

# Trine Villumsen Berling, Ulrik Pram Gad, Karen Lund Petersen and Ole Wæver: Translations of Security: A Framework for the Study of Unwanted Futures

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The security landscape has tremendously changed since the Cold War, mainly due to globalization, technological innovations and the internet (especially concerning information exchange), the War on Terror, and so forth. The security field has genuinely escaped its classical confines. The newly evolved security threats such as international terrorism, organized crime, hybrid threats, migration, or environmental challenges do not comply with traditional boundaries between the state's external and internal security.<sup>1</sup> The Westphalian state can no longer grasp a clear demarcation line between internal and external threats since some of the new security threats, such as cyber-attacks, can peregrinate on a global scale. Recently, the international society has been encountered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which pointed at the need to rethink the management of security and risk. Those are the 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges the securocrats located in various conventional security establishments such as the police, the intelligence services, and the military have to grasp.

But the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the traditional securocrats (understand professionals) discussed with actors coming from various disciplines (scientists, doctors) the possible ways to carry out the right decision, and with policymaking the ways to manage a threat of this nature or further unwanted security risks. And that is the point where scholars coming from critical security studies – in this case, *Trine Villumsen Berling, Ulrik Pram Gad, and Karen Lund Petersen* from the Danish Institute for International Studies and *Ole Wæver* from the University of Copenhagen, who is also the founder of CAST (the Centre for Advanced Security Theory) and CRIC (the Centre for Resolution of International Conflicts) – stir up the debate with their recently published book *Translations of Security: A Framework for the Study of Unwanted Futures*. *Translations of Security* shall become a must-read for anyone interested in security studies, especially in their critical perspective, and in the production of security knowledge in the microperspective field. The authors' thoughts are based on the aforementioned security complexities and problematique; however, the key aim of this book is not to present the new security challenges but to present a new analytical framework that grasps how the security policies are produced among key actors dealing with security challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, who no longer have to come from traditional security fields.

In the authors' opinion, we have to understand how society handles the security challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century they call unwanted futures – i.e. uncertain (possibly catastrophic) futures. We need to pay attention to how different perceptions of security and threats, risk, or danger meet and are translated among various actors. Hence, the book's primary goal is to analyze translations within various meetings and among various actors. According to the authors, it is inevitable to comprehend what takes place during various security meetings when experts with different perceptions of security translate security challenges. After having understood the meetings, scholars can detect the weak spots of those meetings to make use of the possible lessons learned for further management of unwanted futures. Moreover, such an understanding of the security landscape enables a qualified critique of current political practices of security. That is the main reason why translations of security among actors should be studied, especially nowadays when unwanted futures are not solely discussed by traditional security experts but also by scientists, doctors, politicians, or even security amateurs. But when talking about translations, how do we study them? How do we theoretically and methodologically grasp different security logics when security and risks are constantly negotiated among actors? We lack any conceptual and analytical framework to grasp the translations. Therefore, the reviewed book's goal is to create an analytical framework that enables one to study them.

In terms of the book's structure, the book consists of six chapters. The first two chapters portray the theoretical-methodological bases of the translation research. The following chapters analyze 1) translations across disciplines and professions, 2) translations across cultures, and 3) translations across scales, respectively. In the conclusion, the authors explain the potential theoretical and methodological weaknesses when studying translations.

Nevertheless, before we come to understand the content and meaning of this book, it is vital to clarify the book's key concepts. Since it is crucial to understand them, the authors do not underestimate the vivid explanation in the first part of the book; however, the explanations themselves logically occur across the book to remind the reader of the correct meaning to ensure that the reader does not translate the meaning of the book differently. As briefly mentioned above, the authors work with two

core analytical concepts of the entire research – 1) translations and 2) the translation zone. Translations take place between different conceptions of unwanted futures and are often approached from different disciplines or professions, or different national or organizational cultures, or across different scales. On the other hand, translations are produced within so-called translation zones, which are an ambiance where “*different conceptual expressions of how to handle unwanted futures [...] and how new meanings are negotiated [meet]*” (p. 3).

In the second chapter, the authors seek to theorize translation by discussing several theoretical approaches. The book generally draws on several instrumental theories which see translation as mediating objective, hermeneutic theories, emphasizing the interpretation of creative values and social functions. By zooming in on particular approaches, the authors present the meaning of translations across a rather multifaceted scale, starting with the Christian theology, which emphasizes precise translations; moving to the Bourdieusian understanding of translation, which studies how social fields understand practice on its own terms<sup>2</sup>, and then to organization theory, which perceives that meaning travelling across actors can move without any change of its content; and ending with Actor Network Theory, which sees translations as all the negotiations which an actor takes to speak/act on behalf of another actor.

In the next steps, based on the theoretical corpus, the authors conceptualize translations “*as whatever happens in the translation zones produced by meeting between different ways of approaching forms of unwanted*” (p. 38), creating their future specific analytical framework to study translations. Regarding the theorization of translations, they approach their analytical framework for the study of translations, where different types of knowledge meet, empirically. Hence, the framework combines characterizations of contrasting systems of meaning revolving around 1) functional differentiation (disciplines and professions), 2) segmentation differentiation (cultures), and 3) the stratification mode (scales). Moreover, the authors are fully aware of the methodological dangers while seeing translations as all the negotiations; therefore, the authors presented the aforementioned triad set-up, which enables them to grasp them.

Following the triad of function, cultures, and scales, the next three chapters analyze translations in specific translation zones to study how the governance approaches the unwanted futures. In each part, the authors collected appropriate empirical evidence that translates the data into so-called tales, which are short empirical presentations of contemporary translations written by various authors from different academic disciplines. The book includes twenty-four tales dealing with different themes, enabling the reader to fully understand translation in everyday practice. The tales, however, are not meant to be some in-depth studies but rather particular empirical material supporting the appropriateness of the authors analytical framework.

Furthermore, if we zoom in on the functional differentiation, the authors analyze how different threats have been perceived by distinct fields of expertise/management – commonly viewed as professions and disciplines. They see professions mainly as the work of experts (intelligence officers) that seek to apply knowledge (doing things practically) and tend to keep a certain level of secrecy in their job; on the other hand, people coming from disciplines (such as scientists) do things in an intellectual way, seek to produce new knowledge and are inclined to openly share the research results. Both groups, in their opinion, live in different conceptual universes; hence, it might happen that the real issue might get transformed into rather different content. In some cases, professions and disciplines do not have to understand each other, which can have a negative impact on security policies. Such a case is illustrated in tale 3.2., in which the authors are discussing the role of anthropologists and military experts within the Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) in the Global War on Terror in Afghanistan, where the anthropologists sought to carry out in-depth cultural studies to fully understand the context while the US Army wanted answers for quick conflict resolutions. The experience of the HTTs shows that in some cases, the translations of unwanted futures across professions and disciplines do not have to reach the desired goals. Besides this, the authors also discuss the growing presence of security amateurs (NGOs, think-thanks), showing that the security knowledge no longer belongs just to experts. However, in some security domains such as cybersecurity, they notice the role of semi-experts (e.g. IT experts) who enter the traditional security structures due to their expertise and work on the verge between the state and the private sphere to combat challenges such as cybercrime.

In the following chapter, the segmentation differentiation between cultures is discussed. Unwanted futures are translated into the sedimented codes of national or organizational culture. As the authors aptly point out, *“the concept of culture denotes collective ‘ways of life’: Insiders understand why ‘we’ do stuff in ‘our’ way; outsiders may need to be instructed, need to study, or they [may] even need to assimilate, to really understand this culture, at first foreign to them”* (p. 104). This chapter finds two main distinctions that are critical to understanding the translation zone across cultures. On the one hand, the distinction revolves horizontally around translations between the national and the organizational culture, where certain hierarchies evolve since some organizations and nations claim sovereignty due to the superiority of their culture. Here authors also study security knowledge from other security colleagues from different cultures since states or organizations look to others to learn inspiration to optimize their managerial practices. This situation is fittingly displayed in tale 4.1., which discusses how the US incorporated the knowledge of torture of their Middle Eastern colleagues in the torture of Middle Eastern terrorists in Guantanamo, since the US believed that this horrifying know-how could bring better results. However, this tale shows how incorporating a different culture can damage the identity of the initial culture. On the other hand, one can cut the distinction vertically and present the universalizing and civilizing mode against individual cultures. Furthermore, the book also briefly elaborates how the national identity can be challenged by the global civil society, resulting in a weakening of the government while it works out of the jurisdiction of the nation-state.

The further chapter that closes the aforementioned triad delves into the stratificational mode by focusing on translations across scales. The unwanted future is translated across scales. An adequate example can be when the state, as a dominant actor, is threatened by an external threat – such as an invading army – which is later on securitized and translated into the lower scales of the simple soldier serving in the trenches. Said otherwise, scale refers to scope as well as a hierarchy. Scales are also co-produced in the production of knowledge. Additionally, as in the previous chapter, this chapter revolves around two main distinctions that are fundamental for understanding the translation zones across scales. The vertical one revolves around translations between higher and lower scales in terms of hierarchy. In the tale in box 5.1, the authors zoom in on

a situation in which the US was translating the global threat of terrorism at the local level in a northern Argentine town situated on the notorious '*frontera caliente*' (the Brazil-Paraguay border), where it was believed terrorists exist. However, such translations were not translated into the language of the local population, who perceived security in terms of appropriate education, appropriate living standards, and further social guarantees. The other distinction collapses the vertical distinction and presents a networking mode existing independently of the previous one. The authors discuss it in this section since they believe society witnesses renegotiations of hierarchy, territoriality, and belonging. Interestingly, they also contemplate the increasing role of superempowered individuals who can stress the authority of a state via extensive transnational networks that are mainly located in the cyber-space<sup>3</sup>.

The book, in the end, provides the reader with a conclusion where the authors are fully aware of the potential methodological weaknesses of the research while looking at all forms of politics of unwanted futures. Hence, they want to challenge further scholars interested in security studies to refine the theoretical and methodological basis of translations analysis. To do so, in the short brief 6.1.<sup>4</sup> they sketch a manual for carrying out an empirical translation analysis, which should serve as the yardstick when studying translation analysis and working on future theory-building.

This book is certainly not an easy read for anyone with a moderate knowledge of critical security approaches. The authors realize it. Therefore, they provide the reader with more than twenty short empirical tales. The book is not then interwoven only with theories and methodological attitudes to the study of translations. The authors clearly show how their newly developed analytical framework can apply the knowledge in practice, namely in real everyday situations. This is the crucial added value of the research. The book is also a great example of interdisciplinary writing, which is essential for grasping the security challenges of current times appropriately. In terms of constructive criticism, it is complicated to react to some of the weaknesses when the authors are fully aware of them (e.g. the methodological side of the book). In my opinion, it would be convenient to transform this approach for studying translations into some security school of thought using concepts and knowledge that are characteristic for them. But this idea was refused by the author since they do not seek

to build up another security school but rather provide scholars with an agenda for doing security research. Moreover, some tales could have been longer to support the research argument; nevertheless, the authors seek to provide the reader with more than twenty tales to balance the few in-depth studies. Additionally, the authors mention the growing presence of amateurs and non-traditional securocrats across the book, but they do not assess enough whether it shall be an opportunity or not; I would appreciate if they took a clearer position in this regard. To sum up, as mentioned elsewhere in this review, this book should be a must-read for anyone who studies security practices from a micro perspective and looks for a new analytical approach to grasp this topic, but also for other security scholars and experts.

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#### ENDNOTES

- 1 As Didier Bigo (2001) points out via his famous metaphor of the Möbius ribbon, the internal and external securities merged.
- 2 The authors also declare that some of the concepts of the Paris School of security studies, mainly represented by Didier Bigo, served as a source of inspiration since this approach studies the political power of everyday micro-practices of security. The Paris School is also considerably influenced by Pierre Bourdieu.
- 3 The growing role of the individual has been considerably rethought since the publication *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, written by B. Buzan, O. Wæver and J. D. Wilde, who did not admit any significant role to the individual since they believe an individual does not have the power to threaten the state as the key referent object.
- 4 In the authors' opinion, the analyst has to deal with four key steps when doing translation analysis: 1) identify the translation zone, 2) identify the claims on authority, 3) ask, "What is the powerful discursive or physical means used to mobilize the translation?", and 4) analyze the stakes and consequences at play.

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#### REFERENCES

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