REVIEW ESSAY

Theory/Practice in Critical Approaches to Security: An Opening for Dialogue?

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Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 462, $69.95 Hardcover, $22.95 Softcover; Bill McSweeney. *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 239, $54.95 Hardcover, $19.95 Softcover; Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson, and Raymond Duvall, eds., *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 432., $57.95 Hardcover, $22.95 Softcover; Richard Wyn Jones, *Security, Strategy, and Critical Theory* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999), pp. 191, $49.95 Hardcover.

Introduction

The issue of the relationship between theory and practice has busied the minds of students of International Relations for a long time. The question of whether academics should produce knowledge to inform policy-making or whether they could engage in scholarly activity for its own sake has recently been put to the proponents of critical approaches to International Relations who have labelled the products of those scholars that address policy debates as "problem-solving theory."[1] For, from a critical perspective, the role of theory is one of standing back from the day-to-day agenda and concerns of policy-makers and presenting a critique, pointing to the processes through which policy agendas are constructed, options are defined and choices are made. The four books under consideration here share an interest in producing such critique.

Informed by constructivist approaches (Adler and Barnett, Weldes, et al.), sociology (McSweeney) and Frankfurt School critical theory (Wyn Jones), the authors present trenchant critiques of mainstream approaches to security and seek to move beyond them. For example, Adler and Barnett's volume seeks to contribute to the creation of security communities worldwide by enhancing our understanding of the processes through which they are constructed. McSweeney emphasises the constitutive relationship between security, identity and interests in an attempt to recover room for moral intervention in security policy-making, while Wyn Jones explores the contribution Frankfurt School critical theory could make to help anchor the theory and practice of security in a concern with human emancipation. Weldes, et al., on the

other hand, investigate the cultural production of insecurity, or the ways in which insecurity is a product of communities, be that the community of security experts or that of Internet users.

Although few would contest the value of such a critique for "academic" purposes, some remain unconvinced of its usefulness for informing practice. It has indeed been argued that students of world politics should seek to influence day-to-day policy-making and "speak truth to power" instead of indulging themselves in abstract theoretical research.[2] Leaving aside the point about the extent to which such theoretical research is wholly "abstract" (Weldes, et al. and Adler and Barnett's volumes are rich in case studies while three empirical cases run through McSweeney's study in illustration of his broader theoretical points) it should be noted that from a critical perspective the choice is not necessarily between "doing theory" and "doing policy-relevant empirical work." For, from a critical perspective, all practice is informed by theory and theory itself is a form of practice. To put it in other words, those engaged in policy-relevant research also adopt one theory or another whether they are aware of and open about it or not. On the other hand, what some regard as "abstract theoretical research" itself constitutes a form of practice. Viewed as such, the distinction between "doing theory" and "doing policy-relevant empirical work" blurs.

Indeed, all of the four books under consideration here ultimately want to inform practice. What distinguishes them from other studies with similar aims is that they seek to do this not necessarily by informing policy-making at the governmental level, but by presenting alternative readings of the past, showing how there are always at least two stories to tell, and pointing to the ways in which the production of social scientific knowledge itself constitutes practice. Practice is thus understood as not limited to governmental policy-making, but inclusive of the activities of non-state actors including academics themselves.

The aims of this essay are twofold. By focusing on four recently published works on critical approaches to security, this essay will explore the contributions critical approaches have made to the study of security. It will be argued that viewed together, these studies offer a radically different picture of the future of global security than presented by mainstream accounts. The second aim of the essay is to address the issue of theory/practice relationship and discuss what critical approaches may have to offer to those who have so far remained sceptical about their contribution to our theorising as well as practices of world politics. The central argument here is that these four books offer alternative re-conceptualisations of the relationship between the production of social scientific knowledge and policy-making, and that their contribution, if paid due attention, could move the debate about the theory/practice relationship to a different level.

Security Communities

Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett's co-edited volume entitled *Security Communities* is the first sustained attempt to revamp Karl Deutsch's original idea. What Deutsch was interested in when he formulated the idea of a security community back in the 1950s was the cessation of interstate violence and the creation of dependable expectations of peaceful change by way of strengthening relationships among a

group of states. In the *Political Community in the North Atlantic Area*, Deutsch and his colleagues set out to map the road to the creation of security communities. Their conviction was that once the conditions and processes that give rise to security communities were identified, it would be possible to replicate them in other parts of the world so that (the preparations for and the idea of) war would not enter into the calculations of those states.[3] Although Deutsch, et al. were positive regarding the potential for security communities to travel to different parts of the world, their ideas remained largely on paper for four decades until they were revived by Adler, Barnett and the other contributors to their edited volume. In the meantime, the security communities approach was "often cited but rarely emulated" (p. 9).

Adler and Barnett argue that one of the reasons why Deutsch's study was not replicated was because Deutsch, despite his initial collaboration with historians in the project, remained behaviouralist in outlook and adopted quantitative methods in his research into international transactions. Transactions generate responsiveness, reciprocity and mutual predictability of behaviour, argued Deutsch; they also lead to the discovery of new areas of interest and identifications thereby resulting in the creation of security communities. However, as Adler and Barnett maintain, although quantitative research into transactions have helped Deutsch establish the relationship between increased transboundary movements and greater interdependence, it did not allow him to develop a better understanding of the "social relations that are bound up with and generated by those transactions" (pp. 7-8).

Thus, Adler and Barnett justify the need for the adoption of a constructivist approach to the study of security communities by emphasising the need to have a better understanding of the complex and dynamic way in which identities and interests are shaped and reshaped to enable, further or forestall future transactions. The two co-editors maintain that, in the absence of an account as to how actors' willingness to enter into transactions with each other could be moulded by transnational forces, interactions and structures that emerge and evolve due to the actions of the very same (state and non-state) actors, the potential for the creation of security communities worldwide could not be fulfilled.

The practical implication of such an ambitious theoretical task is that if the factors that made the Western European security community possible could be identified and checked against the experiences of actors in non-European settings, this could change the way we think about global security in theory and practice. Ambitious as it may be, Adler and Barnett's volume succeeds in accomplishing this task to a great extent. By way of identifying the dynamics and processes through which the Western European security community was built, the authors de-mystify this first security community which some regard as unique to the Western European historical and social context. A major contribution of this volume therefore is that it reminds one how the Western European security community is a project purposefully built by social actors, and that there are similar processes at work in other parts of the world. Indeed, by way of considering the possible emergence of security communities in North America, South East Asia, Australia and South America, this study shows that security communities can and do indeed travel.

To say that this volume succeeds in accomplishing its task "to a great extent" suggests that there still is something missing. For, notwithstanding its richness in empirical detail and rigorous theoretical analysis, Adler and Barnett's study falls short of identifying the ways in which security, identity and interests are interlinked. In other words, despite successfully moving away from the stress Deutsch put on the logic of spill-over, Adler and Barnett fail to replace it with a theoretical framework that can adequately account for the co-constitutive relationship between security, identity and interests. It is the second book under consideration here, *Security, Identity and Interests*, that provides a deeper understanding of this relationship, thereby helping fill this void in the literature.

Security, Identity and Interests

Presenting an "alternative sociological approach to security," Bill McSweeney shows how the production of security is closely linked to identity, and security policy to the creation, moulding and re-moulding of collective identity. Although McSweeney's study is by no means the first attempt at this,[4] his approach is singular in its critique of mainstream as well as constructivist approaches to identity. Indeed, McSweeney's main argument is that replacing the material emphasis of mainstream approaches with constructivist approaches that emphasise cognitive structures would not get us anywhere if the latter does not allow us to see the role human agency plays in the making of structures (material or cognitive).

In doing this, McSweeney distinguishes between the early post-war approaches to security (the "period of political theory"), Cold War Security Studies (the "period of political science"), and the approaches of the 1970s which re-introduced economic factors into the debates (the "period of political economy"). The early approaches, notes McSweeney, were philosophical and interdisciplinary in character, and tried to understand the psychological and economic dimensions as well as the moral implications of security policies. During the following periods, multiple meanings attached to the concept were swept under the carpet as security was defined in operational terms, focusing on the state, prioritising its physical dimension and in particular the question of survival. Scholars increasingly adopted quantitative methods to study the threat and use of military instrument in an attempt to produce scientific knowledge of world politics. However, as McSweeney reminds us, "security and insecurity are a relational quality, not a material distribution of capabilities, threats and vulnerabilities independent of such relations" (p. 3).

Since the end of the Cold War a range of post-positivist approaches have been adopted by scholars to challenge and critique the narrow, military-focused and state-centric conceptions and practices of security that characterised the "political science" period. It is this literature that McSweeney turns to in Part II of his study to investigate whether the various contributors to the post-Cold War debates are up to the task of recovering the moral dimension of security and security policy-making. Here, McSweeney makes a case for adopting a reflexive conception of the social order which allows one to understand identity and interests as mutually constituted by social agents in search for security. The practical implications of this approach are teased out in Part III of the study where the author looks at the peace process in

Northern Ireland, European integration, and NATO expansion. He argues that in each and every one of these cases, parties were "seduced into a new set of practices and a new habit of identity" as they reconsidered their security and interests (p. 214).

Taking up the example of security communities to further draw out the ramifications of McSweeney's sociological approach, it could be argued that conceiving the relationship between security, identity and interests as co-constitutive allows one to understand the fluidity, uncertainty and inherent instability of each and therefore have a better grasp of the potentialities of human agency and the room for moral intervention. In other words, McSweeney's study provides what was missing in Adler and Barnett's theoretical framework, namely a "seduction model of security." This model does away with the mechanistic and almost deterministic connotations of the Deutschian concept of spill-over and understands the creation of security communities as the "partly unintended product of reflexive agents" (p. 170). This, in turn, provides a much more solid base for an argument in favour of the spread of security communities worldwide. For it allows students of security communities to see the change human agency could make when it is informed by the knowledge that "reality" is socially constructed and could be re-constructed; that identities could be moulded and re-moulded in line with changes in actors' interests; that choices have been made in the past; and that there always are alternatives. This is significant because, as McSweeney notes, "it is a necessary condition of our ability to exercise choice that we know that we have options" (p. 219).

Needless to say, the knowledge that we have options is not enough in itself. There always will be material factors that would have to be taken into consideration. As McSweeney himself acknowledges, "the fact and knowledge that our situation arose from human choice once upon a time, and could have been different, do not emancipate us from its constraints" (p. 215). Rather disappointingly, the author does not elaborate any further on the concept of emancipation. More in-depth treatment of emancipation as a concept and as a process is found in Richard Wyn Jones' *Security, Strategy and Critical Theory*. What should be noted here is that McSweeney's analysis provides a crucial corrective to structural realist accounts of world politics that view material structures as constraining human action, or those of some constructivist accounts which seem to replace material structures with ideational ones that are no less restrictive. This alone constitutes a major input into the debate on the contribution of constructivist approaches to the study of world politics.

Security, Strategy and Critical Theory

Richard Wyn Jones' study is different from the other three in the sense that it does not have a case study. On the other hand, it is also possible to view the academic discipline of Security Studies as his case study. For, informed by Frankfurt School critical theory, Wyn Jones historicises and contextualises the emergence and development of mainstream approaches to security; he also presents an alternative approach based on this critical premise: critical security studies. The author states the aims of his study as those of developing the "conceptual foundations of a critical theory approach to security" and showing that a critical theory based approach "can generate a distinctive and superior understanding of security" in an attempt to show its

"broader utility" (p. 1). The issue of informing practice (understood as illuminating the "possibilities for emancipatory transformation") is central to critical security studies as laid out by Wyn Jones (p. 6).[5]

The book is divided into two parts. In Part I, the author presents an overview of the contributions of Frankfurt School critical theorists. In Part II of the book, Wyn Jones teases out the practical implications for Security Studies of the theoretical insights provided in the first part by focusing on three themes, namely: theory, technology and emancipation. Based on Max Horkheimer's distinction between "traditional" and "critical" theory Wyn Jones presents his own approach ("critical security studies") in juxtaposition to mainstream approaches ("traditional security studies").

Critical security studies is defined by the author as "an ambitious attempt to combine the insights of previous alternative work in the field" such as feminism, Peace Studies, Alternative Defence thinking of the 1980s and Third World Studies, "with a particular set of metatheoretical principles and precepts to develop a new, emancipation-oriented program for the theory and practice of security" (p. ix). Viewed as such, the litmus test for critical security studies becomes that of informing emancipatory practices. Given the centrality of the theory/practice relationship to critical security studies, its proponents are expected to come up with alternative practices informed by critical theory and designed to bring about emancipatory transformation. Indeed, those who remain unconvinced of the "broader utility" of such critical approaches are bound to ask: "how could the author expect to inform practice by presenting a purely theoretical analysis?" It is true that there is very little in this book that would be accessible or of interest to policy-makers, but does this render critical security studies a false promise?

The answer to this question is provided by the author when he argues that "proponents of critical security studies should eschew the temptations of seeking the ears of soldiers and statesmen and should seek instead to aid in the development of counter-hegemonic positions linked to the struggles of emancipatory social movements" (p. 6). The addressees of Wyn Jones' work, therefore, are not policy-makers, but social movements and intellectuals.

By way of shifting the addressee of critical security thinking, Wyn Jones also responds to the criticism that such approaches do not have an impact on "real life." For, the goal for the proponents of critical security studies is not having the prince's ear, but historicizing and contextualising the existing knowledge base, and denaturalising common sense understandings of peoples at various levels in an attempt to create room for political action and help bring about emancipatory change.

As the author is also aware, changing the addressee of critical thinking is not enough in itself. If critical security studies is to help bring about emancipatory change, abstract discussions of what emancipation is or might be would not suffice. What is also needed is "concrete analysis of particular issues and areas" (p. 121). This is also where Wyn Jones's study is vulnerable to criticism on the ground that the author does not engage in empirical research. However, although it is possible to view this as a weakness (whilst admitting that there is a limit to what can be done in a single volume) the author's discussion on critical approaches to nuclear weapons makes up for it. By presenting a critical security studies perspective on technology

and nuclear weapons, Wyn Jones illustrates (however briefly) the ways in which academics (as well as other intellectuals) could play a role by "denaturalising the processes (the interplay of interests, institutions, and technical possibilities) from which nuclear and other weapons emerge" (p. 144). Indeed, scholars of world politics, through engaging in educational activities (within or outside the university context), have helped shape numerous actors' (students, social movements, other intellectuals) conceptions of their own role, the potential for emancipatory change that exists, and the room for intervention.

Cultures of Insecurity

The final volume under consideration here is described by its editors as an attempt in "interdisciplinary conversation" between International Relations and anthropology — two academic fields that flourished in the Cold War environment.[6] The topic of this conversation is a central theme of the Cold War, that of insecurity. Rather than taking the state as pre-given and seeking to contribute to its "security," the contributors to this study seek to show the ways in which the state (or any other community) is produced while securing its identity and interests. By looking at the making of the Cuban missile crisis (Weldes), the remoulding of identities in New Zealand (Laffey) and China (Litzinger), and the creation of "the West" while responding to the crisis in Korea (Milliken), to name a few of the case studies, the volume shows how "insecurities and the objects that suffer from insecurity are mutually constituted" (p. 10). The overall thesis here is that "insecurities, rather than being natural facts, are social and cultural productions" (p. 10).

One of the strong points of this book is in the way it opens up room for additional research. This stems the editors' success in backing the rigorous theoretical framework with meticulous empirical research in a way that clearly demonstrates how the points raised by the contributors are not "simply academic issues without significance in the 'real world'" (p. 12). Another strength of the edited volume is that it manages to communicate with the "unconverted." Indeed, this study constitutes an excellent starting point for those students of world politics who are yet to be convinced of the value of critical approaches in general and constructivism in particular. A third point of strength for the book is that it shows the differences between explanatory and constitutive theory in a way that a purely theoretical study cannot. This last point begs further clarification.

Steve Smith, writing in the mid-1990s, submitted that the divide between explanatory and constitutive theory was likely to become the main theoretical divide in the study of world politics.[7] The fact that it did not has partly to do with the continuing appeal of explanatory theory to policy-makers and those academics who prefer to engage in problem solving. It has also partly to do with "constitutive theory" remaining relatively misunderstood among students of world politics. To put it in a nutshell, the difference between "explanatory" and "constitutive" theory is based on their conception of the theory/practice relationship. The proponents of constitutive theory maintain that theories help constitute the very "reality" they seek to explain; that theories never leave the world untouched as claimed by the proponents of explanatory theory. The difference between the two, then, is not one of choice based on one's pur-

pose (as was the case with the problem-solving/critical theories of International Relations), but one of philosophical outlook.

Needless to say, to argue that theories help constitute the world is not meant to suggest that the world does not exist. Rather, the argument is that theory is always implicated in practice whether the theorist is aware of and open about it or not. It is this theoretical point that Weldes, et al. and the contributors to their volume help get across in a clear and powerful manner. It is also this very point that has the potential to have significant practical implications. For it suggests that academics engage in practice not only when they act as advisers to policy-makers, but also when they shape young minds as teachers at universities, when they choose to inform social movements, and when they write about world politics. It also suggests that policy-makers themselves help constitute the very world events to which they seek to respond. This is the point Jutta Weldes makes when she questions why the Cuban missiles crisis was a "crisis" and argues that crises are socially constructed whilst moulding the identities and interests of states.

Conclusion

In his oft-cited study entitled *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy*, Alexander George maintained that the gap is "not in policy-makers' non-use of theoretical concepts, but in the failure to analyze them more critically and to be more aware of the impact of theoretical-conceptual assumptions on policy-making."[8] All four works under consideration here aim to raise peoples' (policy-makers and others) awareness of the impact their common sense assumptions have on their practices. However, their contribution does not stop there. For, from a critical perspective, the role of theory is also to point to the processes through which common sense has been produced and to reveal the power relations implicated in these processes to create space for alternative discourses and practices. It is in this sense that all of these four books would have significant – albeit indirect – practical implications. Admittedly, they are not intended for the immediate consumption of policy-makers. Rather, they are written for a larger audience made up of students, social movements and other scholars who engage in similar educational activities.

As noted above, from a critical perspective, the choice is not between "doing policy-relevant empirical work" and "doing theory." For, practice is always implicated in theory (as George also maintains) and theory is a form of practice (albeit not the only form of practice). Viewed as such, there emerges an opening for dialogue between critical scholars and those who remain sceptical about the value of critical approaches. This dialogue could focus on the constitutive relationship between theory and practice, or the ways in which actors' ideas and actions help constitute the security threats (or any other foreign and security policy issue) they seek to respond to. As noted above, these four books offer alternative re-conceptualisations of the relationship between the production of social scientific knowledge and policy-making, and their contribution, if paid due attention, has the potential to move the theory/practice debate to a different level. Time will tell whether this opportunity for dialogue will be taken up.

NOTES

1. The phrase "problem solving theory" is borrowed from Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory," pp. 85-123 in Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, Approaches to World Order (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

2. See, for example, William Wallace, "Truth and Power, Monks and Technocrats: Theory and Practice in International Relations," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 22 (1996), pp. 301-321; Joseph Lepgold, "Is Anyone Listening? International Relations Theory and the Problem of Policy Relevance," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 113, No. 4 (1998), pp. 43-62.

3. Karl W. Deutsch, Sidney A. Burrell, Robert A. Kann, Maurice Lee, Jr., Martin Lichterman, Raymond E. Lindgren, Francis L. Loewenheim, Richard W. Van Wagenen, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

4. See, for example, David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Simon Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War* (London: Pinter, 1990). Also see Jennifer Milliken, "Intervention and Identity: Reconstructing the West in Korea," pp. 91-117 in Weldes, et al., eds., under review.

5. On critical security studies, also see Ken Booth, "Security and Emancipation," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1991), pp. 313-326; Ken Booth, "Security and Self: Reflections of a Fallen Realist," in Keith Krause and Michael Williams, eds., *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (London: UCL Press, 1997), pp. 83-119.

6. Noam Chomsky, et al., *The Cold War and the University: Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* (New York: The New Press, 1997).

7. Steve Smith, "The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Genealogy of International Relations Theory," pp. 26-28 in Ken Booth and Steve Smith, eds., *International Relations Theory Today*, (Oxford: Polity, 1995).

8. Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1993), p. xviii.

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