Security! What Do You Mean?
From Concept to Thick Signifier

JEF HUYSMANS
University of Kent

This article starts from the following observation. Although the debate on expanding the security agenda to non-military sectors and non-state referent objects launched an interesting discussion about the security (studies) agenda, it has not really dealt with the meaning of security. It has concentrated on adding adjectives such as 'societal', 'environmental', 'world', etc. to security but has largely neglected the meaning — or, more technically, the signifying work — of the noun 'security' itself. This article wants to draw attention to the question of the meaning of security. First, it differentiates three ways of dealing with the meaning of the noun — a definition, a conceptual analysis and a thick signifier approach, which focuses on the wider order of meaning which 'security' articulates. Two things are claimed — (a) an increasing degree of sophistication if one moves from the first to the third approach; and (b) a qualitative change in the security studies agenda if one uses a thick signifier approach. The second part of the article illustrates how this thick signifier approach contributes to a better and also different understanding of security. Here, the main argument is that security mediates the relation between life and death and that this articulates a double security problematic — a daily security and an ontological security problematic.

'Security! What do you mean?' In International Relations this is a slightly odd question. Is International Theory not the theory of survival? Does it not differentiate itself from political theory and law, which are the theories of the good life, by this interest in the question of survival (Wight, 1966: 33)? Is security not the concept which has been largely preserved for theorists of International Relations in the context of political theory (Walker, 1986: 492)? Does IR not have sub-disciplines of strategic studies and security studies? Is the bottom line of the national interest not the security of the

state (Buzan, 1984: 111)? If one searches for the meaning of security, International Relations seems to be the most evident place to find it. Surprise! It is not, at least not in the sense that its archives are bulged with reflections upon it.

This may be changing. Recently we have witnessed an increasing interest in the question of the meaning of security.[1] Throughout the 1980s and continuing in the 1990s a debate has developed on what security studies is and should be and whether widening the security studies agenda is a good thing. Part of this debate consisted of defining security studies by contesting the military focus of strategic studies through a wider concept of security (Buzan, 1984, 1987, 1991; Haftendorn, 1991; Nye and Lynn-Jones, 1988; Ullman, 1983, 1991; Walt, 1991). This has primarily resulted in a debate on the costs and benefits of expanding security studies across different sectors and referent objects. The former refers to broadening the agenda to new threats — adding economic, societal, political and environmental risks to the classically dominant military threats. The latter implies a deepening of the agenda by introducing new referent objects, that is, units receiving threats — adding individuals, ecological system, community, etc. to the traditional, state-centric agenda.[2] By challenging strategic studies via the concept of security, the question of the meaning of security has become a key issue.

It is the argument of this article that the discussion of the meaning of security has been too narrow in the widening debate. It does not delve enough into the question 'what do you mean by security?' It has resulted in adding adjectives — such as environmental, world, democratic, societal — to a noun but it has not dealt (enough) with the question what this noun 'security' itself involves. As a result of starting the discussion on the meaning of security by looking at the possibilities to widen the agenda of strategic studies, the debate has often bracketed what one could more technically refer to as the signifying work of 'security'. How does our understanding of environmental issues change when we approach them as security questions? Does labelling migration as a security question organize it in a similar way to military questions? What makes it sensible to speak of security in very different sectors, in other words, what makes it possible to speak of 'security' in relation to very different questions?

One could easily argue that this point is nonsense, that the discussion has dealt with the meaning of the noun. The literature is full of definitions of security, isn't it (Buzan, 1991: 16–17)? Does David Baldwin not argue that 'redefining "security" has recently become something of a cottage industry' (Baldwin, 1997: 5)? But, he also immediately criticizes this literature for its lack of interest in the concept of security. This leads him to return to Wolfers' (1962) classic and very good conceptual analysis of national security. A conceptual analysis is somewhat more sophisticated than a

definition of a concept because it concentrates more systematically on what kinds of questions security analysis involves. To an extent Baldwin's article confirms the point I am making here. But, I also think that a conceptual analysis, such as his or Wolfers', approaches the question of meaning too narrowly. The meaning of security does not just depend on the specific analytical questions it raises, it also articulates particular understandings of our relation to nature, other human beings and the self. 'Security' refers also to a wider framework of meaning (call it symbolic order, or culture or, as I will call it, discursive formation) within which we organize particular forms of life. The question about the meaning of security should thus be pursued a bit further. It should lead to the exploration of the wider cultural framework(s) within which security receives its meaning and which are often implied in the daily use of the label 'security'. To do this we should move away from approaching 'security' as a definition or as a concept and instead interpret it as a thick signifier.

Thick signifier? Following Saussure's (1968: 97–102) splitting of the sign into a signifier, which is the word or sound 'tree', and the signified, which is the image tree which we relate to the signifier, I propose to interpret the concept security as a signifier.[3] The relation of the signifier 'security' to its content — its image — is not motivated, which means that there is no natural link between e.g. 'war' or 'tree' and a particular understanding — image — of war or tree. The signifier receives its meaning through its difference from other signifiers ('bird' is not 'tree', 'security' is not 'war') in a chain of signifiers ('the bird sits in the tree', 'our security is at stake in the Gulf War'). What is important is that this does not imply that the signifier 'security' is a neutral device that can be used to express everything. 'Security' has a history and implies a meaning, a particular signification of social relations. It is not the same to say — 'Refugees pose a security question', and to say — 'Refugee questions are a human rights issue in contemporary Europe'. The meaning of the refugee question differs according to the register or the language game in which it is raised. Uttering 'security' articulates such a register of meaning, which we will call a security formation. This aspect provides the intelligibility of security — that which makes security mean something.[4] This is what 'thickness' refers to.

Interpreting security as a thick signifier thus leads to a research agenda which explores this register and differences or changes in the register according to the concrete contexts in which 'security' is used. Several aspects of the security formation of International Relations have already been explored by some of the so-called postmodern approaches. Key authors here are — Simon Dalby (1992), James Der Derian (1993), Michael Dillon (1991, 1996), Michael Shapiro (1992a), Rob Walker (1986, 1990), Michael Williams (1996, forthcoming) and Ole Wæver (1995). This article joins this

body of literature. It intends three things — to explain what is typical about this body of literature, to open an empirical research agenda which concentrates on exploring the meaning of security via a thick signifier approach, and to add to the understanding of what security means in the discipline of International Relations by looking at how security involves a particular mediation of death and life.

In the first part I clarify the thick signifier approach by distinguishing between a definition of security, a conceptual analysis, and a thick signifier approach which is based on post-structural perspective. The second part delves into the meaning of security — its discursive formation — by exploring how the understanding of security in International Relations involves a specific mediation of death and life which implies a mixture of two interdependent forms of security — ontological security, which concerns the mediation of chaos and order, and daily security, which concerns the mediation of friends and enemies.

Definition, Concept, Thick Signifier

Looking for the meaning of the noun 'security' is a search for unity. By determining the meaning of security one delineates the 'content' which the category articulates. There are different ways of approaching this question. Conventionally one can opt either for a definition of the category or for a conceptual analysis. However, there is also an alternative option — interpreting the category as a thick signifier. These three approaches do not differ according to the content of security they express. Rather, they refer to three different *ways of establishing a content* of security — 'How does one approach the question of the meaning of security?'; rather than, 'What does security mean?'

The way I will develop the difference between the three approaches demonstrates that there is a growing degree of sophistication if one moves from definition to concept to thick signifier. So, to a certain extent there is a cumulative relation between the three approaches. But, the relation between the three approaches is more complex than just an increasing degree of sophistication. The three practices also perform a different function, and the thick signifier approach differs qualitatively from the other two because it formulates a different agenda for security studies.

Defining Security

A definition condenses meaning into a statement. In a definition one attempts to sketch the general essence of a category, in this case the essentials of security. Two examples — 'In the case of security, the discussion is about the pursuit of freedom from threat' (Buzan, 1991: 18); and 'A

threat to national security is a situation in which some of the nation's most important values are drastically degraded by external action' (Levy, 1995: 40).

Its main function is to identify the subject of research, to clarify for the reader what one is going to talk about. This act locates the text within a particular research agenda and identifies it by separating it from other understandings of security. In that sense one could argue that definitions operate as a rite of passage, a ritual of purification through which one makes the research a legitimate part of a body of literature and a research community (Der Derian, 1992: 97). After the authors have passed this rite they can continue with their real work, which could be to write a security story (e.g. Dorman and Treacher, 1995), to reflect from a more conceptual point of view on whether particular developments such as migration or environmental issues should or should not be seen as security issues (e.g. Deudney, 1990; Levy, 1995; Loescher, 1992; Weiner, 1992/93), or to develop a research agenda for security studies (e.g. Buzan, 1991).

In principle there is no limit to definitions of security. Since its primary function is to identify what one is going to analyse, in principle it is an autonomous act on the part of scholars to fix the topic of their research. Nevertheless, in practice the definition of security is to a considerable degree determined by the community within which they work. If they want to be heard, the utterance should be recognized as security talk by the research community (the peer group), and the definition of security obviously plays an important role in this game of recognition. For example, the community of security experts in International Relations does not generally recognize security questions which are defined in terms of an inner condition of being at peace with oneself.

Conceptual Analysis

A conceptual analysis resembles a definition to the extent that it also aims at condensing the meaning of security for the purpose of providing research projects with a unity. But, it is also more sophisticated because it condenses meaning in a more complex mode. It does not concentrate meaning in a single statement but explores more extensively what characterizes a security policy or debate. A conceptual analysis starts from the assumption that we know more or less what security means when we use it — of course, assuming it has more or less a precise meaning (Wolfers, 1962: 147–9) — but we do not always make the meaning explicit. To make this meaning explicit is the purpose of conceptual analysis.

Conceptual analysis does not result in a new definition. It is not a comparative analysis of definitions with the purpose of formulating an all-

embracing definition. Rather, it formulates a common denominator which expresses 'common conceptual distinctions underlying various conceptions of security' (Baldwin, 1997: 5). The common denominator has the shape of an analytical framework which makes explicit how a security analysis could (and should?) be organized. In a conceptual analysis one formulates an organizational matrix — or analytical scheme — which is characteristic for security studies. For example, Baldwin formulates the matrix in the form of a sequence of questions — security for whom?, security for which values?, how much security?, from what threats?, by what means?, at what cost?, in what period? (1997: 12–18). If one organizes a text similar to the matrix it is recognized as a security text. Conceptual analysis thus indicates that the rite of passage performed by means of a definition may not be enough to be recognized within the community of security experts. It suggests that besides a definition a particular textual organization is also required.

The function of the conceptual analysis can differ in various degrees. For Baldwin (1997: 6 ff.) it clarifies the meaning of security by eliminating ambiguities and inconsistencies in the different uses of security. The framework that results from the analysis allows him to identify differences between and inconsistencies of concepts of security. The idea is to use this as a platform for a more progressive debate leading to a more consistent interpretation of security within security studies. Wolfers (1962: 147–9) wanted to clarify the meaning of security to find out if 'national security' would be a more precise concept than national interest and a better guidance for national policy-makers. He was not primarily interested in eliminating ambiguities and inconsistencies but in demonstrating the meaning of national security, including the ambiguities it comprises.

Thick Signifier

Approaching security as a thick signifier pushes the conceptual analysis further. It starts from the assumption that the category security implies a particular formulation of questions, a particular arrangement of material. But, instead of stopping at the conceptual framework by means of which the material can be organized into a recognizable security analysis, one searches for key dimensions of the wider order of meaning within which the framework itself is embedded. In a thick signifier analysis, one tries to understand how security language implies a specific metaphysics of life. The interpretation does not just explain how a security story requires the definition of threats, a referent object, etc. but also how it defines our relations to nature, to other human beings and to the self. In other words, interpreting security as a thick signifier brings us to an understanding of how the category 'security' articulates a particular way of organizing forms of life.

231

For example, Ole Wæver has shown how security language organizes our relation to other people via the logic of war (Wæver, 1995); James Der Derian has indicated how it operates in a Hobbesian framework by contrasting it with Marx's, Nietzsche's and Baudrillard's interpretation of security (Der Derian, 1993; also Williams, forthcoming); Michael Dillon has argued that our understanding of security is embedded in an instrumental, technical understanding of knowledge and a particular conception of politics by contrasting it with the concept of truth as *aletheia* and politics as tragedy in the Greek sense (Dillon, 1996); J. Ann Tickner has outlined the gendered nature of security by disclosing how security studies/policies privilege male security experiences while marginalizing the security feelings of women (Tickner, 1991: 32–5, 1992).

A thick signifier approach is also more than a deepening of the conceptual approach. While conceptual analyses of security in IR assume an external reality to which security refers — an (in)security condition — in a thick signifier approach 'security' becomes self-referential. It does not refer to an external, objective reality but establishes a security situation by itself. It is the enunciation of the signifier which constitutes an (in)security condition.[5] Thus, the signifier has a performative rather than a descriptive force. Rather than describing or picturing a condition, it organizes social relations into security relations. For example, if a society moves from an economic approach of migration to a security approach, the relation between indigenous people and migrants and its regulation change (among others, instead of being a labour force, migrants become enemies of a society) (Huysmans, 1995, 1997). Since the signifier 'security' does not describe social relations but changes them into security relations, the question is no longer if the security story gives a true or false picture of social relations. The question becomes: How does a security story order social relations? What are the implications of politicizing an issue as a security problem? The question is one of the politics of the signifier rather than the true or false quality of its description (or explanation).

Security is not just a signifier performing an ordering function. It also has a 'content' in the sense that the ordering it performs in a particular context is a specific kind of ordering. It positions people in their relations to themselves, to nature and to other human beings within a particular discursive, symbolic order. This order is not what we generally understand under 'content of security' (e.g. a specific threat) but refers to the logic of security. This is not a configuration (such as the Cold War) or a form (such as the framework that a conceptual analysis explores) but an ensemble of rules that is immanent to a security practice and that defines the practice in its specificity (Foucault, 1969: 63). I will use the Foucaultian concept 'discursive formation' to refer to this ordering logic which the signifier

articulates.[6] Different dimensions of this formation have been explored by Walker, Wæver, Der Derian, Dillon, Dalby and others. In the next section I will try to contribute to this literature by interpreting security as a strategy constituting and mediating our relation to death.

The thick signifier approach also formulates a separate research agenda in security studies. In that sense it is more ambitious than a conceptual analysis or a definition. The latter serve an already existing agenda and concentrate on correctly defining and explaining security questions in International Relations. This agenda exists largely independently of the conceptual interest in the meaning of security. This is not the case in the thick signifier approach. It implies in itself a security studies agenda which interprets security practices by means of interpreting the meaning of security, that is, the signifying and, thus, ordering work of security practices. How does security order social relations? What does a security problematic imply? What does the signifier do to the discussion of the free movement of persons in the EU, for example? Rather than being a tool of clarification serving an agenda, the exploration of the meaning of security *is* the security studies agenda itself.

The main purpose is to render problematic what is mostly left axiomatic, what is taken for granted, namely that security practices order social life in a particular way. This brings two important elements into security studies which are not present in the traditional agenda supported by definitions and Wolfers' and Baldwin's conceptual analyses. First, as already argued, it adds an extra layer to the exploration of the meaning of security. It introduces the idea that besides definitions and conceptual frameworks, the meaning of security also implies a particular way of organizing forms of life. It leads to interpretations of how security practices and our (IR) understandings of them are embedded in a cultural tradition of modernity (Walker, 1986). Second, interpreting security as a thick signifier also moves the research agenda away from its techno-instrumental or managerial orientation. The main question is not to help the political administration in its job of identifying and explaining threats in the hope of improving the formulation of effective counter-measures. Rather, the purpose of the thick signifier approach is to lay bare the political work of the signifier security, that is, what it does, how it determines social relations.

This introduces normative questions into the heart of the agenda. The way these questions are introduced differs from the normative dimension of security policies which Classical Realists sometimes discussed. For example, Arnold Wolfers' classic piece (1962: 147–65) on national security argues that security is a value among other social values, such as wealth. This implies that a security policy implicitly or explicitly defines the importance of security in comparison with other values (to put the question crudely — how

much do we spend on nuclear weapons that we cannot spend on health care?). The policy also has to decide the level of security that is aspired to (for example, minimum or maximum security (see also Herz, 1962: 237–41)). But, this normative 'awareness' does not capture the basic normative quality of security utterances that the thick signifier approach introduces. If security practices constitute a security situation, a normative question is introduced which, in a sense, precedes the value-oriented decisions Wolfers refers to. One has to decide not only how important security is but also if one wants to approach a problem in security terms or not.[7] To make the point in oversimplified terms (especially by bracketing the intersubjective character of the politics of the signifier) — once security is enunciated, a choice has been made and the politics of the signifier is at work. The key question, then, is how to enunciate security and for what purpose.

Later, I will first of all explore some aspects of the discursive formation of security but it will soon become clear that the analysis of the thickness of the signifier undeniably raises the question of the politics of the signifier. I will interpret some key dimensions of the discursive formation of security in the discipline of International Relations and locate it in the cultural tradition of modernity, by looking at how 'security' mediates a relation to death. Security is interpreted as a life strategy (Bauman, 1992; Huysmans, 1996), that is, a cultural practice of establishing a meaningful life in the face of death. In other words, I explore the meaning of security by looking at how it articulates a particular way of dealing with the question of death. I assume that culturally handling the question of death is the bottom line of security practices. After all, security practices are practices of survival (Buzan, 1991: 19; Herz, 1962; Huysmans, 1996: 115).

Security and a Double Fear

John Herz's seminal work on the security dilemma is a good starting point (Herz, 1950, 1962). In distinction from Wolfers' chapter, it does not present a conceptual analysis of security. Rather, Herz unfolds the meaning of security in terms of a general interpretation of International Relations as a security game. Security is for him the key concept from which to theorize about international relations. ' "Let us think first of all about how to survive, thereafter about everything else." But thinking about how to survive means thinking about international politics' (Herz, 1962: 3). His work is more than a description of the security dilemma; he aspires to say something about how International Relations in general work. By doing this he lays bare some of the key elements of what security relations involve and provides an insight into the world-view which many security studies incorporate.

In Herz's representation of social relations, human practices are primarily driven by a fear of death objectified as a fear of human beings who have the capacity to inflict death upon other human beings — '. . . the fact that is decisive for his (i.e. man's) social and political attitudes and ideas is that other human beings are able to inflict death upon him' (Herz, 1962: 231). In the state of nature, which is the state within which the security dilemma thrives, all men live in a condition in which a war of all against all is a permanent possibility. This possibility is the basis upon which social relations are organized. To improve their position from which to face other human beings, people group into communities:

> . . . families and tribes may overcome the power in their internal relations in order to face other families or tribes; larger groups may overcome it to face other classes unitedly, entire nations may compose their internal conflicts in order to face other nations. (Herz, 1950: 158)

A fear-of-the-power-of-others-to-kill-me splits the human species, or better, unites atomitic individuals in communities. It creates cleavages between those to be feared and those to be trusted. 'The fear of the external other is transvalued into the "love of the Neighbor" . . . and the perpetuation of community is assured through the internalization and legitimation of a fear that lost its original source long ago' (Der Derian, 1993: 104).

The threat construction — the externalization of fear — also moderates the level of uncertainty, the fact that one does not know whom to fear and whom not to fear. 'It is this uncertainty and anxiety as to his neighbors' intentions that places man in this basic dilemma, and makes the "homo homini lupus" a primary fact of the social life of man' (Herz, 1962: 232). Drawing a boundary between those-one-can-trust and those-one-fears moderates the fear of uncertainty. It manages the inability to determine whom to fear and whom to trust by establishing a sphere of trustworthy people.

The fear of death in security stories is thus a double fear. First of all, it is a fear of other people who have the power to kill. So, it is a fear to die biologically by the hand of other people. But it also connotes a fear of uncertainty, of an undetermined condition. More generally this is a fear of the unknown which is constituted by the limits of reflexivity. Thus, the fear of death is also an epistemological fear — a fear of not knowing.[8] The way to deal with this fear is to objectify death. The abstract notion of death becomes concrete through identifying the objects to be feared (e.g. another state, human beings or God). This provides human beings with the possibility of postponing or, at least, mediating their relation to death by countering or moderating the pressure of the object of death (e.g.

235

countering the threat of another state by arming, or moderating a fear of God through praying).

What happens here to the relation between death and life which seems to be the core of security relations? Death is separated from life. The text assumes a rupture between the two which deletes death from life. Death becomes an external condition which is the end stage of life. Life itself turns into a process of accumulating as much life as possible by keeping death at a distance as long as possible. Security policy is a practice of postponing death by countering enemies. As Baudrillard (1976/93: 125–94) has argued in his genealogy of death, modernity has witnessed an ever more severe exclusion of death and the dead from the world of the living. The idea that life is a gift from death[9] and that it has to reciprocate this gift in a symbolic exchange, which implies that death is inherent in life, is replaced by the idea that death is an external condition one should avoid.[10] This modern externalization of death (for example, in the form of a disease or an aggressive state) and the rupture it implies, has two important consequences for the discursive formation of security — (a) it constitutes a desire for knowledge; death becomes an object like other natural objects which we try to know; and (b) it creates a space within which agencies, such as the Church but also the state, can appear which mediate and represent our relation to death.

The next section concentrates on the first implication. The following section deals with the second implication by showing how security policies articulate a complex problematic of political identification. Finally, I turn to the politics of the signifier 'security' to indicate how ethico-political questions are communicated in security enunciations.

Security: Epistemological Fear and the Desire for Knowledge

The living know about the idea of the end, the inescapability of it. They try to improve their knowledge of it in the hope of being able to use this knowledge to formulate more effective counter-measures postponing death. Thus, death is an object of instrumental knowledge formation. What kind of object is it? It is a very awkward object, in the sense that it actually is a non-object. It is the absolute nothing, the end of our relation to objects and of our knowledge of them. We can only speak of death in the form of negative terms, such as 'it is the end of life'. People cannot experience or imagine their own death. They can only interpret it indirectly through experiencing the death of others.

Therefore, death and reason have a very peculiar relationship — death defies the power of reason. This is the case because death is at the same time the ultimate truth (we will all die) and the ultimate absurdity (we can only

think of death as an event which we witness which is an absurdity because we are at that moment the ones who have already ceased to exist, to think, to imagine). Death defies reason also in another way — while reason is about a good choice (we want to know in order to be able to make a better choice), death is not a choice at all. Hence Bauman concludes — 'Death is the scandal, the ultimate humiliation of reason. It saps the trust in reason and the security that reason promises' (Bauman, 1992: 15).

Facing this void is unbearable. In modernity, human beings constantly hide it, keep it at a distance. To do this they literally objectify it. They create objects about which they can develop 'true' knowledge. The general category of death is displaced by concretized dangers, inimical forces ranging from the devil to criminals and rival states. This 'founding' of objects could be called a 'primary' mediation of death.[11] Once death is concretized, the fear of the unknown transcends into a fear of the concrete enemy or danger. The mediation of one's relation with this danger — which may be named 'secondary' mediation — becomes the primary problem. Instrumental rationality plays a crucial role in this 'secondary' mediation in modern, industrialized societies. For example, the medical sciences develop knowledge about diseases in order to be able to formulate effective counter-measures as part of an overall strategy to postpone death as long as possible. The state produces intelligence about rival states to be able to prepare itself against possible aggression. It also produces weapons technology to secure itself, or historical knowledge to learn from the past how to deal with adversarial relations in international society.

There is a paradoxical relation between death and knowledge. On the one hand, death is the ultimate defeat of reason, on the other hand, it is the source of the desire for knowledge. Knowledge thrives on a desire to know the unknown. This desire is constituted by the void of the undetermined, that is death;[12] it is brought into being because of and through the void, which can never be reached. This is what keeps the production of knowledge going. Both the constitution of objects, in security utterances in the form of dangers, and the development of adequate knowledge about these objects, in security contexts serving to defy dangers, rest on this paradoxical relationship. The driving force of knowledge is a fear of death as the undetermined. In that sense, death constitutes the condition of possibility of knowledge. In line with this, we could state that the ultimate unknown, the undetermined, causes knowledge.

The 'secondary' mediation — the one between the self and the concretized danger — performs a double function. It is a strategy of survival in the sense of developing counter-measures to danger in the hope of postponing death (the medical profession is one of the most explicit articulations of this life strategy, but the military also rests on this axiom). In

so doing it forms International Relations, into a balance of power system, or into a security regime, etc. But it also does something else — it hides the void. By determining inimical forces and its relationship to these forces, a form of life is created which has a positive content and a task to be fulfilled (e.g. to guarantee national security, to construct a new world order). The inescapable void upon which it rests — the ultimate undetermined or death — is hidden by life unfolding on a daily basis within a particular form. Thus, the 'secondary' mediation is not just a mediation of a relationship to danger but also a mediation of our relation to uncertainty, levels of determination, etc. In that sense, it is simultaneously 'secondary' and 'primary' mediation. Thus, one can say that threat construction and threat management do not only create a particular form of life (a particular content of International Relations, such as the Metternich system or the Cold War) but also fulfil the function of determining or arranging in itself. In other words, besides guaranteeing a particular content it also represents the principle of determinability as such (that is, the very possibility to determine true relations, to meaningfully fill the void).[13] In the next section, I use this double face of the mediation of death in security questions to distinguish a problematic of daily security from a problematic of ontological security.

Security and Political Identification

The rupture between death and life constitutes a space within which agencies mediating and representing death and life surface. The Church is an obvious example. But, as Herz's text articulates, political communities are also constituted in the name of a mediation of death. People group together because of a fear of the power of other people to kill and because of the uncertainty about life. If we accept that security policies communicate this rupture between death and life, it becomes clear how they embrace a process of political identification, of constructing political agencies. Security policies open a space within which a political community can represent and affirm itself. The policies thus create the condition of possibility for the political community. Hence, one can say in more traditional language that these agencies are primarily legitimated by means of their successful dealing with the problem of death, both as concretized danger and as the undetermined. What is brought into view here is that the community does not just face danger, representing a possibility of death, but is indebted to danger for its own very existence. Death is not external to the community but is an excess upon which the communities' existence relies (see also Dillon, 1996: 67).

This theme is central to a body of literature in foreign policy analysis which studies how discourses of danger construct the political identity of states, or, more generally, political communities. Implicitly or explicitly

assuming that the very existence of the state depends on threat definition, these interpretations trace how shifts in threat constructions or enemy definitions articulate shifts in the political identity of a state. David Campbell's study (1992) of how American foreign policy has thrived in discourses of danger is probably the best example here. The general scheme within which these analyses develop resembles Herz's view that a community unites in the name of managing a threat. The construction of the political self (e.g. us representing the free world) is internally bound to the definition of threats (e.g. communism threatening the free world). To give a few examples of this literature — Jutta Weldes and Diana Saco (1996) have used this scheme of identity politics to explain how the 'Cuban problem' continued to feature high on the US agenda after the threat of communism had largely disappeared; David Campbell (1992: 223–44) has shown in great detail how US foreign policy articulates new threats in the post-Cold War period, featuring especially Japan and drugs; Bradley Klein (1990) has formulated some interesting insights about how the West was constructed through the representation of dangers in the strategic, military discourse of NATO; Lene Hansen (1996) has looked into the construction of the Slovene political community in relation to the recent civil war in former Yugoslavia; Ole Wæver (1996) has discussd how European integration articulates a political community which fears a return to its past (the balance of power system which led to two world wars).

In this understanding of the political, a loss of threat damages political identity. If one loses the other in the name of which the community is defined, one risks losing the name of the community. This damaged identity theme has, for example, informed many of the so-called postmodern analyses of the second Gulf War. They have emphasized how the United States attempted to manage its loss of the big enemy (the Soviet Union and communism) — and the related international order (the Cold War) — by identifying a new force of evil against which it can articulate its difference and therefore its political self (Campbell, 1993; Der Derian, 1992: 173–202; Luke, 1991; Shapiro, 1992b).[14]

These studies articulate a paradox in security policy — our political identity relies on the threatening force of the other; nevertheless security policy aims ideally at eliminating this threat; if the threat were really eliminated, the political identity would be damaged and, depending on how strongly it relies on the threat, it may very well collapse. Or in Campbell's words:

> Should the state project of security be successful in the terms in which it is articulated, the state would cease to exist. Security as the absence of movement would result in death via stasis. Ironically, then, the inability of the state project

of security to succeed is the guarantor of the state's continued success as an impelling identity. (Campbell, 1992: 12)

This view resonates Carl Schmitt's understanding of the political. According to him, separating friends from enemies is the typical function which sets the political apart from the social and the economic worlds. Distinguishing between friends and enemies constitutes the political.[15]

The slip from self/other relations to friend/enemy questions defines security policy and also seems to play an important role in the construction of the political identity of the state. But, introducing this paradox within a general study of foreign policy probably overstates the importance of threat construction for political identification. Schmitt is not necessarily right in assuming that political identification rests solely or fundamentally on enemy construction. For example, the policy towards the EU of the member-states of the EU is competitive but certainly does not rest solely on a security dynamic. The political identity of the states relies considerably on a socio-economic project in which the internal market, the EMU, regional policy and the common commercial policy are key areas.

Furthermore, although this literature provides very insightful interpretations of security policy and the post-Cold War condition, it does not fully deal with what is involved in security politics and political identification. It stresses how threat definitions define the political community and possibly also legitimate the survival of the political elite (Wæver, 1995: 54–7). But, as I have tried to explain in the previous section, the mediation of death also involves something else. It has to guarantee the principle of determinability itself, that is, the possibility of creating an acceptable degree of certainty. While the threat construction literature concentrates on the objectification of death, and especially on how the specific content of the political identity, such as liberal democracy, depends on the formulation of a threat to this content, such as communism, it does not explicitly emphasize that this objectification also moderates the fear of death as the loss of determinacy — the fear of uncertainty and ambiguity — by guaranteeing the possibility of determinacy itself.

This introduces an extra dimension to the question of damaged identity in the post-Cold War. Some states are not only damaged because they lose a self-defining threat but also because they seem to lose credibility as representatives of the principle of determinacy itself. Insofar as the post-Cold War era is represented as a chaotic condition in which there are no certainties anymore — in other words, as a situation in which uncertainty itself has become the primary threat — it clearly raises a most fundamental question for those agencies who represent the principle of determinacy (in International Relations these are primarily states). This goes beyond arguing that

states are not able to reaffirm a particular kind of identity (such as liberal democracy). It is about their credibility as agencies capable of arranging International Relations, that is, of giving meaning, intelligibility to these relations. We can identify this as the mediation of chaos to differentiate it from the mediation of threat.

The figure of the enemy cannot fully express what is at stake here. We could imagine an enemy who challenges the existing order. A revolutionary state — in Classical Realist terms — could fit this category. In a sense, this kind of enemy is more threatening than one who just threatens a particular member of the international order without challenging the order itself. The revolutionary state poses a threat to both the rules of the game and the status quo state(s). In terms of identity politics one could easily argue that this 'stronger' kind of enemy is more significant because it allows the state to articulate both its identity as a political unit and the identity of the international order within which it is a unit.

But the problematic of guaranteeing the principle of determinacy goes further. It concerns not a challenge to an order but to the possibility of the activity of ordering itself. This difference can be conceptualized as the difference between the figure of the enemy and the figure of the stranger. Strangers are both inside and outside a society; they are insiders/outsiders. They articulate ambivalence and therefore challenge the (modern) ordering activity which relies on reducing ambiguity and uncertainty by categorizing elements. Undecidables such as strangers pose a hermeneutic problem because they do not fit the categories. Different from enemies, strangers are disordering because they express the possibility of chaos from within the existing order. One could conceptualize them as a rest product of the activity of categorizing — they are the elements which a particular categorization highlights as exceptions which cannot be fitted into the scheme. What matters here is that this figure of the stranger, which connotes a challenge to categorizing practices through the impossibility of being categorized, does not primarily articulate a threat to the survival of the community or to a specific order (the scheme of categorization) but more generally questions the possibility of ordering itself. The category of 'Jews' connoted this kind of strangeness during particular periods in history.[16] One could also imagine a revolutionary state taking the position of stranger rather than enemy. It would require that it be recognized as a member of an international order while embodying a revolutionary force which aims at overthrowing the order. The Soviet Union may well have taken this position at particular points in time.

The difference between the figures of stranger and enemy clearly relates to the double mediation of life and death with which I concluded the previous section. It articulates a difference between a mediation of friends and

241

enemies and a mediation of order and chaos. In terms of security policy we could call the former mediation 'daily security' and the latter 'ontological security'. Daily security articulates a strategy of survival, which consists of trying to postpone death by countering objectified threats. Ontological security[17] is a strategy of managing the limits of reflexivity — death as the undetermined — by fixing social relations into a symbolic and institutional order. It does not primarily refer to threat definition — in the sense of enemy construction — or threat management but concerns the general question of the political — how to order social relations while simultaneously guaranteeing the very activity of ordering itself. This difference allows Bauman, implicitly rephrasing Carl Schmitt, to state that the state system (the international society of the English School) does not aim at the elimination of enemies but at the destruction of strangers, or more generally strangehood (Bauman, 1990: 153). Ultimately the legitimacy of the state rests on its capacity to provide order — not a particular content of order but the function of ordering, of making life intelligible (see the previous argument that the state appears as the mediator of life and death). This requires that those 'elements' which cannot be classified, which are ambivalent, and thus have a capacity to render problematic this ontological function of the state system, have to be eliminated, possibly through enemy construction. This opens an interesting way, for example, of looking at the significance of the securitization of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the United States and Western Europe in a condition in which old, familiar certainties, such as the welfare state and the belief in a capacity to control the permeability of territory, seem to be imploding. Enemies are clear threats located outside a state, even if they are territorially inside, they are externalized in terms of membership. They are a problem which results in a call upon the state to do something about it. They threaten a particular (group of) states but they do not threaten the legitimacy of the state form and the international society within which the state is articulated. On the contrary, in the first instance they always confirm the political legitimacy by triggering a call for help upon the state. So, if potentially disturbing strangers who, by being both inside and outside, can render problematic the viability of clear boundary drawing, of providing order, can be represented as enemies, they are fixed within familiar categories. As a result, the challenging capacity has been neutralized which secures the state (system) — for the time being.

It follows that the legitimacy of the state as a political unit does not rest solely on how it 'manages' enemies but also, and in a sense primarily, on how it deals with the question of ontological security. It can also be argued that much of IR has neglected the question of ontological security. It has concentrated on the mediation of relations between enemies rather than the

mediation of relations with strangers. Among the central questions of the discipline are — What kind of threat mediating strategies have been historically formulated? How and why do these strategies work or not work? What strategies can be proposed to handle successfully problems of enmity in International Relations? The vast literature on balance of power, collective security, world government, arms control, security communities, etc. deals with these questions in the world of interstate relations.

There is an obvious link between daily and ontological security. Daily security orders social relations — introduces a level of certainty — by objectifying the abstract fear of death through enemy construction. Thus, the success of daily security practices does not only depend on effectively countering the enemy but also on being able to confirm the principle of determinability, that is, the very possibility of fixing International Relations, of rendering International Relations intelligible. Here an interesting question arises concerning the debate on widening the security (studies) agenda. Insofar as widening security agendas articulates the inability to fix threatening forces and the referent object which receives the threats, it may raise questions concerning the principle of determinability itself and thus create a condition of ontological insecurity — the impression of chaos. For example, the expansion of security questions after the Cold War articulates a multiplication of enemies, dangers, threats. When it is almost impossible to hierarchize threats and when the general impression is that one is in a permanent state of crisis and urgency, trust in the capacity to keep threats at a distance crumbles. At that point, the daily security struggle could collapse into an ontological security question. The multiplication of threat experiences in everyday life could translate into an experience of chaos and *Angst*. As a consequence, the legitimacy of the political agencies which identified themselves as the mediators between life and death, as the managers of *Angst* — the state and some international organizations in the case of security policy — could face a 'fundamental' political crisis. Their capacity to order and thus their 'promise' of guaranteeing the principle of determinacy could be questioned. In a more extreme development of this process, one could argue that the place of the mediator, that is, of the political community, is up for grabs. This is what the critical security literature senses, which argues on the basis of an emancipatory cognitive interest for breaking away from the status quo orientation of security policy via the expansion of the security agenda — especially, by introducing the question of 'whose security?'.[18]

I would argue that this collapse of daily security into a problematic of ontological security characterizes the security problematic of the post-Cold War era. The attempts to construct relatively stable friend/enemy mediations seem to fail. As a consequence, security policies do not succeed in limiting the impression of chaos. One of the reasons could be that the audio-

visual media project one threat after another into the living room. As a consequence, threat becomes a spectacle. People seem to move (zap?) from threat to threat (Shapiro, 1991: 468). This certainly makes a more permanent hierarchization of threats more difficult. It could also increase a general feeling of being threatened while reducing the possibility of the spectator identifying what precisely threatens him/her. The void upon which the symbolic order rests (death as the undetermined) — that which is normally hidden behind the daily security struggle — risks being rendered visible in the middle of the daily security problematic. This would transform the daily security problematic into an ontological one. A fundamental legitimacy crisis for security agencies (state institutions, the state, and international organizations) would result from it. The problematic of political identity that is raised in the post-Cold War era thus goes beyond the lack of a fixed enemy or the question of a new world order. It also seems to involve a deeper, wider, more general problem of ontological (in)security.

Politics of the Signifier

It follows from the interpretation of the discursive formation of security that security practice — the play of the signifier 'security' in social relations — refers to the political in a double sense. On the one hand, security practices articulate the place of the political. By separating life and death, and consequently demanding a mediation between them, they define a place where political agencies — those performing the mediation in the name of the community — can appear. This also highlights that these agencies employ security policies to affirm their position. For example, Ole Wæver argues along this line when he states that 'the language game of security is . . . a *jus necessitatis* for threatened elites' (Wæver, 1995: 56).

The state as a political agency represented by governmental elites has largely monopolized that space for a considerable period of time (which does not mean that it has not been contested). Security practice, in the sense of enemy construction and mediation, is thus co-constitutive of the political sphere as a functional sphere in society which differs from, for example, the economic and social sphere. I do not want to go as far as Carl Schmitt (1932/79) by arguing that separating friends from enemies is the 'essence' of the political sphere, but it certainly is a key part of the self-definition of modern political agencies (see also Walker, 1986, 1990).

The second link between the political sphere and security is that security is an ordering activity. It arranges social relations in a particular way. It closes, in a security way, the principled openness of the indigenous people's relation to foreigners, for example. Thus, a security policy is a political choice in which one decides to deal in a security way with a partly

undetermined situation. There are different ways to relate indigenous people to foreigners; security is one of them.[19] This means that the play of the signifier 'security' — or, in other words, security policy — is neither innocent nor neutral nor inevitable, and therefore it is political. This political dimension includes two aspects. First, it suggests that security practices articulate a particular kind of order — that they arrange social relations in a particular way. For example, Wæver (1995) argues that security arranges international relations according to the logic of war. It sets enemies against friends in a clash of wills in which each risks being eliminated by the other. High expectations of violence run through it (see also Huysmans, 1995). However, there is also a second aspect to it. Security practices also embody a particular kind of order*ing*. This means that the process of arranging, which is to be distinguished from the content of the arrangement — the actual result of the process — evolves in a determined way. In line with the previous sections, I will focus on this aspect. Central to the argument is how the epistemological fear that security practices embody relates to a specific ethico-political project.

The ordering strategy of security is to postpone the limits of reflexivity as far as possible by accumulating truth about how the world works. New knowledge about a conflict dynamic, for example, limits the amount of what-we-do-not-yet-know about the dynamic. It softens feelings of discomfort that arise when facing incomprehensible phenomena. Truth articulates a correspondence between the real world and the symbolized one. Death is that which is not yet known but can be known if we work at it hard enough. The epistemology of security is based on two elements — (a) everything can in principle be known; and (b) if it is known its truth does not change over time.[20]

Why do we call this political? Is this not epistemology? Yes, it is the epistemology of security but this epistemology is political in the sense that it embodies a specific ethico-political position. It favours a particular ordering activity. James Der Derian (1993) has rendered this visible by contrasting the Hobbesian subtext of security with Nietzsche's interpretation of the mediation of life and death. In the Hobbesian text security is a life strategy which manages uncertainty and ambivalence by producing truth and thus certainty and predictability. The fear of the unknown reigns under the sign of ontological security. Nietzsche enters the picture to show that it is possible to support a life strategy which does not push the undetermined as far away as possible. Such a life strategy would affirm that life is born out of death, that ambivalence, the undetermined, is the very heart of life. It is the condition of possibility of life and that which makes life worthwhile — 'The security of the sovereign, rational self and State comes at the cost of

ambiguity, uncertainty, paradox — all that makes life worthwhile' (Der Derian, 1993: 104).

This view can be further clarified by having a closer look at what is implied in Stephen Walt's claim that introducing postmodernism into security studies would be counter-productive and dangerous. Walt argues that postmodernism has 'yet to demonstrate [its] value for comprehending world politics'. Instead of studying International Relations, it develops a 'prolix and self-indulgent discourse that is divorced from the real world' (Walt, 1991: 223). What does this mean? Why is this counter-productive and dangerous? What justifies Walt's disciplinary act?

He justifies the exclusion of postmodernism from security studies with the argument that it transfers security studies to an esoteric sphere isolated from the real social practices which it should study. Postmodern security studies is expected to lock itself away in the famous ivory tower. This would be counter-productive in a double sense. First, it would be counter-productive for security studies, which legitimates itself as a machinery producing useful knowledge about world politics. Its raison d'être is ultimately that it provides a better understanding of (the causes of) security problems. This knowledge is then used to prescribe more effective counter-measures (or remedies). Knowledge is thus instrumental in making the world safer. 'A prolix and self-indulgent discourse that is divorced from the real world' is not useful in that way. Postmodernism would lead security studies away from its managerial, technocratic orientation, and therefore in Walt's terms would wind up security studies altogether. Secondly, postmodernism would not be counter-productive for the academic business alone. It would also be bad for world politics. The way to create a safer world is to develop a better diagnosis of (the causes or symptoms of) security problems, and on the basis of this knowledge to prescribe remedies which could neutralize a threat and, in the best case, even prevent a threat from appearing. Undermining security knowledge by delegitimizing it thus directly undermines the possibility of creating a safer world. If this is the case, then postmodernism would be dangerous for both security studies and for world politics.

Now we could start a counter-argument by trying to show that Walt misrepresents the postmodern prospect; that it indeed formulates a new language but that it is not esoteric or isolated from the real world; that it is another way of interpreting world politics; and so forth. But to illustrate the difference in ethico-political projects articulated by different understandings of security knowledge, I have to push the argument of the postmodern danger a bit further. Let us over-interpret Walt's argument somewhat by stating that there is an ethico-political subtext to the two arguments given before.

Walt's disciplinary text is not only motivated by a desire to preserve an

academic discipline and a particular form of knowledge, it also articulates the modern fear of ambivalence and the desire for the expulsion of the undetermined from life. Underlying Walt's text is a (Hobbesian) life strategy which manages death via the production of instrumental rational knowledge. Truth production pushes back the limits of the unknown and helps to formulate more effective policy measures to keep dangers — concretized representations of the general idea of death — at a distance. This strategy thrives in a fear of ambivalence, a fear of the hell of an infinite openness (Connolly, 1989: 339). If the postmodern prospect articulates a more Nietzschean inspired ethico-political strategy which aspires to a revaluation of ambivalence, it will clash in a straightforward manner with the ethico-political project of (inter)national security practices. It reintroduces ontological insecurity into International Relations, not as an obstacle to be overcome but as a positive force making it possible to re-articulate world politics, to move away from the status quo. For example, Campbell's interpretation of the Gulf conflict, and his argument for a politics without principle, is an attempt to formulate an alternative interpretation of the second Gulf War based on an ethico-political project which values ambivalence positively (Campbell, 1993). This project is not recognizable in terms of established security agendas in international relations. Because the latter rely on sequestering ambivalence and undetermined elements from life, it cannot recognize an ethico-political project which introduces ambivalence (or strangehood) into the agenda as a chance rather than as the ultimate danger. From this perspective, we must agree with Walt that the postmodern prospect indeed poses a death threat to security. But, it does not necessarily follow from this that the postmodern project, including its ethico-political orientation, is therefore a bad thing. This is, or should be, the subject of discussion; but Walt stops short of it, preferring a disciplinary move instead of a debate.

What is interesting in this context is that the expansion of security agendas in a sense creates the ontological condition for the postmodern ethico-political project. (This also throws some interesting light on why authors like Walt are not very happy with the expansion of the security studies agenda either.) As argued previously, the expanding play of the signifier seems to constitute an ontological security problematic. The daily security struggle becomes ontological. This opens a window of opportunity for re-articulating the way we mediate–constitute the relation between the determined and the undetermined.[21] It is crucial to remark that the postmodern project — as it is represented here — is not a celebration of the reign of the undetermined — of ontological insecurity as such — which would be a reign of chaos. It is a (plea for the) search for new life strategies which would not exclude death from life but which would emphasize a life within ambivalence (which

247

would also imply that we cannot speak about 'the undetermined' anymore because it is no longer an externalized condition). It looks for a way of life which recognizes that accumulating security with the hope of postponing insecurity is doomed to fail. In IR the shift to a negative understanding of security articulates this by showing how security practices cannot eliminate insecurity because they constitute insecurities. The negative interpretation argues that since security is a strategy to free oneself from a threat, it cannot exist without threats. Somewhat differently formulated, this means that insecurity is a necessary condition for security (Wæver, 1995; Dillon, 1996).

In a sense the postmodern project is a return to Hobbes; not to his answers though, but to his question — How to deal with a condition of chaos in which the collapse of certainties resulted in a booming of violence.[22] The explosion of security questions in current world politics raises the fundamental question of how to mediate our relations to uncertainties, paradoxes and ambivalence in a peaceful way. How are we going to relate to other people, nature and our self so that peaceful, non-violent transformations of world politics become possible? The modernism/postmodernism debate in security studies is about different ethico-political answers to this question, or, in other words, it is about differences in life strategies.

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to show two things. First, and most importantly, I have argued that the question of the meaning of security is still underdeveloped in International Relations. I have also argued that a definition and a conceptual analysis are not the only ways of approaching the question of the meaning of security. A post-structurally inspired thick signifier approach gives the question of meaning a different twist. It leads to a more sophisticated way of dealing with the concept because it unravels how 'security' is embedded in a formation of rules which defines it in its specificity and explains how it organizes relations to nature, to other human beings and to the self. Moreover, by interpreting security as a thick signifier the question of the meaning of security articulates a specific research agenda. Different from a definition or a conceptual analysis, it does not function as a starting point for a security analysis which develops in a sense separately from it. In the thick signifier approach the external agenda disappears, or better is folded into the question of the meaning of security. The meaning of security constitutes the agenda itself. An interpretation of security policy is an interpretation of what the play of the signifier 'security' does. How does

it work upon within social relations? How does it articulate a discursive formation which defines security practices in their specificity?

Interpreting the thickness of security questions axiomatic dimensions of security. Most of the time in everyday practices one does not explicitly reflect on the axiomatic dimensions of security but one just acts within them. Moreover, interpreting the axiomatic dimensions raises questions about the ethico-political dimensions of security policies. In security studies the ethico-political dimensions are often buried under a technical logic of necessity — 'we have to identify threats and study their causes and we have to find the most effective/efficient countermeasures'. The question 'What happens when we do this?' slips out of the interpretation. This is no longer the case in the thick signifier approach. It is based on the assumption that security implies a particular way of organizing social relations for which there is no necessity, at least not in principle. Consequently, it raises the question why we *should* organize our relations to foreigners, for example, in that specific security way. Thus, the is-question turns automatically into a should-question.

The second thing I have tried to show is that there is a growing body of literature (in International Relations) which explores different aspects of the discursive formation of security. Although one cannot say that it is a very extensive body of literature, it is certainly significant enough to show how the question of the meaning of security implies more than the quest for a definition or for conceptual clarification. It also has contributed considerably to our understanding of what security policies do, and more specifically, how they construct the political. In the second part of the article, I have tried to contribute to this literature by looking at how security policies mediate life and death in a twofold way, and how they simultaneously articulate a daily security and an ontological security problematic.

The question remaining is — How can we develop this body of literature and hence our understanding of the meaning of security further? A possible way forward with a thick signifier approach is to analyse the play of the signifier 'security' in different contexts. What does security mean when women involved in a guerrilla movement in Latin America speak it? How does security work in the current ways of regulating migration to Western Europe? What does security signify in gangland? Is security a central concept in the interaction between particular tribes or clans in Africa? Answers to these questions would contribute considerably to a critical awareness of what security (or, most probably different securities) are about and what security policies imply. They would also make it possible to start a comparative analysis of the meanings articulated by security practices. Further, a thick signifier approach raises the question how the discursive formation of

security we are used to in International Relations may be changing as a result of uttering 'security' in the context of a transformation of modernity.

   Such an 'empirical' agenda would be a major contribution to the existing literature on the discursive formation of security in International Relations. It will raise questions such as — Does the signifier articulate a single, well-delineated structure of meaning (the discursive formation) or does it mean different things in different contexts of International Relations? How does the work of security spoken by women in a community in South Africa relate to the general understanding of security in International Relations? Does it relate at all? Don't we risk ethno-, gender-, discipline- or other centrisms if we generalize from the national security experience in International Relations? What are the differences and similarities between social security and societal security, internal security and external security in terms of the way they organize our relation to nature, to others and to the self? Answers to these kinds of questions could help us considerably in developing a critical understanding of (differences in) the significance and meaning of security practices.

Notes

1. For an overview see Krause and Williams (1996, 1997).
2. The distinction between broadening and deepening is borrowed from Krause and Williams (1996: 230).
3. Somewhat differently formulated, the signifier and the signified are two dimensions of a sign. The signifier refers to the expressive dimension of language (e.g. the word 'security' spoken, written, symbolized) while the signified refers to the content of language (e.g. the meaning of security in 'drugs is a serious security problem') (Greimas and Courtès, 1979/1993: 351–4).
4. See also Clifford Geertz's understanding of culture as 'a context, something within which they [behaviour, institutions, processes] can be intelligibly — that is, thickly — described' (Geertz, 1973: 14).
5. Ole Wæver introduced this perspective into IR by interpreting security as a speech act (Wæver, 1995; see also Buzan et al., 1997: Chapter 2).
6. Compared to 'logic' the concept 'formation' has the advantage that it can refer to both a given structure and to a process of shaping through discourse.
7. More extensively on this issue, see Huysmans (1995, forthcoming), Wæver (1995) and Wæver et al. (1993: 187–9).
8. For an analysis of how Hobbes' text articulates this fear of the unknown as the most basic force, see Blits (1989). In more general terms see also Shapiro (1992b: 122–39). There is an obvious link between biological death and the epistemological fear — our individual death is our great unknown. It is that

which we cannot know because once dead, knowledge ceases to be a possibility (Bauman, 1992: 12–17).

9. Life a gift from death? Maybe one way of interpreting this is following the Heideggerian understanding of the human condition as a being-toward-death. Death is the condition of possibility of life because it is as a being-toward-death that life becomes a possibility. In this view death gives life. In this interpretation of Heidegger the notion of death makes it possible for life to appear. Therefore, death is inherent, internal to life itself. Sequestering death from life is a strategy of deleting death as origin (and thereby closing off a particular understanding of politics). (Dillon's book *Politics of Security* (1996) can be read as a book length reflection on the implications of this interpretation for the understanding of security and politics.)

10. For a similar analysis of the relationship between death and life in modernity, see Shapiro (1992a: 140–57).

11. There is more than a bit of a psycho-analytical, Lacanian subtext here. But, I do not want to make it explicit because it would lead us into a general discussion of how identification rests on alienation, while I prefer to focus on a particular form of alienation which is characteristic for the security formation — threat construction.

12. Interpreting death as the undetermined follows Baudrillard's view — 'Death ought never to be understood as the real event that affects a subject or a body, but as a form in which the determinacy of the subject and of value is lost' (Baudrillard, 1976/93: 5). One can interpret the concept of biological death as an objectification of this idea of the undetermined.

13. More extensive on this distinction are Laclau and Zac (1994).

14. Another central theme this literature, among others, stressed was how the Gulf crisis related to a search for overcoming the Vietnam syndrome.

15. 'Die spezifisch politische Unterscheidung, auf welche sich die politischen Handlung und Motive zurückführen lassen, ist die Unterscheidung von *Freund* und *Feind*' (Schmitt, 1932/79: 26).

16. This conceptualization of the figure of the stranger is based on Bauman (1990: 143–6, 1991: 53–101). I do not want to argue that this dimension is totally absent in Campbell's work. His argument that identification is not just about differentiating self from other but also involves securing the ground of this identity, which implies hiding its contingent basis, could be interpreted, if pushed a bit further, along the lines of the argument presented here (1992: e.g. p. 71).

17. This concept is borrowed from Giddens but without intending to borrow the specific meaning this concept has received in Giddens' theoretical framework. Giddens defines ontological security as — 'confidence and trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity' (Giddens, 1984: 375, 1990: 92–8, 1991: 184–5).

18. Key authors representing this approach are Booth (1991a, 1991b, 1997), Walker (1988: 118–27, 1990, 1997) and Dalby (1992, 1997).

19. For an analysis of this in relation to the migration question in Western Europe, see Huysmans (1997).
20. Very extensive and most interesting on the relation between political identification and epistemology is Jens Bartelson's *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (1995).
21. Social and cultural theory has some very interesting things to say about how this is indeed happening, how people are developing postmodern life strategies (see e.g. Bauman (1992), Giddens (1991), Beck (1993)).
22. On how Hobbes' philosophy (and with him the whole liberal project) was a political answer to this question and how his solution implied a radical sequestration of identity questions from security practices, see Michael Williams's paper *Identity and the politics of security* (forthcoming).

References

Baldwin, David (1997) 'The Concept of Security', *Review of International Studies* 23(1): 5–26.

Bartelson, Jens (1995) *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baudrillard, Jean (1976/93) *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. London: Sage.

Bauman, Zygmunt (1990) 'Modernity and Ambivalence', *Theory, Culture & Society* 7(2/3): 143–69.

Bauman, Zygmunt (1991) *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bauman, Zygmunt (1992) *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*. Cambridge: Polity.

Beck, Ulrich (1993) *Die Erfindung des Politischen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Blits, J. (1989) 'Hobbesean Fear', *Political Theory* 17(3): 417–31.

Booth, Ken (1991a) 'Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice', *International Affairs* 67(3): 527–45.

Booth, Ken (1991b) 'Security and Emancipation', *Review of International Relations* 17(4): 313–26.

Booth, Ken (1997) 'Security and Self: Reflections of a Fallen Realist', in Keith Krause and Michael Williams (eds) *Critical Security Studies*, pp. 83–119. London: UCL Press.

Buzan, Barry (1984) 'Peace, Power, and Security: Contending Concepts in the Study of International Relations', *Journal of Peace Research* 21(2): 109–25.

Buzan, Barry (1987) *An Introduction to Strategic Studies. Military Technology and International Relations*. London: Macmillan.

Buzan, Barry (1991) *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd edition. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde (1997) *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Campbell, David (1992) *Writing Security. United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Campbell, David (1993) *Politics without Principle. Sovereignty, Ethics, and the Narratives of the Gulf War*. London: Lynne Rienner.

Connolly, William (1989) 'Identity and Difference in Global Politics', in James Der

Derian and Michael Shapiro (eds) *International/Intertextual Relations. Post-modern Readings of World Politics*, pp. 323–42. Massachusetts: Lexington.

Dalby, Simon (1992) 'Security, Modernity, Ecology: The Dilemmas of Post-Cold War Security Discourse', *Alternatives* 17(1): 95–134.

Dalby, Simon (1997) 'Contesting an Essential Concept: Reading the Dilemmas in Contemporary Security Discourse', in Keith Krause and Michael Williams (eds) *Critical Security Studies*, pp. 3–31. London: UCL Press.

Der Derian, James (1992) *Antidiplomacy. Spies, Terror, Speed and War*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Der Derian, James (1993) 'The Value of Security: Hobbes, Marx, Nietzsche, and Baudrillard', in David Campbell and Michael Dillon (eds) *The Political Subject of Violence*, pp. 94–113. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Deudney, Daniel (1990) 'The Case against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security', *Millennium* 19(2): 461–76.

Dillon, Michael (1991) 'The Alliance of Security and Subjectivity', *Current Research on Peace and Violence* 13(3): 101–24.

Dillon, Michael (1996) *Politics of Security. Towards a Political Philosophy of Continental Thought*. London: Routledge.

Dorman, Andrew and Adrian Treacher (1995) *European Security. An Introduction to Security Issues in Post-Cold War Europe*. Aldershot: Dartmouth.

Foucault, Michel (1969) *L'archéologie du savoir*. Paris: Gallimard.

Geertz, Clifford (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Giddens, Anthony (1984) *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity.

Giddens, Anthony (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Giddens, Anthony (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Greimas, A. and J. Courtès, (1979/1993) *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*. Paris: Hachette.

Haftendorn, Helga (1991) 'The Security Puzzle: Theory-building and Discipline-building in International Security', *International Security* 35(1): 3–17.

Hansen, Lene (1996) 'Slovenian Identity. State Building on the Balkan Border', *Alternatives* 21(4): 473–95.

Herz, John (1950) 'Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma', *World Politics* 2(2): 157–80.

Herz, John (1962) *International Politics in the Atomic Age*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Huysmans, Jef (1995) 'Migrants as a Security Problem: Dangers of "Securitizing" Societal Issues', in Robert Miles and Dieter Thränhardt (eds) *Migration and European Integration: The Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion*, pp. 53–72. London: Pinter.

Huysmans, Jef (1996) *Making/Unmaking European Disorder*. (PhD thesis) Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Department of Political Sciences.

Huysmans, Jef (1997) 'European Identity and Migration Policies. Socio-economic and Security Questions in a Process of Europeanization'. CEU Working Paper in Political Sciences No. 9, Budapest: Central European University.

Huysmans, Jef (forthcoming) 'Constructivism et itude de sicuriti. Le dilemme normatif de dire et icrire "sicuriti"' [Constructivism and Security Studies: The Normative Dilemma of Speaking and Writing 'Security'], *Cultures et Conflits*.

Klein, Bradley (1990) 'How the West was One: Representational Politics of NATO', *International Studies Quarterly* 34(3): 311–25.

Krause, Keith and Michael Williams (1996) 'Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods', *Mershon International Studies Review* 40(2): 229–54.

Krause, Keith and Michael Williams (1997) 'From Strategy to Security: Foundations of Critical Security Studies', in Keith Krause and Michael Williams (eds) *Critical Security Studies*, pp. 33–59. London: UCL Press.

Laclau, Ernesto and Lilian Zac (1994) 'Minding the Gap: The Subject of Politics', in Ernesto Laclau (ed.) *The Making of Political Identities*, pp. 11–39. London: Verso.

Levy, Marc (1995) 'Is the Environment a National Security Issue?', *International Security* 20(2): 35–62.

Loescher, Gil (1992) 'Refugee Movements and International Security', *Adelphi Papers* No. 268.

Luke, Timothy (1991) 'The Discipline of Security Studies and the Codes of Containment: Learning from Kuwait', *Alternatives* 16(3): 315–44.

Nye, J. and S. Lynne-Jones (1988) 'International Security Studies. A Report of a Conference on the State of the Field', *International Security* 12(4): 5–27.

Saussure, Ferdinand de (1968) *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot.

Schmitt, Carl (1932/79) *Der Begriff des Politischen*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot.

Shapiro, Michael (1991) 'Sovereignty and Exchange in the Orders of Modernity', *Alternatives* 16(4): 447–77.

Shapiro, Michael (1992a) *Reading the Postmodern Polity. Political Theory as Textual Practice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Shapiro, Michael (1992b) 'That Obscure Object of Violence: Logistics, Desire, War', *Alternatives* 17(4): 453–77.

Tickner, J. Ann (1991) 'Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation', in Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Turner (eds) *Gender and International Relations*, pp. 27–40. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Tickner, J. Ann (1992) *Gender in International Relations. Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ullman, Richard (1983) 'Redefining Security', *International Security* 8(1): 129–53.

Ullman, Richard (1991) *Securing Europe*. Twickenham: Adamantine Press.

Wæver, Ole (1995) 'Securitization and Desecuritization', in Ronnie Lipschutz (ed.) *On Security*, pp. 46–86. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wæver, Ole (1996) 'European Security Identities', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 34(1): 103–32.

Wæver, Ole, Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup and Pierre Lemaitre (1993) *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*. London: Pinter.

Walker, R.B.J. (1986) 'Culture, Discourse, Security', *Alternatives* 11(4): 485–504.

Walker, R.B.J. (1988) *One World, Many Worlds: Struggle for a Just World Peace.* Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Walker, R.B.J. (1990) 'Security, Sovereignty, and the Challenge of World Politics', *Alternatives* 15(1): 3–27.

Walker, R.B.J. (1997) 'The Subject of Security', in Keith Krause and Michael Williams (eds) *Critical Security Studies*, pp. 61–81. London: UCL Press.

Walt, Stephen (1991) 'The Renaissance of Security Studies', *International Studies Quarterly* 35(2): 211–39.

Weiner, Myron (1992/93) 'Security, Stability, and International Migration', *International Security* 17(3): 91–126.

Weldes, Jutta and Diana Saco (1996) 'Making State Action Possible: The United States and the Discursive Construction of the "Cuban Problem", 1960–1994', *Millennium* 25(2): 361–95.

Wight, Martin (1966) 'Why is there no International Theory?', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds) *Diplomatic Investigations. Essays in the Theory of International Politics*, pp. 17–34. London: Alan and Unwin.

Williams, Michael (1996) 'Hobbes and International Relations: A Reconsideration', *International Organization* 50(1): 213–36.

Williams, Michael (forthcoming), 'Identity and the Politics of Security'.

Wolfers, Arnold (1962) *Discord and Collaboration.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.