

## *Unpacking the new mobilities paradigm: lessons for critical security studies?*

Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet

**S**INCE THE BEGINNING of the twenty-first century, across the social sciences and humanities there has been a widespread and increasing interest in issues of mobility. In many respects, what is referred to as the 'new mobilities paradigm' is an endeavour that critical security scholars should engage with even further. This book is one step down this road. In further pursuit of this, I take a step back and reflect more broadly on the intersections, actual and potential, between the literatures on mobilities and critical security studies.

The 'new mobilities paradigm' emerged across different disciplines from sociology to geography, anthropology to business studies, migration and tourism to urban studies.<sup>1</sup> Mobility may be undoubtedly fashionable but evaluating its significance is not easy. As Thomas Faist (2013) notes, it is problematic to assume that enhanced mobility is self-evidently positive or equally shared. Indeed, the current global refugee crisis is a tragic reminder of how mobility and immobility are certainly at the core of international politics, in both positive and negative ways. As the 'flow' of refugees grows, one can witness the increasing proliferation of discourses looking askance at those who attempt to move, remodelling them in terms of potential risk or threat. All of a sudden, borders have to be strengthened and fostered and refugees become questionable and suspicious migrants. Security fears fuel a new spate of wall-building around the world rather than pathways from one country to another. Ours does not seem to be a borderless world where mobility is enhanced, but rather more a securitised world in which social and political exclusions are on the rise (Shamir 2005). The refugee crisis and the inevitable deployment of logics of securitisation do not obviate the fact that goods, information, and people are certainly moving across borders more, differently, and for some even faster. Likewise, the fact that mobility can be slowed down or even stopped does not pre-empt the possibility of examining the embodied nature and experience of different modes of travel, or

of being a traveller in different places: '[t]he very idea of movement implies both a sociological imagination for spatial matters and a geographic sensitivity to understanding social and cultural processes of movement' (Vannini 2010: 112).

It is otiose to say that learning, writing, and teaching about security requires coming to terms with an incredibly diverse and large amount of literature. It is also no exaggeration to say that security studies have undergone a remarkable boom since the mid-1990s. The boundaries of contemporary politics, discourses, practices, practitioners, producers, and end-users of security know nearly no limits. Security is the *lingua franca* of our times, a pervasive yet contested central element of national, international, and transnational politics. More worryingly, security has evolved into a self-propelling and complex system. Security works as an interlocking auto-referential system that incessantly drives itself (Huysmans 2014).

Critical observations on our current security constellation have flourished over the same period. Across critical security studies, changes in security are interpreted and widely discussed, in the spirit of Max Weber, as processes of bureaucratic rationalisation, the privatisation of and '(de)differentiation' between social and professional universes (Bigo 2002; 2014). The rediscovery of Michel Foucault (1977) and Ulrich Beck's (1999) notions of *dispositif* and risk society, respectively have significantly impacted upon the ways in which security has been understood and analysed. They have given rise to numerous discussions informed by studies in terms of processes of individualisation and exclusion (Bauman 1998; 2000), governmentality and control (Garland 2001; Lyon 2003), and, more recently, processes and logics of commodification (Loader 1999; Avant 2005; Neocleous 2007).

Across this literature, the notion of mobility has always been central yet not necessarily discussed as such. I would suggest here that the interest in 'mobility' in critical security studies has been largely, perhaps only, been understood in relation to a rather Foucauldian interpretation of power and population control, i.e. the establishment of institutions of regulation, control, and correction of types of mobilities construed as imperfect, with the ultimate goal of settling down populations and improving their utility and docility (Aradau and Blanke 2010). In line with John Torpey's (2000) compelling analysis of how passports and identification documents are to be viewed as the products of elaborate bureaucracies devoted to identifying individuals, regulating and localising them, I would argue that within critical security studies there are three discernible arenas that address the issue of mobility. The first is an emphasis on the policing and governance of mobility (Bigo 2002; Bonditti 2004; Scherrer et al. 2010). Here the notion of mobility is largely seen as a by-product of an analysis of the rationale and practices of a rather successful monopolisation of the legitimate means of movement by states and their bureaucracies (police, customs, and diplomacy). Analyses of mobility in terms of governance are also

key to most of the recent investigations of risk management techniques and the seductive allure of biometric data in the development of security (Amoore and De Goede 2008).

A second trend in the critical security literature, largely concomitant with the first, is concerned more specifically with borders, agents, and tools of border control, disputed territories, and other liminal spaces. Considerations on the multiplicity of actors involved in that singular space (border guards, diplomats, police officers, NGOs, travellers) and the diversity of their agendas, roles, tactics, and routines has been the focus of empirically informed studies (Andreas 2000; Ackleson 2005; Côté-Boucher et al. 2014; Bigo 2014). Attention to the inescapable interconnection of diverse security discourses, different legal regimes and policies at play in these peculiar border spaces, observing and analysing what is going on, who is going through, and who and what is stopped, has led to timely and rich analyses on the regulation of mobility. However, as a contributor to this literature I must confess that the concept of mobility itself was something of a second-order concern.

The third trend in which mobility figures large is driven by an interest in analysing the narratives of threat and risk in relation to migration, circulation, and freedom of movement (Guild and Bigo 2005). In many ways, the very particular European context, starting with the loosening of the internal borders in the then European Community as a result of the Schengen accords largely contributed to the development of reflections on security, circulation, and mobility. Largely informed by this political context, the medium- and long-term impact of enlargement processes on issues of external and internal security, especially in the context of new EU membership, but also in the context of partial accession of states and of the more recent implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), has been crucial in redirecting mobility to the core of critical security studies (Jeandesboz 2014).

Finally, any discussion of the place of mobility in the critical security literature would be unsatisfactory if there was no mention of the rise of surveillance studies, its impact on security studies in particular and on the study of social control more generally (Lianos 2013). The emphasis on technologies and the different tools used in order to enhance surveillance is a crucial part of the critical security research agenda. David Lyon (1994; 2003) aptly highlights how surveillance actually became a feature not only of the specific monitoring of suspects on the move but also of the generalised social sorting of populations.<sup>2</sup> In an anxious post-9/11 world, the proliferation of new airport security measures has certainly received more attention than before (Adey 2004; Salter 2008), and propelled the issue of mobility to another level, combining security with notions of circulation, high and low motion, risk assessment and social sorting, governance, and control. Again mobility is seen very much as the by-product of a multi-layered configuration of borders, social boundaries, and control,

particular infrastructures and technologies created, implemented in historically and sociologically informed contexts. What the theoretical implications of these automated systems of surveillance, control, and border management, actors, routines, and rationales might have for the notion of mobility itself has perhaps not received sufficient consideration.

For this reason, mobility studies and the new mobilities paradigm are worth considering more closely. In many ways they are aligned with the recent analytical trends in critical security studies briefly mentioned above. Nonetheless, we need to remind ourselves that a focus on mobility is not quite as novel as first appears. I am thinking here of the work of Manuel Castells (1996) on 'flows', Arjun Appadurai's (1996) notions of variety of '-scapes', or Zygmunt Bauman's (1998) metaphor of 'liquidity'. Additionally, John Urry (2000) has identified what he calls an emerging culture of mobility at the heart of global society, thereby launching a trend in sociology and, subsequently, among geographers. Whether many scholars today remember that period of intense and puzzling analyses of what were seen as significant transformations of social and political life in the late 1980s and early 1990s is a moot point. At that time, such concepts were welcomed as essential and timely in order to chart the evolutions of the world under the combined influence of the opening of Communist Bloc countries to the market economy and the information and communication technologies revolution. The overwhelmingly optimistic or grandiose tone of Urry's (2000) bold manifesto to move 'sociology beyond societies' has been subsequently replaced, however, by a more cautious understanding of how 'mobility, immobility and moorings' are dialectally connected (Hannam et al. 2006). It would be easy to be mesmerised by the profusion of buzzwords, mobility being the latest. The crucial point, however, is not the speculative debates about the so-called novelty of mobility but rather the analytical tone that is woven into the fabric of mobility studies. The move from the analysis of objects to processes, from fixity to motion is what makes the 'mobility turn' attractive in the first place.

This motion-oriented research agenda brings together space, place, and power relations in a very interesting way. It involves complex hybrid, but also hidden, geographies, especially if one pays attention to the different constituent parts of mobility: mobility and its experience is about speed and cadence, the journey and the direction, and all the different objects and places of friction and control along the way (Cresswell 2010). Interestingly, the renewal of migration studies begetting new theories (Massey et al. 1998) has contributed to the expansion of both the scope and nature of the agendas of mobility studies and critical security studies. The contribution of migration studies, beyond extremely precise and well-informed case studies, is that movement goes with confinements and enclosures. Put differently, immobility and mobility are part of the same logics or regimes of regulation and traceability that are creating

spaces entirely dedicated to a transnational mobility, access to which is neither straightforward nor universal (Sassen 1998; Harvey 2006).

In the main, mobility approaches have proved fruitful in generating conceptually rigorous and empirically rich studies across disciplinary boundaries. I think there are two elements of mobility studies that could valuably inform future critical security studies. First, the turn to mobility could be seen as an invitation to discover or to develop even further our interest in the 'hidden geographies' in security studies, those mundane places and possibly subaltern activities that inform and affect our understanding of security. I think this collection of articles is a first contribution to just that. Second, to reflect further upon the implication of notions of speed and acceleration for security studies and how it is connected to violence. Speed not only epitomises a form of mass mobility but also contributes to mechanisms of exclusion, social sorting, and stratification. Current forms of social control are aimed at favouring the movement of certain goods and people while impeding the movement of others. This is certainly not new, as Christophe Studeny (1995) and Tim Cresswell (2006) have shown. Nonetheless, as Bryan Turner (2007) rightly suggests, there are important developments involving the securitisation of modern societies that create significant forms of immobility.

This growing presence of the notion of mobility within critical security studies is not so much a new turn but more a timely invitation for critical security scholars to reconsider the notion of time and space. Indeed, Hartmut Rosa (2003) invites us to investigate this incredible speeding up of social life. It is not that everything and everyone is moving faster. It is, for example, about considering how new forms of organisation and administration supported by a technological boost produce tangible effects on mobility, its imaginary, and all of its social dimensions. Some people, actions, or ideas move faster than others, and some are literally rendered motionless (Virilio 1986; Bauman 1998). As David Harvey (1990: 261) notes, the 'time-space' compression – our perception and the organisation of space and time in our social life – has been utterly transformed by this technological acceleration. This shift in our late modernity is even more dramatic when it comes to the expanding galaxy of security. Lyon (2006), like many others, aptly shows that electronics-based networks segregate as much as they connect, and that they do so selectively.

Critical security scholars need to reflect more on how security and the surveillance of mobility produce different forms of quarantine and seclusion in an anxious global world. This idea of regimes of mobility is a promising avenue. Talking in terms of regimes entails, firstly, the foregrounding of the visible but also the various unrecognised forms of immobilisation. Secondly, it implies the reintroduction of reflection on the modes, mechanisms, and tools of social and political ordering and their developments. Finally, it implies a confrontation with our own limitations of thoughts and the dismantling of our prevailing legal understandings of movement, mobility, and security (Guild and Bigo

2005; Basaran 2011; Basaran and Guild 2016). As such, there is more to be analysed in the repatriation agreements, the architectures of the refugee camps, and the control orders designed to limit the mobility of suspects through tagging, confinement to their homes, and restrictions on their communication. Furthermore, the fact that mobility of data is privileged ahead of the mobility of persons, or, more accurately, certain categories of people, is not only an interesting sign of our times but also of how the critical security agenda might be slightly ahead of that of mobility studies.

The overarching invitation proffered by the prominence of mobility studies is actually to go back to philosophical questions about mobility, modernity, and liberty and to explore their political implications in a post-9/11 world. This is what this volume is aimed at; re-interrogating the normative imperative of mobility, re-engaging with the differences between being mobile, being secure, and being free is certainly a way for critical security scholars to try to find the last shards of hope for humanity in a world that has become a trap for so many. Seen from this perspective, this book is a testament to the vitality and maturity of both the field of critical security studies and the disciplines within which this intellectual endeavour is embedded.<sup>3</sup> This volume is, hopefully, a first step on the way to a series of exchanges and a greater circulation of knowledge on security, immobility, and mobility.

#### NOTES

- 1 The literature is voluminous but key examples include Massey et al. (1998), Urry (2000), Sheller and Urry (2006), Vannini (2010), Cresswell (2006), Salazar and Schiller (2014).
- 2 See also Haggerty et al. (2006), Guittet and Jeandesboz (2009), Bauman and Lyon (2012).
- 3 On a more personal note, it is also a pleasure to be part of such an enterprise that sparkled during a summer school in Brussels in 2013.

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## Epilogue

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