

Research Project: Security in the Anthropocene

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"My current project asks what it means to live in the Anthropocene. It does so by examining the impacts of the Anthropocene on the concept of security. In its most basic (and truest) formulation, security means safety. But yet the world upon (and within) which we act can no longer absorb our pursuits of safety. Our carbon-based societies may have achieved unprecedented levels of health and development, but the unintended consequences are dire. Beyond simply the elusiveness of state security (and the human insecurity often accompanying it), we are now confronted with very real possibilities of mass extinctions and global upheaval. Security must therefore be re-imagined for the age of the human.

My project argues that this re-imagination should take three principal directions. We must confront the ontological understandings of the human and of nature, and what security can mean in an age of global exception. First, humans are seen as decentred and nodal; existing-in-encounters with other humans, beings, and things. Second, nature is not simply a canvas upon which the tragic stories of security take place, but rather is seen as a restless, dynamic and entangled mess of physical and social forces. The Anthropocene challenges us to move far beyond conventional geopolitics, where the earth is objective, permanent, and rigid. Lastly, conventional security has always been predicated upon the distinction between normalcy and exception. The Anthropocene reflects though a permanent state of exception, whereby earth processes (and their effects) break down the zones of safety and risk, and of action and inaction, both of which are fundamental to our understanding of how security "works." The consequences of this breakdown lead us to combine insights from the micro-practices of security that criminology emphasizes with the macro-level securities of international relations to advance a vision of security assemblages, consisting of a complex blending of social and biophysical factors that create the world from the small to the large: materially, socially, and spiritually.

What are we left with then? How do we live in the Anthropocene? The project concludes by eschewing either hope, despair, or blueprints for action. Instead I explore possibilities. Humans cannot be "unmade," but we can be remade into something other than what we currently are. On this basis I construct a vision for security based upon an ethos of care. A security of care is able to bridge disciplinary divides that have restricted the possibilities of understanding security and opening it up to the radical possibilities immanent in the midst of existential risk. More importantly it corrects the traditional ethics of security built upon the distinctions between inclusion and exclusion, friend and enemy. Caring is both a practice and a disposition, and holds qualities of attentiveness, responsiveness, and mutuality. Such a view may appear far from the confines of traditional security studies, which emphasizes protection as the ordering principle of safety. Care is able to offer a perspective that takes into consideration the needs of the other, including humans (the climate refugee who lives halfway around the world), animals (the polar bear), things (the West Antarctic ice sheet, the weather balloon), and the yet-to-be-human (the generations unborn). Care will not secure us, but it can attune us to our cosmological allies in the fight for survival."