Securing the European ‘Homeland’: Profit, risk, authority
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2. Studying Practice and Problematizations

Introduction
The methodological implications of the study of everyday practices, objects, and procedures of security have recently become subject to increased scholarly attention (Côté-Boucher, Infantino and Salter, 2014; Büger, 2014; Hönke and Müller, 2012; Hansen, 2006). This emphasis on what Christian Büger (2014, 385) calls “the practice of doing practice research” derives in part from the so-called practice turn in critical security and International Relations scholarship, which takes a primary interest in the everyday security practices carried out by a dispersed number of actors (Pouliot, 2010; Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Abrahamsen and Williams, 2011). A majority of these studies has favored a highly empirical and interpretative approach to the concept of practice, combining ethnographic field research with discourse approaches in the Foucauldian tradition, to explore “how actors act and how they give meaning to their actions” (Côté-Boucher, Infantino and Salter, 2014, 196). The emphasis on empirics and field research in practice research is not just about adding context to an existing conceptual framework. As outlined by the previous chapter, the theoretical argument about practice requires that close attention is paid to “the continuous process of assembling objects, subjects and practices” as it is through these that the worlds that we study are in fact constituted (Huysmans, 2011, 377).

This chapter raises two questions about the methodology of studying security practices. The first relates to the problem of ‘what’ to study: if practice research implies an empirical and interpretative focus on the
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many daily activities, practices, and devices, how do we know where to start or with which sites and participants we should engage? Building on a Foucauldian-inspired analysis of “problematization,” I propose to follow a particular method of analysis that Foucault referred to as “thinking problematically” (Foucault, 1977, 185-186). Thinking problematically involves the study of problematized objects, or problematizations, and the discursive practices that underpin their emergence. This approach draws close attention to “problematizing moments” or “crisis” situations, allowing for the identification of routinized security practices as well as newly emerging ones (Bacchi, 2012, 2; see also Büger and Bethke, 2013; Schouten, 2014).

Secondly, the chapter raises the question of ‘how’ to study these problematizations and interpret practices. What are the approaches and tools that we have available for conducting practice-oriented research? Three principal means of data collection will be identified: document analysis, (intensive) interviewing, and participant observation. While the latter is often singled out as the preferred method for studying practices given that it provides (almost) direct access to the contextualized practices of involved actors (for a critique, see Kuus, 2013), this study is explicitly based on a combination of the three methods. Partly, this is because of the difficulty of gaining access, but this strategy is also informed by the idea that a study of practice demands a variety of methods. Writes Nicolini, “because of the multifaceted and complex nature, practice can never be captured by a single method or reproduced through one single style of writing” (quoted in Büger, 2014, 403).

Taken together, the overall objective of this chapter is to outline research methodology and operationalization and to explain how the research was conducted. It deals with key questions such as data collection, data analysis, site and participant selection, and validation. On a secondary level, an important objective of this chapter is to reflect on the relationship between my object of study and my position as a researcher. David Mosse has argued that there necessarily exists a conflict between ethnographic methods and the analysis of high and mid-level policy officials. This problem lies in “the very nature of professional identity formation on the one hand and of ethnographic enquiry on the other” (Mosse, 2011, 52). According to Mosse, ethnographic description deals with precisely those things that policy professionals seem to disregard, including “discrepancies of practice, disjuncture, or individual compromise” (ibid, 54). To engage with security professionals, Côté-Boucher et al. also write, means that you may be chal-
lenged for the way in which you lack contact “with the reality of the daily pressures, political stakes, and organizational challenges” as they are experienced by local actors (Côté-Boucher, Infantino and Salter, 2014, 200). During the course of my own research, my viewpoints were not just challenged, but often ignored or downplayed by the professionals with whom I engaged. Access to information was sometimes openly denied (“you do not belong to our target group”), but more often it was concealed in more subtle ways. Interview requests were frequently ignored, or they were sent on to a colleague in the public relations department, who then gave a charming but not very informative interview. Many of my interviewees operated in a context in which they were “discouraged from veering off message” (Kuus, 2013, 55). Accordingly, the challenge was to take our conversations “beyond the iteration of rehearsed talking points” (ibid, 116). The last section of this chapter reflects on these questions of how to conduct research in a context of secrecy and surveillance.

Broadly, the chapter relates to recent conversations about the role of method and methodology in critical security studies and IR (Adler-Nissen and Kropp, 2015; Aradau et al., 2014; Aradau and Huysmans, 2013; Sheperd, 2013; Salter and Mutlu, 2013). Aradau and Huysmans (2013, 597) claim that questions of methodology have long been disregarded by critical scholars in IR to avoid instrumentalizing method “as a ‘guarantee’ for the scientific and orderly/ordered research that the discipline aspires to” (but see e.g. Campbell, 1992; Milliken, 1999; Hansen, 2006). Aradau and Huysmans (2013, 598) consider methods as performative in the sense that they are not simply techniques for collecting and handling data, but “devices” through which “‘truthful’ worlds are enacted.” Methods actively participate in processes of producing and reproducing worlds, or, in the words of Annemarie Mol, they “mediate between an object and its representations” (Mol, 2002, 155; emphasis in original). Understanding method as performative helps shedding light on how method and methodology are themselves worthy of critical reflection (Law, 2004). On the one hand, our methods should be viewed as practices that constitute academic fields, norms, and us as researchers. Methods, in this sense, may embody promises of scientific rigor and validity, or in the case of ethnography, nuance and detail (see Kuus, 2013, 127). On the other hand, methods travel through spaces other than the academic field. They are “not simply tools of analysis but are deployed and developed as part of security practices themselves”
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(Aradau et al., 2014, 5). Mapping and modelling methods, for example, constitute notions of “networked terrorism” (De Goede, 2012), or “vulnerable” systems or infrastructure (see Chapter 4), and these concepts, in turn, make possible the circulation and dispersion of security practices.

The chapter will begin with an analysis of problematizations as an empirical access point and with an outline of the four examples of problematization that I study in Chapters 3 to 6. I will then move on to a discussion of the three methods that were used to conduct this research. The third section will more explicitly deal with limitations and research challenges such as gaining access, secrecy, and surveillance. I will conclude by presenting the structure of the argument and by introducing the chapters that follow.

**Practice and problematizations**

This dissertation advances recent conversations about the role of method and methodology in IR and critical security studies by placing the study of problematizations at the heart of the analysis. In analyzing security problems, my focus is neither realist, nor constructivist. “A problematization,” writes Foucault, “does not mean the representation of a pre-existent object nor the creation through discourse of an object that did not exist.” Rather, “it is the ensemble of discursive and non-discursive practices that make something enter into the play of true and false and constitute it as an object of thought” (Foucault, 1994, 670; quoted in Collier and Lakoff, 2007). Building on a Foucauldian-inspired analysis of problematization, I use this concept in two ways: first, to refer to the iterative constitution of objects of thought, as just described, and, second, to select relevant research sites, which I call “problematizing moments.”

Let us begin with a more elaborate discussions of the first use of the notion of problematization. In this first (broader) meaning, problematization captures a two-stage process involving the study of how and why certain things become a problem and how they are shaped as particular objects for thought. This insistence on how things become a problematized object is a profoundly critical method of analysis in the sense that it opens up for politicizing taken-for-granted “truths” (Bacchi, 2012, 1). Foucault developed his thoughts on problematization and the ways in which they are formed most famously with regard to the seemingly fixed status of sexuality and madness. For Foucault, “sexuality” is not a stable concept that exists
outside of the practices, technologies, and political structures that help constitute it. Likewise, Foucault asks, “how and why were very different things in the world gathered together, characterized, analyzed, and treated as … ‘mental illness’” (Foucault, 1985, 115)? Foucault’s concern in this regard is with “the problematizations through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought” and with identifying and examining the practices underlying these problematizations (Foucault, 1986, 11). This focus also offers insights into the possible solutions that can be proposed. A problematization, writes Foucault, “develops conditions in which possible responses can be given; it defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to” (Foucault, 1984, 389). Any analysis that draws on a study of problematizations will, then, seek to show how different solutions to a certain problem have been constituted and made possible by the way the problem is posed in the first place (Campbell, 1998, x).

Again, to ask these questions is to shed light on the dispersed elements that establish sexuality or madness as seemingly stable objects. These are “the actual practices involving those designated ‘mad,’” that is, the networks of institutions, practices, and techniques, assembled to define and government of madmen (Bacchi, 2012, 3; emphasis in original). In his analysis of how Bosnia became understood as an intractable ethnic problem, David Campbell (1998, 25-26) illustrates how “identity” in this context was made possible by a variety of discursive practices that included “foreign and security policies…, immigration strategies, the protocols of treaty-making, representational politics at the United Nations, and beyond.” “The sites of the state’s performative constitution of identity,” Campbell explains, “are [in fact] many and varied” (ibid; see also Bialasiewicz et al., 2007).

If these sites for the constitution of problematizations, as Campbell claims, are many and varied, where do we locate and examine the practices that help constituting “sex,” “madness,” “identity,” or, in the context of my own analysis, “European homeland security”? Returning to the second meaning of problematization as a method selecting relevant research sites, Foucault’s writings suggest that we empirically study the moments when existing and routinized practices are shifting. In these situations of “crisis,” as Carol Bacchi (2012, 2) explains, “givens’ become questions, or problems,” and this offers an opportunity for inquiry into the what has come to appear as self-evident. A focus on these problematizing moments allows for the identification and explanation of practices at crucial moments when
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they are “unstable, undefined, and under construction” (Schouten, 2014, 25). This is a particularly relevant strategy when concerned with explaining innovations and newly emerging concepts and objects. A moment of crisis, writes Büger (2014, 397), “is to be seen as associated with the introduction of a new practice, a new representation, a new technology, a new object, a critical encounter between practices, or a new participant to a practice” (see also Bueger and Bethke, 2013).

A focus on “problematizing moments” allows for the identification and analysis of existing practices when they are unstable and in flux, but it also directs our attention to the (contested) introduction of new concepts, shifting relations and practices, and technological innovations. Concerned with newly emerging security practices and their entanglements with pre-existing routines, this dissertation is based on a study of four problematizing moments, or “events” – if with the event we refer to what Foucault (1991) described as “eventalization.” They involve the study of: “civil” security (Chapter 3); “critical infrastructure” (Chapter 4); urban transport in Europe (Chapter 5); and airport security after the 2006 liquid bomb plot (Chapter 6). In all four problematizing moments, current practices are viewed as inadequate. All four, then, have been selected on the basis of their ability to illustrate the emergence of: a) problematized objects and new security concepts; b) shifts in security practices and technology; and c) new forms of public/private cooperation.

To sum up, this section proposes a Foucauldian-inspired analysis of problematization for two reasons. The first advantage is that it allows for critical reflection upon the practices constituting and sustaining certain phenomena as a problem and a particular object for thought. This insistence on how things become problematized is a profoundly critical method of analysis in the sense that it destabilizes taken-for-granted and seemingly fixed categories. Secondly, understanding the concept of problematization to refer to a specific method of analysis (thinking problematically), a study of problematizations is a particularly fruitful approach to identify relevant research sites. The thesis is based on four problematizing moments, whereby all four involve a crisis situation in the context of which existing practices are adjusted and newly emerging concepts, practices, and networks are being introduced. While the first meaning of problematization underpins the thesis as a whole, for the purpose of clarity, the concept of problematization will only be used to describe these four moments of problematization.
Crucially, a focus on examples of problematization differs from a case study approach in a number of ways. It is not my objective to use these examples to test theoretical assumptions or to pinpoint causal relationships. Neither is it my aim to compare between or generalize across the problematizations described. Following Carolyn Humphrey (2002, 13), the point, rather, is to generalize within them. Writes Humphrey, “[it’s] not much good describing two different situations and then totting up, ‘There is X here, but not there; there’s Y here, but not there’ and so on.” Instead of determining a relationship between the specific instances in one case and those in other cases this means investigating the broader “discursive field” in which these practices and problematizations can exist (Kuus, 2014, 51; emphasis in original).

Interpreting practices
Now that I have established “what” to study and where to locate practice, this section looks more closely into the question of “how” to interpret practices and problematizations. Three principal means of data collection and data analysis will be identified: document analysis, intensive interviewing, and participant observation. While the latter is often singled out as the preferred method for studying practice, my study is based on a combination of these three methods. The following sections will outline how they complement each other.

Documents
A first strategy for gathering data is document analysis. Official policy documents and semi-official publications such as company brochures serve as important source materials for how security actors “think” problems and solutions (Belcher and Martin, 2013, 406). Broadly, my concern is with how these materials seek to stabilize and fix specific problems of security and with how these representations give rise to particular solutions. According to Walters and Haahr, the study of problematizations pushes discourse analysis into new directions in the sense that it is more explicitly concerned with the technical and material aspects of discourse and the ways in which these materials make social worlds comprehensible, manageable, and, indeed, possible. A focus on problematizations, they write, places emphasis on “the much neglected world of inscription [and] the eminently technical ways in which the world is represented by means of little things
like charts, tables, graphs, numbers, diagrams, and reports” (Walters and Haahr, 2005, 7; see also Walters, 2004). For an analysis of security, this does not mean that the discursive articulations of threat in media coverage and public discourse are no longer relevant (see e.g. Methmann and Rothe, 2012); but it is to place emphasis on the ways in which these threat articulations are incorporated into technical and durable arrangements.

My analysis is, then, only to some extent based on what Neumann (2008, 67) refers to as discursive “monuments” – that is, those primary texts that “show up as crossroads or anchor points” in any field of study. In addition to key texts such as Council Directives, Regulations, and Commission publications I engage with a variety of technical and seemingly obscure documents in the realm of European security. These include staff working documents, expert and position papers, annual reports, market studies, company brochures and websites, research strategies, guidebooks and training manuals, slides, and calculative tools such as tables and graphs. Chapter 6 is also based on an analysis of visual materials (videos), produced by the EU SECUR-ED project and handed out on USB sticks during consortium meetings (see also below). A lot of interesting material was relatively easy accessible and many of the documents under study can be found online. Partly, this is because the companies in this field have an interest in presenting themselves as transparent and competent actors to shareholders, customers, and monitoring bodies. This is presumably also because much of the material in which I am interested is generally understood to be trivial, technical, or bureaucratic.

Still, these concrete documents provide me with a lot of interesting insights, for example with regard to the production and circulation of practices of expertise in security. One of the aims of this analysis is to examine how expert knowledge is produced in and through technical documents (Mitchell, 2002; Best and Walters, 2013), and to understand how specific claims to expertise acquire political and governmental importance (see also Barry, 2013; Mitchell, 2002). This emphasis on the social and material dimensions of expert knowledge production is particularly relevant as EU involvement in security largely occurs through technologically and economically-driven agendas and initiatives. For example, as Chapter 5 explains, much of the work that is produced in the name of EU “critical infrastructure protection” involves technocratic practices such as standards and best practice development, research, and facilitation and negotiation. Chapter
4 further illustrates how in homeland security the European Commission favors a market-driven approach and downplays the sensitivities regarding EU security cooperation by insisting that this market should be understood as *any other market* for which common internal market mechanisms such as standardization and certification apply. Not unsurprisingly, commercial security firms similarly emphasize that this is business-as-usual and that they themselves are “just like any other corporation” (Berndtsson 2011, 305). At the same time, in company brochures and on websites, many of these firms make specific reference to their long-standing expertise in complex security environments. Their claims are often substantiated by “fact and figures” about the company’s history, its global presence, and its portfolio of award-winning innovations.10

To investigate expertise in this way, Kuus (2014, 40) writes, “is not to study what people think or whether they are right,” but “to examine the political and social technologies that make particular arguments coagulate as legitimate expertise.” Expertise, as such, is a practice which “systematically favors some claims and styles of argument” (ibid, 52). As Best and Walters (2013: 348) argue, “the concreteness of this conception of expertise usefully complicates the narrowly discursive or ideational approaches to the subject, which can too easily reify expert knowledge and exaggerate its power.” Still, my own analysis has not been immune from this tendency to reaffirm expertise. In fact, it was often tempting to accept the ideal renderings of cutting-edge technology articulated in company brochures and policy documents. The challenge has been to pinpoint the *discrepancies* between the technoscientific imaginaries and the gritty realities of their manifestation. In developing this argument I build on ethnographic research, conducted during problematizing moments. Studying these moments allowed me to identify practices and technologies when they become contested, overruled, reworked, or are left aside. This strategy not only helped me to denaturalize technological innovations and to render them explicitly political, but it also brought into view *other* types of knowledge, as discussed below.

**Participant observation**

A growing literature in critical security studies and IR is taking an interest in studying everyday security practices as a way of shedding light on problematizations. This development is accompanied by a growing engagement with the ethnographic method, defined by a “focus on everyday lived ex-
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experience, on finding in the little what eludes us in the large” (Kuus, 2013, 117; see also Geertz, 1968, 4; Wedeen, 2010; Gusterson, 2008; Vrasti, 2008). Ethnographic research has been foregrounded as an important way of offering a more nuanced view of political practice, even if some have been skeptical about the viability and utility of ethnographic research in IR (Kuus, 2013), or have questioned the ways in which ethnographic research has been conducted outside of anthropology (Vrasti, 2008). Ethnographic enquiry has also been taken up to reflect on the socially constructed nature of knowledge and expertise (Kuus, 2011; Gusterson, 2008), on gender in security (Cohn, 1987; Enloe, 1989), and on the problems of conducting ethnographic fieldwork in “closed contexts,” such as security or foreign policy settings (Koch, 2013, 392; Neumann, 2008).

The term ethnography has become nearly synonymous with participant observation. However, as Gusterson (2008, 94) points out, “the ethnographic method” includes a lot more. Among other things, it relates to navigating ethical obligations, gaining access to the field, conducting semi-structured interviews, writing down fieldwork notes, and writing up ethnographies. My own ethnography is based on a combination of participant observation and interviewing. Indeed, even if for the sake of structuring the argument I discuss participant observation and interviewing in separate sections, the two cannot be separated. There exists no clear dividing line between interviews and participant observation: being in Brussels, passing through corridors, or, as part of my fieldwork, through security checkpoints on the way to an interview are important ethnographic moments (see also Neumann, 2007). I recall a meeting with a spokesperson of the European Organization for Security (EOS), a relatively new lobby group representing the interests of European civil security equipment providers, in their new office building located in the European quarter in Brussels. Upon my arrival, my respondent asked me if I could wait in his office as his earlier appointments ran late. Later, he apologized, explained that he was holding job interviews, and then showed me around the new office building. To me, the occasion was a nice indication of EOS’ expansion and its growing influence in Brussels.

At the same time, the role of participant observation in my empirical research went well beyond these ethnographic anecdotes. My analysis draws on eleven formal and multi-day stakeholder conferences, seminars, workshops, and panels dealing with emerging challenges and responses in
security across Europe (see annex II). These were key events to study how experts in the field articulate particular security problems and solutions. These were also moments in which I could observe the ways in which different actors (public and private, representing EU institutions or member states) engaged with each other during panels and in more informal settings, such as coffee breaks and receptions. Moreover, these events provided insights into who were present or able to speak in the first place.

In addition to participation in these stakeholder events, the analysis builds on observations during three multiday trade fairs for security technology: the Security Essen trade fair (2012), the Counter Terror Expo in London (2013), and the Milipol exhibition of internal state security in Paris (2013). The growing number of security trade fairs in Europe are not so much a new phenomenon, but their relevance is understudied. As Guittet and Jeandesboz point out, “one of the less investigated aspects of this business of security is the proliferation of international spaces of promotion of security technologies where new high-tech tools available to anticipate and fight uncertainty are presented” (2010, 237; emphasis in original). Moreover, they argue that these are important sites to study how the promotion of technology creates “an increasing expectation of more efficient technologies for the purpose of achieving more security” (ibid; emphasis in original). My strategy was to focus on two questions: the technology that is available at these exhibitions, and the ways in which the availability of the technology creates an expectation of technological and analytical competency.

Observations at these exhibitions proved relevant for a third reason: while I engaged with high-level officials during most of my fieldwork, these sites enabled me to have informal conversations with more mid-level consultants, researchers, engineers, and bureaucrats. I used these moments to ask questions about their daily activities, but also to engage with them in discussions about market and industry development, research and innovation, and developments in security. Some of these conversations offered a messier picture of events. Citing Gusterson (2008, 102), my ability to “hang out” with these people provided insights into the difference between “frontstage” and “backstage” narratives or between what was officially said in public meetings and confessed in private conversations.

The same occurred as part of my fieldwork on the EU-funded Secured Urban transportation - European Demonstration (SECUR-ED) research project, where participant observation played the most substantial
role in my methodological approach (see Chapter 5). Here, fieldwork consisted of participation in two full-day demonstration meetings in Milan and Bucharest and in the project’s midterm workshop and final conference in Geneva and Brussels. Over the course of the project, I spent a great number of lunches, dinners, and coffee breaks talking to manufacturers, policy officials, and researchers in the consortium. Fieldwork also included a bus tour with the SECUR-ED consortium to visit the touristic highlights of Bucharest. As an outsider to the project, I felt uneasy at first, but, soon, most consortium members began to engage with me in a more familiar matter. A number of them began to give me advice about who to talk to, what to read, and which research directions to take. Others shared their concerns about the directions SECUR-ED had taken and revealed, contrary to the official project line, that the equipment that they were testing was not at all state-of-the-art-technology. Again others started gossiping about their peers and explained that much of what was going on at these demonstrations and workshops should be understood in the context of what they considered project politics. To give an example, a question about what the technology could not do, or failed to do, coming from the audience during a meeting in Bucharest was explained to me as an attempt by one manufacturing company to learn more about the state of the technology developed by their competitor.

More fundamentally, attending these meetings and demonstrations enabled me to identify the distances between the performative expectations and promises and the actual workings of these technologies. The shortcomings of the equipment were only occasionally exposed, for example when during a moment in the control room in Milan the track-and-trace camera system started to zoom in on a small bird. Most importantly, in Milan it became clear to me that in spite of the trouble of organizing the demonstrations to gain end-user acceptance and to enroll potential buyers, the transport companies in the consortium had no intention of purchasing the new technology. In chapter 5, I show how, faced with these failures and inconsistencies, the project’s initial objective (enhancing the security of European transport networks by encouraging the sale of security equipment) was rearticulated. The project’s true accomplishment, it was then stated, had been to bring together transport stakeholder across Europe and to have them exchange and improve the ways in which they communicate and cooperate on a daily basis.
Chapter 5 concludes by questioning the value of a €40m innovation project, largely funded with EU-money, if the security equipment that is demonstrated is not of interest to the end-users. But these questions could only be raised on the basis of event-rich data and close attention to those things that ethnography assembles: events, contingency, and relations (Mosse, 2011, 55). Ethnographic research enabled me to complicate the ideal renderings of technology that I found in company brochures and policy documents, as well as the sometimes scripted interactions of expert interviews (see below). It brought into view other types of knowledge. As Barry puts it, rich empirical detail is crucial to attend to:

the internal messiness of any organization; to the ways in which institutions contain elements which are not part of their self-conceptions; to the relations between public presentations and other practices; to the disorder of scientific research in practice; and to the failures of technologies to meet the expectations which are made of them and the ways in which failures are recognised and addressed (2001, 23).

A last point needs to be made here. In writing my analysis up as ethnography, the attempt was to provide a deeply contextualized or “thick description” of the full range of people, activities, and institutions under study, and to generalize from those descriptions (Geertz, 1973). Some chapters probably better succeed at this than others, and some commentators may argue that none of my chapters will qualify as ethnography by anthropological standards (see e.g. Vrasti, 2008). However, my aim has been to give close attention to the messiness of events and concrete practices in European security, a domain that is still very much studied by focusing on text. This was also an attempt to bring ethnographic sensibility into the study of formal and high-level policy structures after Laura Nader’s original call to “study up” (Nader, 1974). Semi-structured interviews further contributed to that purpose.

**Interviewing**

In her analysis of EU bureaucrats, Merje Kuus (2014, 57) builds on “intensive interviewing,” which she distinguishes from expert interviews in the sense that the former requires “in-depth knowledge of and attention
to the contexts and relations studied.” For Susan Wright (2011, 28), intensive interviewing refers to a technique of interviewing through which the researcher “becomes aware of the active concerns, everyday concepts, and political understanding of at least some of the sets of people involved in the issue under study.” Understood in this way, intensive interviewing intersects with ethnographic approaches in the sense that both methods foreground detailed description and contextualization to make sense of how others see the world. My own analysis is based on intensive interviews with 25 security professionals between 2012 and 2015. The phrase “security professional” is used here to refer to a variety of public and private actors involved in European security: equipment manufacturers, industry lobbyists, EU bureaucrats, policy officials from national member states, researchers, journalists, and consultants (see annex I). The interviews were conducted in four rounds, each round dealing with a specific event or problematizing moment. The purpose of these interviews was to ask case-specific questions, but, above all, to reconstruct recurrent security concepts, problems, and broader discursive themes. This means that I was not concerned with asking a consistent set of questions and to ensure comparability between interviews. Instead, each interview built on earlier interviews and, as the number of conversations grew, these suggested new avenues for research, but also recurring themes (see also Gusterson, 2008).

Most of the interviews have been recorded and transcribed. This was important because I was interested in the exact language that my respondents used to express their views. Only occasionally did an interviewee point out that (s)he would be more comfortable expressing her or his thoughts off the record. All public sector respondents, however, stressed that they spoke in a personal capacity and that their experiences did not necessarily reflect the views of the institution for which they worked. All informants spoke on condition of anonymity and on the understanding that their remarks would not be ascribed to them. All interviews are therefore non-attributable and all material is examined in such a way that anonymity is maintained. Moreover, some interviewees have been restructured in terms of gender. This means that a reference to ‘he’ or ‘she’ does not necessarily indicate the informant’s gender (see also Kuus, 2014, 50). This is particularly important in a context in which there are very few women.

In all my interviews, I asked a set of core questions, followed by what Gusterson calls “branching” and “building” questions (2008, 104). I usu-
ally began by asking my respondents questions about their take on broader events and developments in European security. These served as icebreakers, but also helped me to determine what my informants considered relevant, important, or challenging. I then asked more specific, “branching” questions based on each respondent’s tasks, responsibilities, or concerns. These questions were specifically geared toward heterogeneity, controversy, and failure as I was concerned with problematizing claims to expertise and narratives of technological progress. As for “building,” as discussed, each interview built on the interviews earlier conducted. Building strategies enabled me to bring into view an emerging discourse community. I also used building questions to ask my respondents to reflect on my interpretations and preliminary conclusions.

Furthermore, “building” was an important strategy to prevent my respondents from getting bored. As Kuus (2014, 56) points out, “the question of how not to bore these professionals cannot be ignored,” and the same was true in the context of my research. Most of my respondents were highly-educated and intellectually curious, with some of them having PhD degrees. Quite a number of them had a background in engineering, so it was important to explain them why their perspectives were of interest to a political science study. Furthermore, when interviewing EU bureaucrats it was key to be aware of the way in which EU expertise operates through the technical language of what Kuus (2013, 124) calls “eurospeak.” To be taken seriously means being prepared to speak the same language – for example, to use acronyms, or to informally refer to Directives and Regulations. Despite my efforts to prepare the interview I sometimes found that my informants at times began to ‘lecture’ me. These were certainly not always unproductive interviews, but I could not help thinking that this was gender-related. A large majority of my respondents were male and all the security events that I visited were male-dominated. The trade exhibitions, in particular, struck me as very masculine. These sites conveyed an image of the exhibited new equipment as high-tech, surgical, and clean, but also as playable. At the Milipol internal security exhibition in Paris, visitors could test guns and robots and engage in a shooting competition at a provisional shooting range. At all trade shows, the latest technologies were demonstrated as part of security shows or so-called feature zones. The few women who were present worked as hostesses (often wearing short skirts and high heels), or they were hired as
“excuse women,” as someone confessed in an informal conversation at the London Counter Terror Expo.

A last point should be raised here with respect to negotiating access. My strategy was to approach EU officials first as it was my expectation that they would be fairly open toward the goals of my project, and from there to proceed through snowballing. I generally ended my interviews with asking “who to speak next,” and my experience was that people were happy to speak with me if I was referred to them by their colleagues. Still, gaining access remained difficult at times and required creative strategies. Questions of secrecy also affected my analysis in more fundamental ways. The next section further elaborates these questions.

Reflections on secrecy and access

How can we conduct research in the face of secrecy, surveillance, and “cultures of fear” (Mitchell, 2002)? Which methods can we engage to access what is behind the presumable “closed doors” of security apparatuses (Belcher and Martin, 2013; Walters, 2014)? Confronted with a security politics that is itself “knowledge-obsessed” (Dillon, 2004), promoting ever more knowledge to prepare ourselves for the unknown crisis, what is the position of the researcher? What does it mean, in short, to study security practices?

First of all, secrecy is productive, and, as such, it is something to be explained. Among other things, secrecy monitors and disciplines (Foucault, 1979), it constructs particular social orders (Goffman, 1961), and it classifies and categorizes documents and groups of people (Gusterson, 1996). More generally, as Gusterson argues, “secrecy is a means by which power constructs itself as power, and the knowledge of secrets is a perquisite of power” (1996, 87; emphasis added). Secrets are exciting, even if they often turn out to be surprisingly mundane, trivial, and unexciting. Secrecy also establishes particular forms of expertise and it downplays criticism. It allows those who are criticized to claim that others “just don’t understand,” precisely because they do not have the same type of information (Gusterson, 1996, 8). Correspondingly, to share secrets, or to make someone else part of your secret is a very powerful move.

Several arguments can be made about the effects of secrecy in and on my research. Firstly, and most obviously, secrecy determines insider and outsider status. Secrecy denies access to information to many and only
allows some to become a member of the privileged group. Often, my own status was that of outsider. In the context of the SECUR-ED project, for example, I was only allowed to access the online and very brief public summaries of the project deliverables and my attendance during the project demonstrations and scenarios needed to be approved by the project coordinator every single time I indicated interest. Sometimes, the distinction between in and outside was less clear-cut: I was quite literally accepted ‘in’ every time I was invited for an interview with an official in Brussels, and the routine surveillance and identity checks that I had to pass through to enter the office buildings visibly marked the boundary between inside and outside. Of course, once I entered the office and began the interview, secrecy (as well as expertise, gender, etc.) drew new boundaries. These were less visible, but I was reminded of them by my name tag indicating that I was a “visitor.”

Second, information can be a secret, while simultaneously being in the “public domain” (Masco, 2010, 439). In his work on the secret and counterterrorist state, Joseph Masco examines the growing use of a category of government information known as “sensitive but unclassified.” Masco argues that what is interesting about this category of classification is that, while information is not officially classified, “it is removed from public circulation and treated as if it were” (ibid, 447; emphasis in original; see also Curtin, 2014). This more ambiguous category of sensitive but unclassified information leaves it up to each agency to draw the lines between public access and classified information, and under this condition, agencies may be encouraged to over-classify. Any piece of information may be regarded as a (national) security threat, “as it is the creative linkage across bits of knowledge that is imagined to be dangerous” (Masco, 2010, 447; see also Pozen, 2005). In this context, information is restricted on a precautionary basis. The SECUR-ED project is particularly interesting in this respect. Much of the material produced by the consortium was not available to people from outside. This I found problematic for a research project largely that is largely funded by public EU money and dedicated to the improvement of mass transportation security through demonstrations, integration, and dissemination of best practices. When I discussed this with the consortium members, they argued that information could not be disclosed because of precautionary security reasons. For example, if the results from the risk and vulnerability assessments conducted by the consortium would be published, these bits of information could possibly help terrorists in preparing for an
attack. Similarly, reports containing photographs and maps of infrastructures and demonstration sites were seen as a security problem because of concerns for a possible terrorist attack.

Third, secrets in my research were not always a barrier to state security policies. Secrets were maintained or produced by a range of state and non-state actors, and for different reasons. Belcher and Martin (2013) point out how in their research on, respectively, counterinsurgency training of military personnel and immigration enforcement, secrecy or a lack of access was often the result of bureaucratic procedures, overwork, incompetence, or doubts about their motives. For them, these experiences complicated the description of defense and immigration authorities in “sinister and conspirational terms” (Belcher and Martin, 2013, 409). To portray state authority in such a way “is to afford the state a level of intentionality and coherence that conceals what is very often a non-event, a deferred decision, a question ignored in the hopes of its disappearance” (ibid). By treating states and state agencies as monolithic entities, we, then, run the risk of “attributing state agencies with far more coherency than is born out in practice” (ibid).

To return to the question of how to conduct research in contexts of secrecy, let me first note that it was difficult to say if the restriction of access was the result of practices of secrecy or bureaucracy. Others have pointed out that almost all efforts to study up in policy circles are hindered by a lack of access. For example, Kuus claims that “[many] bureaucracies have tightened access…[yet] even against that background foreign policy institutions stand out by their tight security and plush public relations infrastructure” (2014, 55; see also Mosse, 2011; Neumann, 2007). For Kuus, the difficulties related to studying foreign policy institutions “are not problems that can be resolved” but rather research dilemmas “that must be negotiated on a daily basis” (ibid). Seen in this light, secrecy is one specific dilemma that must be negotiated when conducting research.

My own strategy to gain access and circumvent secrecy was to approach EU mid-level officials (mainly Commission officials) first, and from there to proceed through snowballing. These officials acted as so-called gatekeepers, introducing me to colleagues and inviting me to relevant stakeholder events. At the same time, it turned out to be difficult to speak with these experts more than once and my interviews with them were generally short (in between 45 and 75 minutes). The most informative and longer in-
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terviews (sometimes lasting up to 150 minutes) were with other observers, such as journalists, lobbyists, and people from technical research institutes. One interview with a lobbyist working for the European rail industry led to longer-term contact and the opportunity to participate in the SECUR-ED demonstrations; it was him who negotiated my presence with the project coordinators. Being at these demonstration sites provided new opportunities for establishing research contacts.

With regard to the trade shows, all three required security clearance, and at all three exhibitions, visitors were subjected to security regulations, such as CCTV surveillance and security checks. All visitors were required to carry a photographic identity document and to visibly wear their personal visitors badge. Photography was not allowed at these exhibitions, with the exception of Milipol (for images, see Chapter 3). Apart from the requirement to pre-register, admission to all three trade shows was relatively easy. However, in the case of the Counter Terror Expo in particular, entrance fees were high, around 500 for a two-day entrance ticket. The high costs involved in doing this type of fieldwork forced me to constantly think about my current data and about what a new fieldtrip would add to my narrative. This brings me to a last set of questions: when is it time to leave the field and start writing up? And when can we confidently stop reading texts? Many have argued that the researcher often does not have a choice due to limitations in research funding and time, and this was also true in my case. In addition, a good indication to leave the field was when my interviewees told me I had spoken to most of their colleagues, or when I felt that fieldwork did no longer surprise.

The remaining question is, then: how can I be sure about the validity of my findings and analysis? Validity, here, refers to the correctness or credibility of the interpretation, but it does not imply the existence of any objective truth (Maxwell, 2012, 106). To summarize, three different strategies have been adopted. First, a focus on collecting “rich” data through intensive interviewing and immersion in the field (Becker, 1970, 51-62). Secondly, “respondent validation,” as part of which I asked my respondents and peers to reflect on my interpretations and conclusions (Bryman, 1988). The third strategy outlined by this chapter was that of “triangulation,” which refers to the collection of information from a diverse set of sources on a diverse range of settings and events, making use of different but complementary research strategies.
In what follows, I will study four examples of problematizing moments, starting with an analysis of the emerging market for “civil” security (Chapter 3), and the emergence of “critical infrastructure” (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 and 6 zoom in on specific examples of problematizing vulnerable systems. Drawing on an in-depth analysis of the EU Secured Urban Transportation – European Demonstration (SECUR-ED) project, Chapter 5 first examines the ways in which the problem of urban transport security has been addressed in Europe. Chapter 6 provides a detailed study of the alleged 2006 liquid bomb plot, investigating two sets of questions: first, the way in which the liquid bomb plot was mediated as an event beyond risk, and, second, the emergence of new types of technologies, knowledge-forms, and modes of governance that are developed to protect airports after the liquid bomb plot.
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Endnotes

9. Eventalization means analyzing an event according to the multiple processes that constitute it. Eventalization has many parallels with problematization in the sense that it disregards causal propositions and makes visible “a singularity at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant (Foucault, 1991, 76, emphasis in original).


11. As Hugh Gusterson notes in his ethnography of the Livermore weapons laboratory, in highly securitized contexts the most trivial information is often kept secret. Gusterson (1998, 69) writes that, for many years, the US government “classified as secret the number of toilet rolls bought by the Oak Ridge nuclear weapons facility – so that Soviet agents could not use this information to estimate the number of employees there.”