

**SECURITY IN TRANSITION:**  
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY  
INVESTIGATION INTO THE  
SECURITY GAP



**Working Paper**

**Security in Transition: Novel  
Ethical and Methodological  
Considerations**

**SiT/DP/02/13**



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## Introduction

The starting point for the Security in Transition research programme is the assumption that the world is in the midst of a profound change in the way that security is conceptualised and practised. Up until 1989, security was largely viewed either as ‘internal security’ or as ‘national’ or ‘bloc’ security and the main instruments of security were considered to be the police, the intelligence services and the military. This traditional view of security fits uneasily with the far-reaching changes in social and political organisation that characterise the world at the beginning of the twenty first century. What we call the ‘security gap’ refers to the gap between our national and international security capabilities, largely based on conventional military forces, and the reality of the everyday experience of insecurity in different parts of the world.

The main aim of this research programme is to conceptualise and describe empirically the security gap and to track the way public and private security capabilities are changing and whether they help to close the gap or open it further. The programme has five components: narratives; indicators; rules; tools; and geographies.

Because the world is changing so rapidly, the team has been interested, from the outset, in developing research methods that capture the ‘new’ nature of what we are analysing and observing. Thus the methodology of this programme is inter-disciplinary not in the sense that it brings together different scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds, although it does, but rather in the sense that the methodology is tailored to the overall objectives and does not neatly fit any particular discipline, or rather is not constrained by disciplinary traditions. In studying the various components, members of the team are making use of different and appropriate methods that are at the same time discussed and refined through a reflexive process involving the whole team. Thus the narratives component, for example, now renamed ‘cultures’, uses a combination of policy dialogues, local consultations and linguistic analysis. The indicators team have initiated a critique of existing data sets and started work on a pilot events database, tracking insecurity in Syria. A working paper has been produced on whether existing data bases confirm the intuitions of ‘new war’ theory, and a further working paper is under preparation on the ethical and scientific status of data gathered through the Internet and mobile technologies, especially crowdsourcing. In addition the team is developing its own methodology for case studies, which relate to several components, and combines a ‘bottom-up’ focus on local communities in insecure zones with a more ‘top-down’ concern with different security actors, institutions, and instruments. This draws on a range of methodological approaches for collecting data, such as ethnographic and participatory approaches, surveys, and elite interviews. Likewise it draws on a range of approaches for analysing them, including various forms of content analysis, network analyses, and a range of standard formal statistical models.

The subject matter of the Security in Transition programme naturally highlights considerations of research ethics. In response to the ethics review from our original programme application to the ERC, we were happy to take up the suggestion of developing a whole work package to address the theme of ethics in the context of our research. To date, our thinking and discussions have involved

elements of the old and the new. For example, some of our work invokes longstanding themes and well-articulated concerns – such as the possibility of putting informants at risk of reprisal after conducting interviews in the field. In other areas of our work, we are confronting empirical research scenarios that are newer and less well understood – for example, using mobile telecommunications technologies to collect data remotely through crowdsourcing. It seems clear to us that careful and helpful thinking about ethical dilemmas should combine consideration of fundamental principles – such as privacy, security, risk, power – with thorough knowledge of the specifics of empirical contexts – including for example cultural norms, institutional characteristics, past, present and likely future political situations. On these grounds, we consider methodologies and ethics to be intrinsically inseparable elements of social science research. So our research ethics work package is one of methodology as well as ethics.

To launch the programme, a series of workshops were held jointly with the Philosophy Department at LSE to explore the novel ethical and methodological approaches relevant for the programme. The seminars, held over the Michaelmas term (October-December) 2011, were led by Professor Nancy Cartwright, our independent ethics advisor, and Professor Mary Kaldor, who directs the programme. The seminar programme was as follows:

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Seminar leaders</b>	<b>Date</b>
<p><b>Human security methodology:</b></p> <p>The potential of the ‘dialogic’ method for investigating insecurity from a human security perspective, involving in-depth conversations at local levels undertaken by local people</p>	Denisa Kostovicova	12 October
<p><b>A general theory of evidence:</b></p> <p>The significance of measurement for social science</p>	Nancy Cartwright	26 October
<p><b>Quantitative indicators of insecurity:</b></p> <p>The inadequacies of existing data sets relating to physical insecurity and the potential of an events-based approach</p>	Anouk Rigterink Mary Kaldor	15 November
<p><b>Crowdsourcing, web technology:</b></p> <p>The ethical and methodological considerations to data gathering using the Internet, especially crowdsourced data sources</p>	Sally Stares Gus Hosein Sean Deel	16 November

<b>Ethics of human security research:</b>	HakanSeckinelgin	7 December
Ethical considerations relating to fieldwork in insecure areas	Tim Allen	

This working paper summarises what we learned from the seminar series and includes in addition a summary of the thinking that relates to the narratives component of the programme, now renamed ‘cultures’.

Notwithstanding our treatment of methods and ethics as a single topic, it is possible tentatively to highlight the issues arising from these seminars that relate most acutely to ethical concerns. These fall broadly under the headings of fieldwork and crowdsourced data collection.

For fieldwork, the concerns are mostly well known. In brief, fieldwork in areas affected by conflict runs the risk of harming informants in various ways: by asking them to recount traumatic experiences, causing emotional stress; by identifying them to others as witnesses, potentially jeopardising their safety in future; by exploiting power differentials between researcher and researched, using them as a data source and raising expectations of help. From the other side, fieldwork can be a source of ethical risk for researchers: field researchers can find themselves and their teams in physical danger; they too need to negotiate a power relationship when collaborating with funding organisations and/or local gatekeepers or co-investigators, in order to protect the independence, validity and reliability of their research.

For crowdsourcing, concerns are not so well understood. On one hand, remote data collection may reduce risks to individual informants by removing the need for the physical presence of a researcher in a turbulent context. But data collected by mobile and internet technologies leaves a virtual paper-trail, and we have well publicised examples of breaches of privacy and data security through explicit hacking and accidental disclosure, as well as examples of subpoenas of digital data. In cultural context the risks to one’s security and privacy seem not to be well understood by citizens. Moreover, future risks are not well understood even by technology experts. In addition to these immediate concerns, crowdsourced data present a challenge for ensuring validity and reliability of information provided. Whilst this is on the face of things a methodological concern, ensuring the accuracy and precision of evidence – particularly for security studies – must also be an ethical concern.

The following pages contain summaries written by a collection of authors of the main contents of our methodology and ethics research seminars. We offer a short set of concluding remarks at the end of this document.

# Human security methodology

*Denisa Kostovicova*

## Introduction

An LSE team conducted a research project on human security in Kosovo in 2010. The design and application of the innovative human security research method generated original insights into understanding human security from below. The project questions the utility of human security indicators and surveys along with their ability to capture multifaceted manifestations of human insecurity particularly in post-conflict contexts, and offers an alternative perspective that the LSE team will present.

In this paper we present the project that we as the LSE team did in Kosovo on behalf of the UNDP Kosovo, and with logistical support of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, a Prishtina-based NGO, whose implementation lasted from February to June 2010, while major conceptual work and research design started in the summer of 2009. The outcome is a report that we have written on Human Security in Kosovo, and an academic paper, which makes a two-fold contribution to operationalising human security in post-conflict context:

- First, it pioneers, elaborates and applies a dialogic process, as a human security methodology.
- Secondly, and based on this new methodology, it introduces the concept of a multidirectional security marker.

I will go into these in detail, but would first like to set out where we are coming from.

## The human security argument

### *The conceptual critique*

When I was originally approached by the UNDP to do a project that would report on Human Security in Kosovo, we assembled the team here, and one of the key challenges we had was how to operationalise multifaceted manifestations of insecurity centred on the individual – which distinguishes a human security approach to other approaches to security. This challenge directly addresses a prominent line of criticism in the theoretical literature on human security that attacks the concept for being all-encompassing, vague and hence unworkable.

### *The methodology gap*

The stalemate of unresolved battles about meaning could be resolved by methodological advances in human security. While critical thinking about security has sought to change what we understand as

security and produce new analytical perspectives, it has relied largely on methods of knowledge production and application, which are rooted in established conventions about the nature of security, its objects and goals. Where human security has attempted to challenge convention, it has done so by reframing the conceptual pillars of security: rethinking the nature of threats and causes of vulnerability, redefining the referent objects of security, and propelling everyday life into a process of securitization. It has also set out a normative agenda of emancipation, in which not only basic needs but also dignity, ownership and control are part of the dense web of secure life. In all this, human security has made a novelty of privileging 'who?' and 'what?' questions, but has paid less attention to the methodological implications and imperatives, of shifting security away from its classical roots in the nation-state, towards the local, individual and personal.

The lack of emphasis on questions of 'how' in human security has been seen as largely unproblematic. Epistemology has taken a back seat to grander debates about concept and ontology. What passes for a human security methodology amounts to little more than a difference in operational practice, rather than probing more fundamental questions about the nature of knowledge and knowledge production within the new discourses of security. To sum up the problem: studying human security in the social sciences and doing human security in the field both risk falling into the very trap the idea's proponents condemn in classic approaches.

The human security paradigm has led researchers in two methodological directions: firstly, quantitative methods which have concentrated on measuring novel forms of insecurity and contrasting them with conventional data (Spagat et al., 2009; Lacina&Gleditsch, 2005; Collier &Hoeffler, 2001), and identifying a range of indicators and proxies in an attempt to capture statistically these novel forms, seen in indices such as the Generalised Poverty Index, the Human Development Index and the Human Security Project's Index of Human Insecurity. The second direction is towards qualitative methods involving interviews and perception studies, which attempt to filter aggregated data through the prism of individualised experiences.

Critical security studies have thrown up a rich vein of insights that suggest more productive avenues for human security research to pursue. In particular, by taking security as socially situated and discursively defined these approaches begin to break down the universalism embedded in global security and start to rethink it as a site of 'shifting political imaginaries and practices' in which 'complex processes of accommodation, rejection and reformulation' and the salience of uncertainty form part of the problematic to be studied (Bubandt, 2005: 276-277; Stern and Öjendal, 2011: 108). Similarly, Stuvøy (2010) integrates subjective interpretation in the research methodology in order to validate subjects' views and perceptions in the production of security. Here researchers are concerned about creating bottom-up, actor-orientated and vernacular forms, which can account for not only the messiness of individual perspectives but also the fact that the (in)secure individual is part of a fluid context of power relations in which personal security is part of a dynamic of governance and regulation and biopolitics (Hudson, 2005; Grayson, 2008).

By focusing on threats (which harm) as the determinants of security, considerations about whether individuals and groups are: passive targets with almost no scope for individual action/reaction, subjects but with limited agency, mitigated by both visible and hidden power structures, or predominantly active agents in the production of security, or some combination of all three, tend to be downplayed. Yet, such questions open up more novel methodological possibilities, in which concepts of emancipation and empowerment are more explicit.

This is where we come in with our innovative research method that we tried out in our research on human security in Kosovo.

### **Dialogic process as a human security method**

Our starting point in theorising human security is the Human Security Study Group (HSSG) approach, developed under the leadership of Professor Mary Kaldor, on request of the then EU's Foreign Policy Chief, Javier Solana. The Group elaborated six principles, which provide a framework for analysing and implementing human security and which reflect the complex interaction of different ways in which individuals and groups may be put at risk. The principles are:

- The primacy of human rights
- Legitimate political authority
- A bottom-up perspective
- Effective multilateralism
- A regional focus
- Clear and transparent strategic direction

We used this approach to human security because it retains the focus on the down-side risks, i.e. those that maintain the link to the 'freedom from fear' dimension, but without dismissing the 'freedom of want' perspective. This is opposed to a broad conceptualisation of human security, indeed some adopted in the UNDP reports, as the one of Afghanistan, where it is hard to draw a line between development and security.

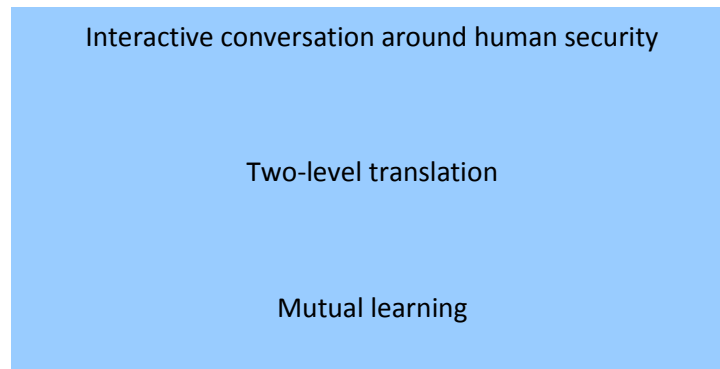
The Centre and the human security research team here have over the years worked with these principles in an attempt to capture insecurity in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts. Without wishing to reduce the breadth of this effort both conceptual and regional (including the Caucasus, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq and Balkans, and post-disaster work in Thailand and the ongoing work in Haiti), the major contribution the Centre has made is in elaborating and demonstrating the validity of the bottom-up perspective.

The aim in this project was to go a step further in elaboration of the bottom-up approach. We designed a human security method as a dialogic process.



A key consideration was how to apply and investigate human security, through operationalising a bottom-up approach, which would elaborate a role for those being questioned, beyond acting as passive sources of empirical data. In other words, we wanted to incorporate into our research a normative and emancipatory aspect, that distinguishes the human security approach.

**Box 1: Human security method as a dialogic process**



Having weighed the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative (survey-based methods), we opted for a dialogic process where research is a “dialogue between the researcher and the researched, thus honestly reflecting the difficulties of interpreting another person’s world.” (This directly echoes a dilemma of how to gain authoritative knowledge). The dialogic process was focused on the construction of a conversation around human security, as way of framing the idea of security, and mapping the individual’s insecurity within this new framework, and identifying possibilities for addressing the security concerns identified.

Hence, the data we generated consists of 100 conversations, rather than interviews, in ten different locations in Kosovo, with representatives of all ethnic groups.

However, another innovative element we introduced in this process was the actual implementation through the involvement of local researchers, which we referred to in the report as ‘two-level translation.’ We trained twenty Albanian and Serb students (divide into ten teams) about human security, and the interactive process, which itself was a dialogue, led to the adaptation of the prepared questionnaire. Ultimately, the participants felt they co-owned the process of elaborating research design and methodology.

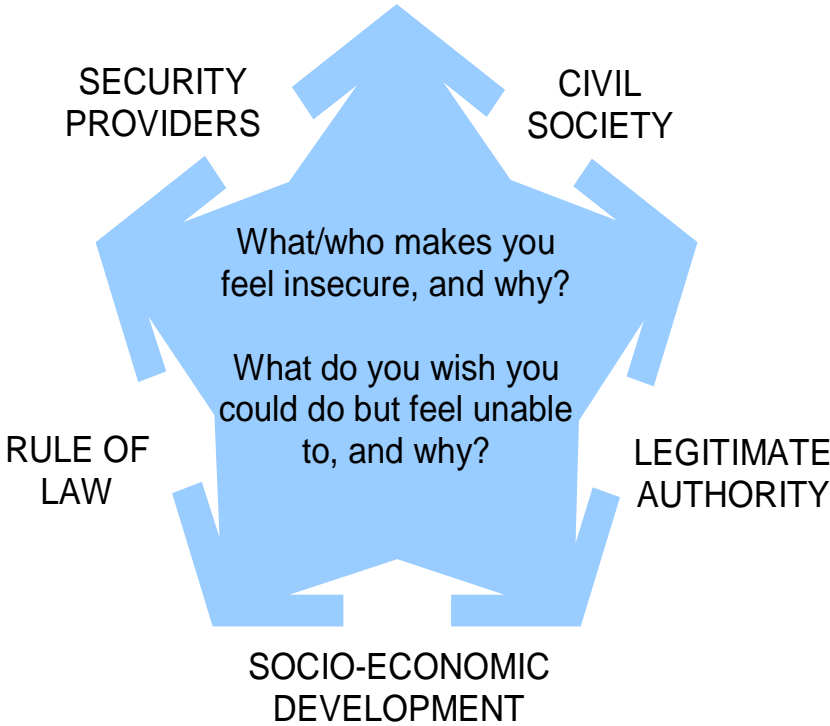
The key to it was the *questionnaire* used by the reporting teams drawing on the human security principles elaborated by the HSSG, and the notion of latent as well as blatant security risk. By asking the headline question, ‘What/who makes you feel insecure?’, the reporting teams sought to explore multiple sources of insecurity experienced at individual and community levels. This headline question was broken into sub-categories which related to different aspects of everyday life such as security providers, which dealt with physical protection; socio-economic development, which dealt

with income, welfare and the provision of public goods; legitimate authority, which focused on representation and decision making; civil society which looked at associative aspects of people's lives; and rule of law issues about governance. Thus, the study not only asked different types of questions to many standard security surveys, but also asked the core question from multiple perspectives, so that when viewed as a whole the questionnaire would identify issues that cut across different categories of insecurity and reveal how they were interrelated. The questions were conceptualized primarily as prompts, in that it was envisaged that they would kick-start a dialogue on a given issue area.

The second headline question which the teams asked, following 'What/who makes you feel insecure?', was related to security aspirations: 'What do you wish you could do but feel unable to do and why?'. The aspirational question was aimed to capture the transformationalist and emancipatory potential of the human security method applied. It re-engages the aspect of agency in providing respondents with dialogic possibility of doing something to mitigate their insecurity.

The question strategy is depicted in the following graph, which was used in the training of the reporting teams to convey the importance of linking headline questions with sub-categories, and each sub-category to another.

**Figure 1: Human security method question strategy**



These conversations provided rich empirical data that we used to map human insecurity including security providers, socio-economic development, legitimate political authority, civil society and rule of law/governance. These are fascinating, and we will be happy to refer to these in the discussion.

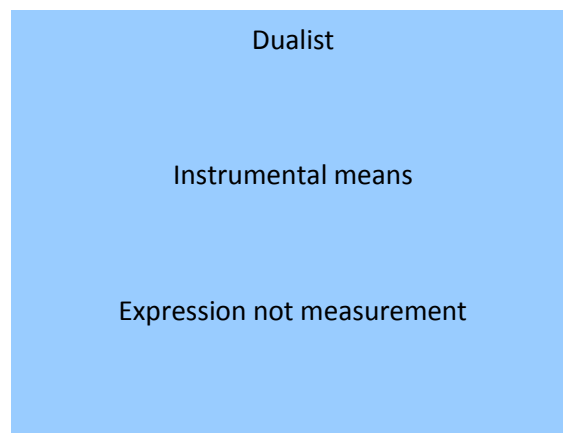
I think it would be interesting to present how the findings, derived from this methodology, contribute to understanding human security in a post-conflict context. The key finding in this study is the identification of what we call *multidirectional markers* of human security.

### **Multidirectional markers of human security in Kosovo**

The human security method highlighted ambiguities that have a direct consequence on how we interpret the state of human security, and, related to this, on the role of agency in furthering human security in Kosovo. Human security approaches are premised on agency being a way out of insecurity. However, this study shows that an effect of agency is also to entrench and perpetuate insecurity. Therefore, a key challenge for human security policies is to recognize these ambiguities in the first instance and then subsequently account for them.

We purposely distinguish human security *markers* from human security *indicators*. Unlike indicators that are top-down mechanisms for identifying and analysing human insecurity and addressing it, we denote markers as representing insecurity/security from the bottom-up. They represent the difference between the ‘bird’s eye’ and the ‘worm’s eye’ view of security. However, because they are both authentic yet also subjective they also reveal the inconsistencies and paradoxes, which characterize people’s attempts to lead normal secure lives in the middle of uncertainty.

#### **Box 2: Multidirectional human security markers**



This human security exercise has identified three ambiguous markers of human (in)security in Kosovo: informality, self-reliance, and social cohesion.

#### ***Informality***

Pervasive informality in Kosovo both in the sense of informal economic activity defined by tax evasion as well as by the subversion and evasion of rules has a negative impact on human security. Informality drains the state coffers of revenue that could be put to use to enhance the overall well-

being of Kosovo's citizens and it undermines the rule of law. Its ultimate impact is disempowering as it confronts the individual with a malfunctioning system, which operates on the basis of personal links rather than on impartial rule. By contrast, from an individual perspective informality looks completely different. Whether resorted to in order to ensure survival, access to easy tax-free income, or as a source of enrichment, it demonstrates people's ability to change their immediate circumstances for the better. Similarly, rule evasion, though normatively undesirable, is an effective way of 'getting the job done.' In either case, informality has an equally empowering potential for an individual in testifying to their their ability to change their immediate circumstances.

### ***Self-reliance***

The research in Kosovo revealed a remarkable degree of self-reliance among Kosovo's citizens. Whether they consider themselves as primary providers of physical and economic security or guardians of their interests, self-reliance has an ambiguous implication for their sense of human security. In so far as it represents citizens' loss of faith in the state institutions, both at national and municipal levels, and their ability to generate an effective substitute for state public goods provision, self-reliance is empowering, testifying to the role of individual agency. However, the reliance on one's self, family and circle of friends, also results in a withdrawal from the public sphere in that the state's failure to deliver remains unchallenged. Such passivity is ultimately disempowering. It puts the onus on society to take over the state's responsibility for equitable, effective and impartial provision of public goods and services, while simultaneously relieving the state of part of its obligations towards citizens.

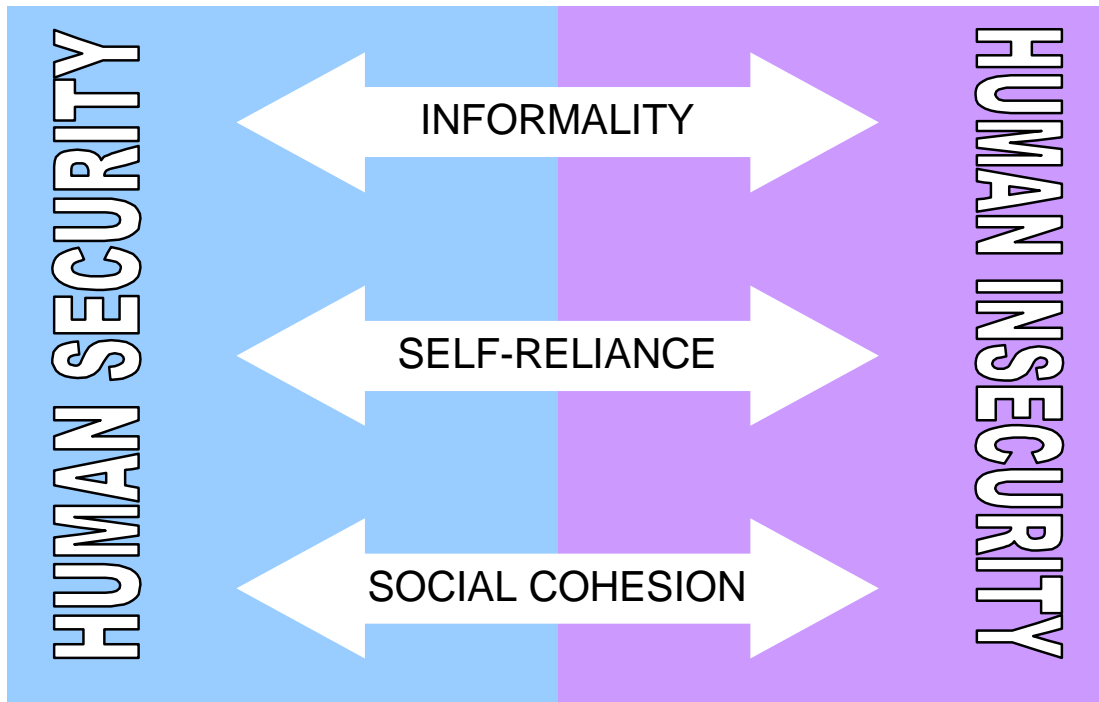
### ***Social cohesion***

Social cohesion understood in terms of the density of social networks underpinned by social capital is one of the targets and goals of human security-framed interventions in post-conflict settings. Related to the two ambiguous human security markers described above, social cohesion in Kosovo's society provides an infrastructure for informality and self-reliance. It is a security cushion, which allows the citizen to cope with a range of insecurities encountered in his/her daily life. Simultaneously however, it acts as a barrier to individual agency and people's attempts to alter their circumstances by constraining and limiting systemic change. During the research, a number of respondents spoke of their fear of punishment for making complaints against state institutions, or reporting criminal behaviour in their midst. For female respondents, a social reprimand was described as a barrier to the pursuit of equal opportunities.

Individual agency, which lies at the core of the emancipatory aspect of human security, yields an unexpected result: it entrenches and perpetuates insecurity, at the same time as it empowers people and restores their dignity. The key challenge for policy makers is to recognize this form of resourcefulness of Kosovo's citizens and deploy it to produce human security as a public good.

The three multidirectional markers of human security in Kosovo are represented by Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Multidirectional markers of human security in Kosovo**



### **Evaluation of the research method**

As with any other social science method, the human security method has its strengths and limitations. These are not listed in a hierarchical order, and are represented in Table 1.

#### ***Strengths***

One evident strength of the human security method and its reliance on local resources is the *ownership* of the production of the knowledge of human security as an embodiment of a bottom-up process, resulting in *trust* and *information sharing*. The remark that people feared criticising state institutions, and considered this to be a source of insecurity in itself, underlines the critical importance of trust for an honest exchange of views and the conveying of information. Related to the issue of trust, the *inductive technique* of eliciting information allows the discovery of ‘silences,’ and other unanticipated dimensions of human security. This is reinforced by the twin strengths of *issue elaboration*, and being able to go beyond the mere recording of security concerns, and, subsequently

*explanation.* For example, this exercise confirms the findings in the ‘Kosovo Mosaic: Public Services and Local Authorities in Focus,’ in recording mistrust in the political authority in Kosovo, and attitudes to other forms of authority including civil society, NGOs, and international community.\* However, the dialogic method also allowed the establishment of an explanation, which revealed a limited and politicized understanding of civil society in its public role. Lastly, the method is particularly conducive to *establishing connections*, which is critical to empirically capturing the interrelatedness between security concerns inherent in human security and which are particularly hard to tackle. Such correlation can be entirely counterintuitive. For example, one respondent remarked that he was not sure whom to bribe. His frustration consisted of certainty that he will bribe, but uncertainty about how he can bribe in the most effective way. Thus it sheds light on the interconnectedness between rule of law/governance – bribery takes place – and legitimate political authority – lack of clarity about who is in charge, as well as the ambiguous marker of informality which we describe below.

### ***Limitations***

The human security method, particularly as applied in this exercise, demonstrated the following limitations. While it leads to elaboration, expansion and explanation of security concerns, it does not provide information about their *prevalence* or *generalizability*. Hence, the dialogic process makes a key contribution to deepening the understanding of multiple security concerns in a local context, but it needs to be complemented with other research strategies in order to establish population-wide patterns. This is accompanied by an inability to make a precise judgement about the *ranking* of the expressed security concerns. This is partly because the human security method prioritises an understanding of how different human security concerns are linked and build on each other. More research is required to understand how the multidimensional nature of human insecurity can be reconciled with the ranking of different forms of insecurity without compromising the comprehensiveness of the human security paradigm. Furthermore, the human security method as applied in this study makes no claim about *representativeness* and *selection*, given the relatively small number of respondents. While the value of the inductive method applied in this study has been outlined above, an evident limitation is the low level of *iteration*. The human security method applied in this study relied on a ‘two-level translation.’ This strategy was aimed at reducing the distance between different agents in the knowledge construction process in order to capture the bottom-up perspective on human security. However, it also raises the question of the number of levels necessary to achieve this goal; the idea that multiple levels could be established in order to cascade knowledge and understanding outwards is a possible avenue of future development of this research methodology. The repetition of the exercise in regular intervals, which would provide a *longitudinal perspective* on security concerns, would improve the method, akin to regular and periodic publication

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\* UNDP and USAID, ‘Kosovo Mosaic: Public Services and Local Authorities in Focus, Prishtinë/Priština, 2009, pp. 46-48.

of the UNDP Early Warning Reports. Lastly, *filtering*, in terms of data interpretation, is another limitation of the human security method as applied in this exercise, and in this respect the findings would benefit from verification with the interviewees themselves. In other words, just as a co-constitutive dimension was critical to gaining insights into human insecurity, the same method could be applied to the writing up process.

**Table 2: Evaluation of the human security method as a dialogic process**

STRENGTHS	LIMITATIONS
Ownership→ trust→ information sharing	Data generalizability
Issue elaboration and expansion	Ranking
Inductive technique→elicits concerns	Selection→representativeness
Intangibles→emotions and feelings	Iteration
Captures connections	Longitudinal
Allows explanation	Filtering

In summary, the human security method as a dialogic process makes a notable contribution to deepening the comprehension and articulation of human security. By disclosing ‘hidden’ aspects and correlations, and by providing the space for silence and participation by marginal voices, it provides novel insights and avenues to probe in investigating human security. These, however, could benefit from further verification through complementary methods such as survey-based research in order to establish their representativeness and generalisability.

## Conclusion

### *Application of the human security methodology as a dialogic process*

The exercise succeeded in **changing the awareness and understanding of security** both by the researchers and the researched as a result of the dialogue. Conversations constructed around human

security allowed them to re-appraise their own sense of security through exposure to a new concept. Teams reported back that there was an altered understanding of insecurity, a phenomenon that has been termed “knowing anew”.<sup>†</sup>

The teams for Prishtinë/Priština and South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica were struck by people’s curiosity and desire to know more in order to better understand their circumstances and emphasised in their report that people were interested in talking.

Lastly, **the transformationalist potential** that defines the human security concept can be seen through the demand for change expressed by individuals when describing their circumstances. The respondents frequently queried how the research process would change their circumstances, for example in Gračanica/Gračanica. Similarly, a respondent from Prizren/Prizren was unequivocal about the reasons for engaging in a discussion by saying, “One thing that I would really want is that my answers contribute to changing something”.

### ***Type of interaction with local sources of knowledge***

People are accustomed to answering questions in polls and surveys, but not to contributing directly to a discussion of a concept. However, our research in Kosovo shows that of equal importance is that people believe in the importance and relevance of their opinions. Our South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica team reported their respondents as saying, “In Kosovo, surveys are common, but interviews are rare.”

To conclude: The application of the human security method as a dialogic process yielded findings that are of an entirely different order and beyond disaggregation and ranking of discrete security concerns, typical of the ‘mainstream’ human security studies.

The findings indicate that the sources of insecurity are many and varied, although overall it was clear that socio-economic status is the quintessential aspect of human security in Kosovo, arising from a lack of access to decent, well-remunerated and regular employment. However, the data also corroborate the inter-related nature of human security, through the inability to separate socio-economic insecurity from say legal security caused by poor governance.

Insofar as the citizens of Kosovo understand human security as the right to be protected, to seek protection and at the same time to participate actively as individuals and communities in delivering protection, this conjunction of rights suggests that human security is a relational concept rather than uni-directional.

Lastly, one of the most significant findings derived from the methodology used captured the profoundly personal and intimate nature of human security, both in terms of the vulnerability people

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<sup>†</sup>Hirsch, *op.cit.*



experience as well as the strategies they deploy for addressing their insecurity. This dimension of human security is not detectable through existing methodologies used in human security research.

Our overarching recommendation is that policies need to take into account this personalised experience and expression of human security.

The framing of security in an intimate and personal way reflected in the above definitions speaks to the notion of human security as an aggregate of multiple experiences and perceptions ranging from physical safety, economic and social well-being to plausibility and effectiveness of political representation and civic activism. Strong emphasis on self-reliance in tackling insecurities expressed by the interviewees is directly related to such an understanding of what makes individuals and communities safe and secure. It is therefore of little surprise that responses to the aspirational question ‘What would you wish you could do, but feel unable to and why?’, aimed at re-engaging the sense of agency among respondents vis-à-vis their (in)security predicament, convey a pervasive sense of powerlessness among people of Kosovo. Whether the primary concern is a lack of sustainable livelihood, poor quality of basic services, inadequate political representation or weak governance, the respondents believe that as individuals they lack power to change their circumstances in a meaningful way. The perception of daily reality as unpredictable, risky and degrading undermines the confidence and self-assurance that the limitations to living more secure lives can be overcome.

## General theory of measurement in the social sciences

*Nancy Cartwright and Rosa Runhardt*

Measurement in the social sciences consists of the following steps: first, providing a theoretical definition for the quantity or feature of concern (characterization), second, providing a representation in a metrical system appropriate to the defined concept (e.g. representing it as a continuous quantity, or by a two (or n)- valued variable, with an ordinal scale, or a cardinal scale, etc.) and proving that this representation is appropriate to the concept as characterized, and third, devising empirical procedures for applying the metrical system to the world to get results. The specific way in which we characterize, represent and devise procedures depends on the type of quantity or feature we are concerned with, as well as the aim of the research.

To characterize a quantity or feature it is necessary to identify the boundaries of the concept; we must be able to tell what individuals belong to the concept and what does not. However, whilst some quantities and features in the social sciences can be clearly defined because we think there really is one feature or quantity that the concept refers to, others seem to involve a net of loosely related features and there seem to be only fuzzy boundaries about what units do and do not fall under the concept. We call the latter *Ballung* concepts; examples include human welfare, poverty and civil war.

If we wish to measure a *Ballung* concept, the boundaries in the characterization must be set by the social scientist. There are different options available, leading to different results. The decision about how to set the boundaries and exactly which feature to include in the characterization can often then reasonably be taken to depend on the aim of the study: in a study of poverty aimed at reducing poverty in Glasgow, for instance, poverty may be characterized differently than in a study aimed at finding at comparing the poverty levels of democracies versus non-democracies. In characterizing, there is always a tension between on the one hand staying as faithful as possible to the quantity or feature of concern in each unit measured, which may require nuanced purpose- or context-relative measure and on the other hand designing a 'one size fits all' measure that can allow for comparison across units or across time.

Related to characterization, it is worth pointing out several positions in philosophy of measurement about the connection between the quantity or feature measured and the measurement itself. *Realism* argues that the quantity or feature measured exists independently, i.e. that there is a real quantity or feature referred to by the concept. On the other end of the spectrum is *operationalism*, which argues that there is no difference between the measurement and the thing measured. A common example is operationalism about IQ, which poses that IQ is simply whatever IQ tests measure. Midway between these positions lies *conventionalism*, which is close to what we just argued about *Ballung* concepts: conventionalism argues that to get from the thing being measured to our measurement some decisions have to be based on conventions. So poverty is not simply what poverty indicators

measure, but the measurement result of poverty measures is partially based on the conventions we have set.

It is very important to keep in mind here that where we cannot be sure that there is ‘really’ a specific quantity there to be measured (as we think there is in physics for example, with the concepts ‘charge’ or ‘mass’), rather than a looser concept that may be of great social interest (like ‘social exclusion’, ‘food security’ or ‘civil war’) the intrusion of values is almost certain. Measures of social concepts are not done just for the sake of satisfying curiosity – measurement outcomes are used to support action: food entitlement programmes or an international decision not to intervene because civil war is an internal matter. That means that some groups will be advantaged and some disadvantaged depending on what the measurement results are. For instance when the US changed the details of how the CPI is measured, taxpayers got a break but veterans’ and social security benefits suffered. For quantities like these there is no unique ‘right’ ‘objective’ measure to choose and yet the outcomes can have significant social, political and moral effects.

Given a specific characterization, the social scientists’ next task is to provide an appropriate representation of the concept in a metrical system. There are several ways of representing social science concepts: scientists can use a particular kind of scale (e.g. ordinal, ratio, interval), or a table of indicators. Some representations are more useful for a particular aim of study than others. For instance, if the representation has to be used to *compare* the properties of different individuals, we may use a scale of some sort (e.g. to order the individuals, to say in this region in the world is poorer than that region). Moreover, what representation is appropriate depends on what type of concept the social scientist is dealing with: not every type of concept lends itself to every type of representation equally well. For instance, a Ballung concept like social exclusion will be more faithfully represented with a table of indicators than on a scale. Apart from *providing* a representation, the social scientists need a good argument (or in the best cases a ‘representation theorem’ to show that the method of representation (e.g. a continuous function or an ordinal scale or a table of indicators) can adequately represent what we want it to represent. To do this, social scientists must first provide a list of characteristics taken to be true of the targeted concept, and then set this list against the concept as represented to prove it has these characteristics as well.

With a characterization and representation in place, the social scientists then devise procedures, the rules for applying the metrical system to the real world in order to get measurement results. This is not trivial, especially in those areas of social science where data collection is difficult and scientists sometimes have to rely on the previous work of others (e.g., in conflict studies). One issue that comes up is that previous work may have been done with a very different aim in mind, and thus with a concept that was slightly differently defined. This would lead to a discrepancy between the characterization the scientists have and the procedures that were used for collecting data. There is also the possibility that faced with practical difficulties when it comes to applying the metrical system devised, scientists decide to go back to the drawing board and change the characterization and representation to face the difficulties in data collection.

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## **Methodology: quantitative indicators for conflict**

*Anouk Rigterink and Mary Kaldor*

*(Report by Anouk Rigterink)*

This section will review a number of quantitative indicators for conflict that are currently available in the public arena. These indicators roughly fall into two categories: cross-country datasets and, more recently available, event-based datasets. However, before reviewing these indicators, it seems wise to take a step back and ask ourselves what characteristics a good indicator should have.

### **What does a ‘good’ indicator look like?**

Three guiding questions are used when reviewing indicators for conflict. First, what is the concept of conflict that is behind the indicator? Or: what, conceptually, is being measured? Measuring a real-world phenomenon, by definition, involves simplification. In the case of conflict, we know that conflict involves a great many aspects and that we will never be able to capture all these. Even if we could, it would result in an exact description of reality, not in an indicator for conflict. Thus, all indicators will necessarily be more restrictive than the concept they aim to measure and this is not necessarily a bad thing: it is exactly what indicators are meant to do. However, it is useful to assess which elements of the concept got lost in the translation to indicator. Is this an acceptable necessity or are we missing out on important trends?

When it is clear what is being measured, some aspect(s) of the concept need to be defined in such a way that they can feasibly be measured and data constructed. Hence, the second question is: what is the method through which the indicator is constructed? What are potential advantages and disadvantages of this method for the form and reliability of the data produced?

Of course, data is rarely produced just for data’s sake. It is used and analysed, conclusions and policy recommendations are constructed. But not all data can be used in all (types of) analysis, not all analyses give robust results, and not all results have useful implications for policy. The third guiding question thus centres around the analysis that can be done with the data produced: to what extent have these analyses led to robust and useful results?

### **Cross-country datasets**

Probably the most widely used type of indicator for conflict is derived from various cross-country datasets. In essence, these datasets provide an overview of countries that were involved in some war,

in a particular year. Examples of these are the Correlates of War (CoW) datasets and the Armed Conflict Dataset produced by the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP). Naturally, in order to determine which countries have experienced war, it is necessary to define war somehow. UCDP for example, defines an Armed Conflict as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 [for minor armed conflict and 1000 for war] battle-related deaths”. CoW similarly employs a ‘casualty threshold’ in their definition of war: “sustained combat, involving organized armed forces, resulting in more than 1000 battle-related combatant fatalities within a 12-month period”. Despite the similarities, it should be noted that UCDP uses ‘battle-related deaths’, which includes civilians, whilst CoW mentions ‘battle-related *combatant* fatalities’, which does not.

Looking at the concept behind these definitions, both datasets take ‘battle’ as a central element of conflict. Despite the mental image of Napoleonic or trench warfare that this may provoke, ‘battle’ is actually taken quite broadly (although not explicitly defined), up to the point where it includes terrorist attacks like those on 9/11. Without challenging the notion that terrorist attacks can be part of war, just by the fact that terrorism has to be rebranded ‘battle’ to ‘count’, it appears that there is a somewhat uneasy fit between the concept of war as we currently observe it and the way it is measured.

Another implication of this way of constructing a conflict indicator is that an entire country is coded as either ‘in war’ or ‘at peace’. This may obscure reality, which may be that conflict is concentrated in a particular geographical area while large areas of the same country are essentially peaceful. This is an issue for larger countries in particular, not only because their territory is bigger, but also because the larger the population, the easier it is to exceed the ‘casualty threshold’. India for example, is consistently coded by the UCDP Armed Conflict Dataset as the country experiencing the larger number of individual conflict in the world, even though few people would intuitively characterize India as a whole as a conflict zone.

From the UCDP definition of armed conflict, it would furthermore appear that armed conflict always involves a government of a State and always has political motives. However, increasing importance of non-state combatants and the blurring of conflict and organized crime (such as the smuggling of commodities such as diamonds and timber) have been noted. Mary Kaldor for example in her book ‘New and Old Wars’, puts forward that these elements become increasingly important in modern warfare. If that is true, it is possible that cross-country datasets measure a decrease in the number of conflicts, while in reality, conflict not decreasing in importance but changing in nature.

Overall then, there is a substantial gap between concept and indicators from cross-country datasets. This could potentially lead to a misleading image of where and when conflict exists. In response to this, UCDP has started to produce two new datasets, one on ‘non-state conflict’ and one on ‘one-sided violence’. These similarly measure which countries have exceeded the casualty threshold of 25

in a particular year, but drop the requirement of state involvement in the conflict and the requirement that deaths have to result from a battle between two organized armed parties respectively. However, as this information is relatively new and presented in separate datasets, it remains to be seen how these will be integrated with the better known and more traditional Armed Conflict Dataset.

Picturing the data that is contained in these cross-country datasets, it is essentially a large list with 1's and 0's, indicating whether a country was in war in a particular year (1) or at peace (0). This binary system has a number of disadvantages, as pointed out by Sambanis (2005). First, it is not possible to capture in detail the run-up to, or escalation of a conflict; it will only appear in the dataset once the casualty level has exceeded one of the casualty thresholds. The moment that the threshold is exceeded may not be the same as the moment that the conflict started according to its participants. Furthermore, there is the problem of what to do with countries that 'dip' below the casualty threshold for a short amount of time and then exceed it again: should this be coded as a new, second, conflict or a continuation of the old conflict? And if it is to be coded as a continuation of conflict, how much time needs to have lapsed before we would code two separate conflicts?

These concerns might be written off as inevitable imprecisions or measurement error in the data, if arbitrary decisions on coding rules did not have effects on the conclusions of analyses using this data. However, it turns out that it does. Differences in coding rules have a meaningful effect on which variables we think are related to conflict for example. With this, we are moving into a discussion of the robustness of the results stemming from the analysis of cross-country data.

Data from cross-country datasets is suitable for a particular type of analysis; one that compares countries that have experienced conflict with countries that have not, and try to determine what the difference is. It has mainly been used to determine which variables, for example GDP growth, presence of natural resource, democracy etc. are correlated to war. We would like conclusions from these analyses to be robust, i.e. not change when one makes small arbitrary changes, like adding an extra variable or slightly changing the period under research. However, conclusions from cross-country analysis have proven to not be robust. Despite numerous papers running very similar analyses, there is little agreement on which variables are related to conflict. This is not dissimilar to analyses tackling other big questions on a country level, as illustrated by the now-abandoned fashion of running cross-country growth regressions.

Even if results were robust furthermore, we could doubt whether a *correlation* between say, low GDP and war, actually tells us anything. Does this imply that low GDP *causes* conflict? Or is it just the case that countries with a low GDP share characteristics such as bad government, and it is these characteristics that causes both the low GDP and the conflict? These kinds of 'correlation-is-not-causation' problems are more pressing on a country-level, as there can be any number of country-specific characteristics that make comparing two different countries problematic.

More promising avenues for research may be to compare countries to themselves over time, or compare various regions within a country to each other. However, as the name implies, cross-country datasets contain no within-country variation and little variation over time, making them of limited use here.

### **Event-based datasets**

A relatively new and promising addition to the world of conflict indicators is the event-based dataset. Examples are the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) and the UCDP Geo-Referenced Event Dataset (UCDP-GED). Event-based datasets record the exact location and date of, and participants in instances of violence. The only requirement for inclusion is that the violence has to involve some organized armed actor, not necessarily a government. Some datasets then divide events into various categories, such as ‘battle’ and ‘violence against civilians’. Event-based datasets draw their information from media reports, going through large number of media expressions and coding these into events according to a set of coding rules.

Conceptually, these datasets leave the definition of conflict very open (although UCDP-GED only includes data on country-years that are already included in one of their three cross-country datasets). An advantage of this is that they seem better equipped to capture violence, even if it changes in nature, or if it involves new groups of participants. On the other hand, one might say that certain types of violence are fundamentally different from one another and should not be heaped into a single database. However, the user can exercise some discretion, for example by omitting events involving a certain actor from the dataset if it is felt that these events are fundamentally incomparable with others.

The method of gathering data from media reports obviously has various disadvantages. For one, the media might be more likely to report on events in certain countries than in others. Thus, we could not irrevocably say that there is more violence in a country where more violent events are reported compared to some other country. However, if the preferences of the media are stable over a period of time, it may still be possible to track trends in violent events within a country over time. Furthermore, it is likely that reporting of battle-related deaths suffers from similar limitations.

The major advantage of event-based datasets is that they leave much more freedom for the user of the data. Rather than presenting data on the country-level, basically precluding any possibility of running an analysis at a lower level, the user can determine the number of violent events in a particular region or sub-region of a country, per day, per week, per month etc. However, it is important to maintain some level of caution when aggregating events: is the massacre of a village and a combatant being taken out by a sniper really two events, or would we rather add the number of casualties?

For analyses, this means that event-based datasets include much more variation over time and within-country that can be explored for research. This is helpful for researcher looking for ways to



avoid the correlation-causation conundrum, and uncover relationships that can be interpreted as causal. As these datasets are relatively new, they have been underused so far in research, but given the advantages of events-based datasets, this is likely to change in the future.

# Crowdsourcing as a social science research method?

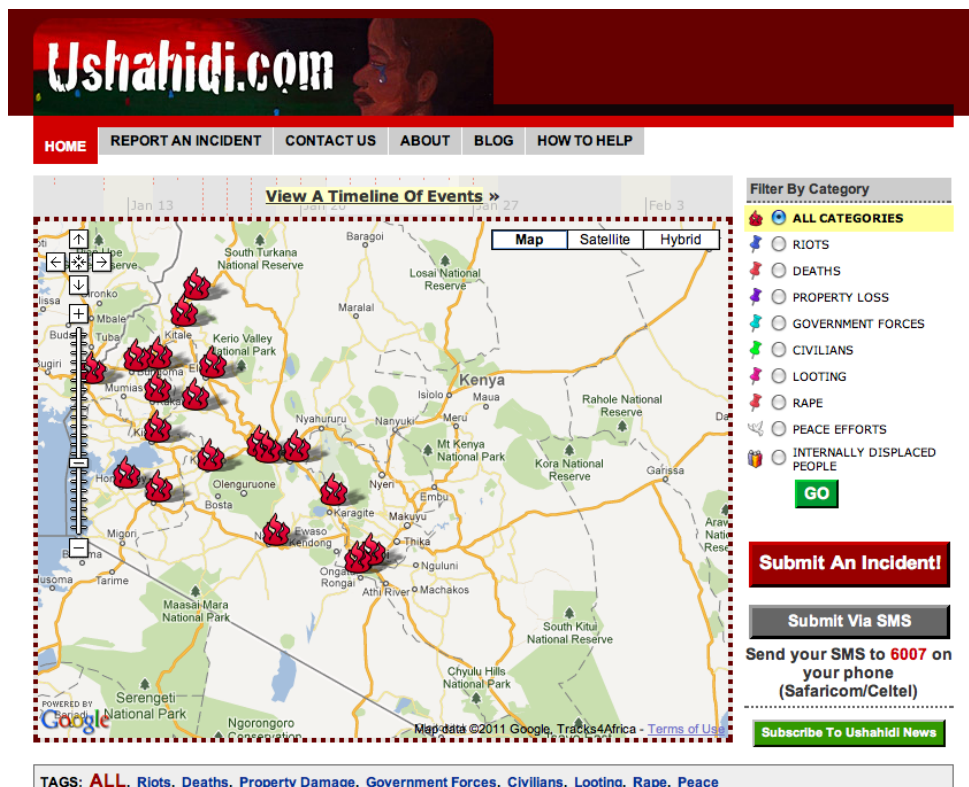
*Sally Stares, Gus Hosein and Sean Deel*

*(Report by Sally Stares)*

Mobile and internet communications technologies bring new possibilities and challenges for social science research as data collection methods. Starting from the case of the Ushahidi web platform for crowdsourced data collection and mapping, we reflected on the characteristics of these new technologies, their potential value in security research, and their potential problems, in terms of both the nature of the data they generate as evidence for social science research, and the many ethical challenges they can entail, particularly the potential risks faced by research subjects and informants.

## Ushahidi

Ushahidi (meaning ‘testimony’ in Swahili) was developed in a relatively acute crisis situation during a period of political unrest and violence following the contested Kenyan elections of 2008. Partially in response to a media blackout, local activists and members of the diaspora quickly developed a web platform that would allow anybody with access to a mobile phone or internet connection to submit event data which, after approval, would automatically be mapped and tagged on a real-time Google map of Kenya. These were combined and triangulated with available media reports. The figure below is a screenshot of the Ushahidi Kenya map.



Ushahidi and related platforms have been deployed in many contexts – some initiated by bottom-up actors (e.g. Mexico City’s traffic map, Atlanta’s crime map, vote monitoring in various places) and some by top-down policy makers (e.g. UNICEF Innovations Lab’s Kosovo Youth Map). The initial framing of this technology was as a crisis response tool, alerting interested parties (civilians, NGOs, etc.) to trouble spots. But with the maps remaining in the public domain, they have the potential to become established sources of data, consulted by outsiders studying those contexts. What status then might they have as sources of empirical evidence? Is it feasible to consider using such technologies for academic research in security studies? What advantages and disadvantages might they entail, and how should we regard existing data produced using this approach?

### **Initial thoughts on the potential advantages and disadvantages of Ushahidi-style data gathering**

On one hand, crowdsourcing tools like Ushahidi have some appealing methodological features which might recommend them as ways of circumventing problems encountered in applying standard (typically sociological) data collection techniques in turbulent settings. In such contexts,

- It can be practically difficult (due to costs, logistics and/or safety concerns) for researchers to travel to certain areas to collect data.
- There are often insufficient records from which to construct a sampling frame.
- Events of interest are often sparsely and/or unevenly distributed, in space and/or in time – and often hidden, or with few potential observers.
- The physical presence of a researcher would be obtrusive. For sensitive topics, this raises problems of response biases as well as issues of ensuring confidentiality, and managing trust and expectations between research subject and researcher.

In that context, crowdsourced data collection might be advantageous since data are generated ‘bottom-up’ rather than within a frame constructed externally by researchers. This has many potential benefits:

- Interpretations of events by locals might be considered to have greater validity compared to interpretations provided by outsiders.
- Local people would have more ownership of data produced, having positive implications for the politics of knowledge.
- Data produced using this method are typically immediately, or very quickly, publicly available.

On the other hand, crowdsourced data collection techniques may generate new questions and problems. For example,

- If no kind of sampling frame can be constructed, what can be known about the data collected? Or if it is not the aim of the study to estimate frequencies or distributions of events, would another data collection method not be more appropriate, e.g. journalistic or in-depth case studies?
- Reporters of crowdsourced data comprise a volunteer sample, whichever way they are recruited, be it via an open call or using a snow-balling strategy based on personal connections. In social science research the potential biases of volunteer samples are well known.
- Submitting data relies on technology, making it hostage to coverage and dependency of telecommunications networks, and potentially introducing a bias in access for participants along socio-economic lines.
- In the absence of an external researcher, questions of quality assurance of data arise. The process by which the data appear in the database is essentially unknown.

Making the data collection process locally derived and owned brings some new challenges – for example:

- How can we ensure that reporters interpret events in comparable ways? In classic sociological research, reporters would be trained and inter-coder reliability exercises undertaken. This seems unfeasible in the case of crowdsourced data collection.
- Local ownership of data overtly politicises the exercise – generating additional concerns regarding for example response rates and quality; the potential for an observation tool to be appropriated as a campaigning exercise; and various concerns arising from the nature of event reports as potentially libellous, placing the research in an intersection with local and international law, and potentially generating safety concerns for informants and victims. The public and spatial nature of the map-presented data exacerbate these concerns.

### **Reasons not to abandon the issue**

Crowdsourcing is generating increasing amounts of interest in social research, both academic and non-academic. Where data are prevalent, they tend sooner or later to be adopted as evidence. It seems timely therefore to consider as carefully as possible the status that such data could have as evidence for social science research. Many of the considerations to bear in mind are part of the larger theme of ‘big data’, which themselves warrant careful discussion. This discussion certainly involves commercial actors, who in many cases are producers and guardians of this new form of data. As well as privacy and security issues, questions need to be posed about what kind of useful information we might be able to gain from analysing such data. With so much data easily available, we are at risk of veering towards ‘dust-bowl empiricism’ rather than proceeding with careful analyses motivated by rigorous theoretical foundations. Whilst this may seem at first sight just to constitute a

risk of producing slightly poor quality research, it could easily lead to a practice of making speculative theories on the strength of patterns found in data that arise merely by chance, or that are spurious associations, really explained away by other factors.

## **Ethics and privacy aspects**

Undoubtedly the ethical issues surrounding the use of this kind of crowdsourced data are many and serious. We need to think very carefully about whether we are creating risks by generating information, or by collecting and processing information. The principle of informed consent is central to this. But in itself is a complex phenomenon in practice. When people participate in a study they implicitly or explicitly grant permission for researchers to use the information they provide – but for what purpose? Exactly what do they consent to, and how is this communicated?

There are many case studies at our disposal of empirical data collection projects set up in order to help people in vulnerable circumstances – such as refugees, people affected by domestic violence or by HIV. Fundamentally, aid workers need to know how and where to find the people they are trying to help. But in all these examples, the disclosure of identifying information to certain parties could result in severe harm coming to research subjects (e.g. through hostile agencies targeting certain types of individuals, or through individuals' own communities meting out punishment), and we know about real examples of exactly this happening. Similar processes can be seen in contexts where the consequences are less violent, but destructive in context – these include the misuse of governmentally administered general records for individuals, made possible by general and broad access granted to government officials.

Sensible precautions in such circumstances include the following:

- Limit the data collected to what is necessary, for a stated purpose.
- Separate information contained in a single data collection exercise, e.g. de-identify, aggregate, anonymise, limit information presented strictly to what is needed for the particular purpose.
- Tightly regulate sharing of data. Question why information is needed, by any parties, before allowing access; do not grant general purpose access.
- Keep information secure during and **upon** transfer.
- Seek approval of the individual.

There is a great deal to say on all of these points, but for the purposes of the discussion on crowdsourced data, we focus on the last point to develop our discussion further. One of the characteristics of the Ushahidi system championed by its founders is that 'data can be submitted by anyone, anywhere'. However, this apparent advantage entails some serious questions:

- For what purpose(s) are data submitted?

- Do participants know what they are submitting?
- Do participants know what they are generating?

We know about cases in Mexico where individuals reporting drug related violence have been tracked down and murdered, and about practices that individuals sometimes take (such as posting reports under nicknames) in order to try to increase their anonymity. Ultimately, anonymity in digital data is extremely hard to guarantee:

- SMS messages are delivered via (registered) mobile phones
- Emails are delivered by (identity registered) cybercafés and other registered devices
- Online technologies such as Twitter may become subpoena targets
- Additional identifying information is often automatically generated from such data sources, e.g. location, time, history etc.

Recent years have seen examples reported loudly in the press of web data controversies, including Google's resistance of US government requests for search data as part of online child pornography investigations, and an accidental release of search histories by AOL. We also know about reports in other countries of targeted illegal data brokering and of transfers of sensitive data between agencies.

**Anonymising** data is a key tool that must be used to try to protect subjects' privacy and security. For GIS-sensitive information that might be partially achieved by mapping rough, generic locations rather than precise ones, whilst not compromising too much the integrity of the database and balancing against the need to be able to verify accounts.

Linked to this is the question of **who owns the data** generated, who has control of it and where accountability lies. Controversies over the use of data from Facebook serve as a good illustration of these issues. Researchers at Harvard University were accused of breaching students' privacy after downloading a huge amount of data from the popular social networking site, without seeking the informed consent of subjects. These data, they argued, could provide valuable information for understanding people's cultural preferences and tastes, and could be rendered anonymous. But the research community was shocked at the lack of consent sought, and it was not long before cyber-experts were able to work out the identity of the student class from whom the data were taken. On the other side of the spectrum, the researchers continue to receive requests for the data from other parties, long after the debacle. The lessons learned from this episode are straightforward:

- All information is personal.
- Anonymisation is very hard to do.
- Re-use is hard to fight against.

## **What advice do we have now?**

In the presence of so many dilemmas, there is an urgent need for discussion and careful consideration of the many complex problems that may be entailed in crowdsourcing data. For some of these issues we need imagination to anticipate problems that could arise. For others we can begin by drawing on principles already established by various agencies. The UNGA (1990) guidelines provide a good set of starting principles:

- Principle of lawfulness and fairness
- Principle of accuracy
- Principle of purpose-specification
- Principle of interested-person access
- Principle of non-discrimination
- Principle of security.

And for now, the following practical steps are to be recommended:

- Limit data collection to what is necessary, linked to a purpose
- Separate information, e.g. de-identify, anonymise...but even this is risky
- Tightly regulate sharing
- Keep information secure
- Seek consent of the individual, continuously. Think about how to communicate this.

## Ethical considerations and fieldwork

*Hakan Seckinelgin and Tim Allen*

*(Report by Sam Vincent)*

The Security in Transition research programme envisages a multidisciplinary investigation of the ‘security gap’, defined as the space between our existing security capabilities (largely oriented towards national security) and the capability required to provide human security. Research into the security gap will necessarily entail significant fieldwork, potentially including visits to conflict-affected and post-conflict settings, and working with people who have experienced insecurity as well as people who have perpetrated violence. Conducting such fieldwork poses a range of ethical considerations.

### **Collaborating with institutions: biting the hand that feeds**

Academics have no choice but to collaborate with a range of multilateral, bilateral and national institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations when conducting fieldwork in developing and/or conflict-affected settings. In practice this collaboration raises a range of ethical concerns. Collaboration can take a variety of forms. In practice a great deal of academic fieldwork is made possible by funding and logistical support from organizations involved in public policy. In the past researchers have reported experiencing pressure to modify or expunge some of their findings. It can be difficult for a researcher to deliver an analysis that is critical of collaborating organizations.

Such pressure is not necessarily overt. In some cases such organizations may be the only international presence, and the only means of reaching, the area that the researcher wishes to study. In practice this means the researcher accepts help in arranging relevant documents and security clearance as well as flights, overland transport, accommodation and food. The organization likely also assumes responsibility for the researcher’s safety, up to and including an understanding that the organization would evacuate the researcher if necessary. Under such circumstances the researcher may wish to avoid confrontation and indeed feel loyalty and gratitude towards the organization in question. It can be difficult to present awkward findings and there is a risk of “biting the hand that feeds you’ too hard,” particularly if the researcher hopes to work in the same area or with the assistance of that organization again in the future (Allen and Parker 2012).

Within social anthropology there has been a long-running debate about whether and under what circumstances it is possible to do serious academic fieldwork while receiving funding or support from “parties with potentially ulterior interests in obtaining the ‘right’ kind of results.” Where at one end of the spectrum it is argued that under such circumstances it is impossible to do good research, the balance of experience at LSE has been that it is possible to manage the inevitable tensions as they arise. Indeed, such tensions are in many respects similar to those necessarily experienced when interacting with local or national institutions. After all, as Allen and Parker have argued,



“Anthropologists are always confronting the dilemma of how much to reveal, and what kinds of information might be harmful to informants. It is a problem arising from the intimacies that are an inherent part of our methodology” (Allen and Parker 2012). They argue that in cases where overt pressure is applied to omit or change research findings, researchers should respond by writing as honestly as possible about what has been observed. They need to ensure that they supply robust evidence in support of critical points.

In considering contracts with funding bodies, the researcher should never agree not to publish what they have found out. In most cases it is possible to delete clauses assigning funders intellectual property rights over research and instead make an arrangement whereby material is leased to funders while the researcher retains copyright (Allen and Parker 2012).

Similarly, collaborating with actors that are closely aligned to the state or to one or more party active in a conflict may present ethical dilemmas. While enabling access to a research site and informants, and perhaps helping to build trust among one set of people, there is the danger that facilitators may seek to distort research findings and impose conditions or limitations upon research. There is also the risk that by virtue of these contacts the researcher comes to be perceived as partisan or biased by other parties, hampering or preventing the researcher from gaining information from across a balance of sources.

### **The welfare of informants**

Academic researchers have obvious ethical obligations towards their informants in the field. In conflict-affected and insecure contexts informants may be particularly vulnerable, and the researcher needs to evaluate the likely direct and indirect impact of the research on the people concerned. Researchers therefore need to understand the political and cultural context as well as possible - including both the history of a conflict and the current political climate - in order to identify and mitigate the possibility of inadvertently placing informants at risk by seeking to elicit particular kinds of information. Where the researcher is accompanied by a representative of the state or some other political group, they should take care to recognize that the presence of such a person can affect what kinds of information it is safe for an informant to disclose as well as how an informant perceives – and is prepared to trust and respond openly towards – the researcher.

Researchers need to recognize their privileged and powerful position and their starting point should be avoiding or minimizing the risk of doing harm. Where researchers consider offering rewards/incentives for participation in research it is important that they consider local purchasing power and whether the gift is of enough value that it might make an informant willing to take a risk that she would not otherwise take.

It is highly likely that SiT researchers will need to broach politically, culturally and personally sensitive subjects with informants. At the same time, under the specific conditions that the

programme is investigating, it is likely that in at least some cases informants will have experienced violence, whether as victim, perpetrator or witness. In designing research questions, researchers will need to be extremely careful about balancing their research requirements against broaching painful and traumatic subjects and to consider how to avoid re-traumatizing people. Some field researchers have reported (Seckinelgin 2012) that it can be hard to formulate questions beforehand in this regard. Significant adaptation may be needed depending on how open participants prove to be. Interviewees do not necessarily respond as researchers expect. Therefore, judgment, improvisation and a readiness to adjust the approach once in the field are all vital necessary considerations.

Researchers also need to consider the expectations of informants. What do they hope and expect to get in return for spending time and offering information? Seckinelgin found that some of his informants tended to use interviews as an opportunity to talk about issues that it was otherwise socially impossible for them to talk about. In this case, taking the time to enable informants to openly express their private thoughts about their experiences seems to have been a valuable contribution in its own right. In other cases researchers may be asked for assistance in relating their needs back to authorities, and they may seek reassurances or promises that researchers are in no position to provide. Such situations can create pressures and ethical dilemmas. Researchers need to manage the expectations of informants and think through what they are in a position to offer.

In terms of accumulating, working with and disseminating the data that are gathered, researchers have clear ethical responsibilities towards informants. Ensuring that appropriate steps are taken to ensure the security, privacy and wellbeing of research subjects, including properly anonymizing information, is essential in this regard.

### **Welfare of researchers**

Researchers also have an ethical duty to ensure their own wellbeing as well as that of colleagues. Safety is a priority, yet researchers should give attention to broader issues of wellbeing. Highly emotive issues may be difficult for the interviewer to listen to (for example, discussion of wartime sexual violence by perpetrators), while also posing hard ethical questions (should the interviewer remain neutral, give an admonishment, or report the matter as criminal?). How we think about perpetrators is closely tied to the issue of how we understand they should be addressed in a post conflict context. The question of their individual responsibility for having committed crimes needs to be weighed in light of the circumstance of fighting and of obeying orders.

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## The culture's research component: analysing the security gap and power

*Sabine Selchow*

The 'Culture/s' research component focuses on the 'security gap' from an analytical perspective that is – in the broadest sense – informed by discourse theoretical premises. In general, this means that the research focuses on issues such as identity, cultural representations, everyday life; it focuses on discourses as a technology that produces, legitimises and secures power. In particular, the notion of the 'security gap' is operationalised as a discursive mechanism, and our overall interest lies in grasping its complex working. As such, the research in the Culture/s component falls in the broadest sense into the realm of the recently flourishing scholarship in Security Studies that goes beyond traditional International Relations (IR) approaches.

The methods that are applied in this research component or, more precisely, the approach that guides the concrete research is shaped by the distinct theoretical premises that underlie the outlook in this component. Hence, in order to be able to understand them, these premises need to be clear. Generally speaking, the research is interested in the communicative practices through which social reality is produced and as well as in the political constitution of this social reality, more precisely in the techniques and rationalities that guide actors. A number of concepts are at the heart of these premises, prominently, the concepts of **discourse**, **governmentality** and a particular understanding of **power**.

'**Discourse**' is an *analytical* concept that goes back to Michel Foucault at the heart of which is the basic premises that the social stock of meanings is *produced* rather than naturally given. This production is disciplined through systems, and the concept of 'discourse' captures these systems. On the one hand, 'discourses' are to be understood as concrete historical formations of 'knowledge and meaning production'; on the other hand, 'discourses' are to be understood as shaped by specific structures and dynamics that can be described in an abstract way. As Foucault points out in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 'discourses' are constituted by linguistic signs; the discursive function of these signs, however, does not simply imply that they refer to any kind of referent (objects, subjects, relations etc). Rather, the discursive function of these linguistic signs means that they '*produce*' these referents. 'Producing the referent' does of course not mean that a material referent is actually 'produced', but it means that the linguistic signs within these formations of statements (in other words: within 'discourses') 'ascribe' meanings to these referents and with that make them accessible in the first place.<sup>‡</sup> In this sense, 'discourses' are processes in which the linkage between sequences of signs and referents leads to the actual 'production' of these referents – or, more precisely, to the production of the meanings of these referents.<sup>§</sup> To analyse 'discourses' then means nothing short of analysing how social reality is produced (through communicative practices). The concept of '**governmentality**' "refers to the arts and rationalities of governing, where the conduct of conduct is the key activity."<sup>\*\*</sup> Central to the conception of 'governmentality' is that freedom is not understood

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‡FOUCAULT, Michel (1973). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock, 74.

§ See DREYFUS, Hubert L. & Paul RABINOW (1982). *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 86pp.

\*\*Bratich, J.Z., J. Packer, and C. McCarthy (2003) (ed.): *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 4.

as the opposite of power but as the very medium that is at the heart of power.<sup>††</sup> To govern means then to structure the fields in which ‘free’ subjects act and govern themselves within the medium of freedom. Hence, ‘**power**’ is not understood as something that is repressive but *productive*. Furthermore, power is not conceptualised as something that somebody holds and that could be shared or taken away; rather, power is the name for a ‘complex strategic situation in society’.<sup>‡‡</sup> To analyse ‘governmentality’ then means to analyse the techniques and rationalities that guide ‘free’ subjects, or, more precisely that provide the field in which ‘free’ subjects govern themselves.

The above premises, which are ‘unconventional’ in the face of the traditional scholarship in political science, IR and Security Studies, first of all, translate into a methodological approach that is different from traditional political science research. In general terms, the theoretical ideal of a deductive approach which strictly starts on the basis of a theory that is then transformed into a consistent method and is finally verified based on empirical findings, does not easily correspond with it. This means more concretely that instead of verifying a pre-set hypothesis, studies that build on the above premises aim to evaluate and carve out the specificity and identify what is typical about a socio-political phenomenon<sup>§§</sup> and are best understood as “interventions in conventional understandings or established practices”<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, rather than as endeavours that set out to detect causal explanations. All this is important to keep in mind because it translates into a specific practice when it comes to methods. What is apparent from the above is that it counters the idea of a decontextualised method. Jonathan Potter captures the general nature of empirical when he writes that these approaches are to be understood as a “craft skill, more like bike riding [...] than following the recipe for a mild chicken rogan josh. [...] Rather than conceiving of a world of discrete variables with discrete effects, in [studies building on the above premises] there are constructions and versions that may be adopted, responded to or undermined.”<sup>†††</sup>

On the one side, the underlying premises imply that each empirical study is to a specific degree ‘experimental’ as it cannot follow a preset and ‘tested’ methodological path. On the other side, this means that in each case it needs to be individually negotiated and explicitly reflected on in how far social scientific standards are met.

So, while there is not one methodological path, let alone one distinct method attached to the kind of analyses we are interested in the Culture/s component, there is a toolbox of methods from various academic disciplines at our disposal, such as methods associated with ‘narrative analysis’, methods

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††Broeckling, Ulrich, and Susanne Krasmann, ‘Ni Methode, Ni Approche: Zur Forschungsperspektive Der Gouvernementalitätsstudien - Mit Einem Seitenblick Auf Konvergenzen Und Divergenzen Zur Diskursforschung’, in *Diskursanalyse Meets Gouvernementalitätsforschung: Perspektiven Auf Das Verhaeltnis Von Subjekt, Sprache, Macht Und Wissen*, ed by Silke van Dyk and Johannes Angermueller (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2010), 28-9.

‡‡ Michel Foucault in: Pospisil, Jan (2009) *Die Entwicklung von Sicherheit. Entwicklungspolitische Programme der USA und Deutschlands im Grenzbereich zur Sicherheitspolitik*. Bielefeld: transcript, 46.

§§WAGNER, Wolfgang (2005). ‘Die soziale Konstruktion aussenpolitischer Interessen: Deutsche und britische Debatten ueber eine Staerkung der Gemeinsamen Aussen- und Sicherheitspolitik der Europäischen Union.’ In: Ulbert, Cornelia & Christoph Weller (eds) *Konstruktivistische Analysen der internationalen Politik*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag fuer Sozialwissenschaften, 68.

\*\*\* Campbell, David (2007). ‘Poststructuralism.’ in: Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki & Steve Smith (eds). *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 219.

††† POTTER, Jonathan (1997). ‘Discourse Analysis as a Way of Analysing Naturally Occurring Talk’ In: Silverman, D. (ed.). *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage, 147-8.

associated with ‘content analysis’,<sup>##</sup> statistical methods associated with ‘corpus linguistics’,<sup>\$\$\$</sup> and methods associated with the interpretive approach in IR<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>.

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<sup>##</sup> Ibid.

<sup>\$\$\$</sup> See Selchow, Sabine (forthcoming) ‘An Interplay of Traditions: The ‘Return of Uncertainty’ and its Taming in Post-9/11 US Security Thinking’, in Bevir, Mark Bevir, Oliver Daddow, and Ian Hall (eds.) *Interpreting Global Security*, Routledge, 2013.

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> Ibid.

## Concluding remarks

The reports in this document hopefully convey a sense of the diversity of methodological approaches that are involved in the Security in Transition project. Some of the research methods adopted are well tried and tested – for example, Anouk Rigterinkis drawing on standard statistical analysis techniques as part of her assessment of quantitative indicators of conflict. Some are new, and their feasibility is still being discussed – for example, the potential use of crowdsourcing considered by Sally Stares and colleagues. In some cases, well known methods are being implemented in unusual ways – for example, Denisa Kostovicova’s *dialogic method* employs interview settings but used for conversation rather than the traditional format of a one-way flow of information from informant to researcher.

Alongside this variety of methods, or practical tools, we also draw on a broad discussion of methodologies: the theories and logics underlying the choices we make. Thus Nancy Cartwright’s report on the theory of measurement explains the process of mapping the key elements of the empirical world we are studying onto some formal (numerical) system. In the process of measurement, many choices need to be made along the way, both practical and theoretical, to yield data that will be suitable for the kinds of analyses we want to undertake, to answer our research questions. Sabine Selchow’s report describes how philosophical approaches to methods and understanding can vary dramatically between scholars. They might be considered quite separate in some studies – for example, this would be the standard approach in traditional quantitative analysis, where we would define and analyse a set of variables in order to tell us about the phenomena they are intended to represent. These phenomena exist independently of any analysis of them. By contrast, in the studies proposed for the ‘Cultures’ component of the project, methods and knowledge are fundamentally intertwined; analyses and objects of study also cannot be separated.

We have highlighted at the start of the document the most pressing and overt ethical concerns for the Security in Transition project. We need to remain acutely aware of these issues, and anticipate and address them promptly. But we also want to be careful that this does not lead us to neglect the ethical concerns which have a less dramatic presence in our plans and reports. Fundamentally, we take ethics in research to be synonymous with integrity. We need not only to, for example, minimise the chances of directly endangering an informant in the field, but also minimise the chances of causing harm indirectly, through reporting research carried out carelessly, or findings in whose validity we have low confidence.

Finally, we need to be as transparent and reflective as possible about the contingent nature of our research, and about how it is shaped by the theoretical frameworks we adopt. The project is strongly informed by a human security approach, which underlines a focus on individuals, and more particularly on civilians. This approach is one based not just on analytical principles but also on normative principles. We need to be clear about the possibilities and limitations that are implied by

this approach. Research is an exercise in selection, and its results are necessarily partial, in both senses of the word.

So there are two reasons for considering methodology and ethics together. The first is quite practical: in designing good research we need to combine essential principles of research ethics (e.g. privacy, security, risk, power) with sensitive decisions about methods using knowledge of empirical contexts (e.g. cultural norms, institutional characteristics, political situations). The second is more general: put bluntly, it can be considered unethical to do poor research. As well as the potential to cause harm immediately in the field, there is the potential to cause harm by for example misinforming or even misleading. We need to guard against lack of care, hidden biases, and other compromises of quality to maximise the integrity and value of research.