

Sabine Selchow

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The paths not (yet) taken: Ulrich Beck, the ‘cosmopolitized world’ and security studies

Sabine Selchow, London School of Economics, UK

While it is Ulrich Beck’s concept of ‘risk society’ that has mostly attracted attention in the field of security studies, in this article I argue that if we want to take Beck seriously, we need to go beyond his ‘risk society’ thesis and acknowledge that his main thesis was that we live in a social reality that is qualitatively new and, consequently, calls for a radical shift in how we look at and talk about it. To bring Beck into security studies, then, means to study ‘security’ from within Beck’s ‘new world’. For that, I argue, a sharper conception of what characterizes that world is needed. At the heart of my article I provide such a conception – the ‘cosmopolitized world’ – which I identify as being shaped by non-linearity and the interplay of two moments: the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ and the ‘tradition of the national perspective’. Building on this concept and experimenting with it, I turn to reading the ‘US national security’ discourse as this is constructed in the text of the 2015 National Security Strategy from within this ‘cosmopolitized world’. Reflecting on this experiment, I conclude by highlighting the potential that bringing Beck in this way into security studies holds, as well as pointing to the need for future work on the vocabulary of the ‘cosmopolitized world’.

Keywords: Ulrich Beck, cosmopolitization, reflexive modernization, risk society, US National Security Strategy

Introduction

On 1 January 2015, sociologist Ulrich Beck died unexpectedly. At the time of his death, Beck was in the process of completing his book *The Metamorphosis of the World* (Beck, 2016). In a draft introduction to this work, he confesses: ‘I was at a loss for an answer to the simple but necessary question: “What is the meaning of the global events unfolding before our eyes?”’ He addresses this question by galvanizing his analyses into a social theory of a world that is not ‘changing’ or ‘trans- forming’, but ‘metamorphosing’.

Beck was a lateral thinker, a *Querdenker* in German, who was committed to the discipline of sociology but refused to be confined by its conventional parameters. For this conviction, he was willing to endure criticism from colleagues. Beck published countless articles and monographs, translated into some 35 languages. His writing is inviting and friendly. His style is lyrical, witty, and shaped by metaphors and *Wortwitz* (wordplay), a fact that has not always served the reception of his work well beyond the realm of his mother tongue, German.

In security studies, understood in the broadest sense, it is in particular Beck’s ‘risk society’ thesis that has captured scholars’ imaginations. This is not least because of the increasing relevance of the technology of ‘risk’ within contemporary security practices (see e.g. Amoore and De Goede, 2008). Yet, Beck was not a ‘risk’ scholar, narrowly understood, and his ‘risk society’ thesis is not a theory of ‘risk’. It is an attempt to deconstruct and question the usefulness of the modern idea ‘risk’ in its political function and applications. More generally, ‘risk society’ is only one component of Beck’s social theory and is closely interwoven with two other components: ‘individualization’ and ‘cosmopolitization’.

The aim of this special section is to trigger a creative re-engagement in security studies with the multiple aspects of Beck’s work. The contributions to this special section set out to experiment with Beck’s ideas and explore paths that have not yet been taken with Beck in the field. Each of the three articles in this section introduces and follows a different path. Accordingly, each speaks to a different camp of scholars and readership of *Security Dialogue* – particularly, but not only, to those who are engaged with the technologies of ‘risk’, ‘prevention’, ‘preemption’ and ‘precaution’. What the three articles have in common is an

(implicit or explicit) engagement with the question of whether Beck's theoretical perspective must be adopted wholesale, or whether it is possible to work 'in his spirit', or to isolate and utilize single aspects of his wide oeuvre.

Gabe Mythen and Sandra Walklate's contribution to this special section puts the spotlight on three of Beck's less discussed conceptual devices: 'non-knowledge' (Nichtwissen), 'emancipatory catastrophism' and the most recent concept 'metamorphosis'. In so doing the authors aim to open new pathways beyond Beck's 'risk society'-thesis that acknowledge and are inspired by the 'pro- vocative intensions and [...] disruptive ambitions', which are enmeshed with Beck's lateral think- ing and his 'capacity to turn dominant worldviews upside down'. Looking at the violent conflict in Syria from a Beckian perspective, Mythen and Walklate elucidate the explanatory potential that the three chosen conceptual devices hold and stress the possibility of cross-disciplinary dialogue that they open – even if, as the authors suggest, one is not persuaded by Beck's entire thesis.

Matthias Gross' article also identifies the concept of 'non-knowledge' as particularly worthy of exploration. Gross critically engages with Beck's concept 'risk', as originally applied in *Risk Society*, and identifies it as a 'zombie category'. 'Zombie category' is a term that Beck uses himself to refer to (sociological) categories that are not adequate (anymore) to capture social reality. Gross argues that had Beck 'taken seriously his own observations and reflections on the unintended side- effects of the second modernity, on uninsurability, on unpredictability, and on the delocalized character of modern hazards, he may have labelled his new society the 'non-knowledge society''. On this ground, Gross pushes Beck's concept of non-knowledge further, conceptualizes non-knowledge as a key driver of modernity and demonstrates its value for analysing security related issues. In this present, first contribution to the special section, the concepts 'cosmopolitization' and 'reflexive modernization' play a significant role. I argue that if we want to take Beck seriously, we need to look beyond his 'risk society' thesis and acknowledge that his main thesis was that we live in a social reality that is qualitatively new and, consequently, calls for a radical shift in how we look at and talk about this 'new world'. I suggest that this implies two things. First, it requires accepting that research inspired by Beck can always only be 'provisional' because of the inherent provisionality of his own scholarly endeavour. Second, it means that if one wants to take Beck's work as a whole seriously in security studies, 'security' needs to be studied from within the 'new world' he imagines.

The aim of my article is to help pave the way for this scholarly move. What is needed for that, I suggest, is a sharper conception of what characterizes Beck's world, that is, of what one would be guided by and focused on if one wanted to study 'security' from within that world. In this respect, at the heart of my article is my conceptualization of Beck's world as a 'cosmopolitized world'. Grounded in a close reading and interpretation of his work as a whole, and of *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (Beck, 2006) in particular, I conceptualize the 'cosmopolitized world' as being shaped by non-linearity, as well as by the interplay of two moments: the 'cosmopolitized reality', on one side, and the 'tradition of the national perspective', on the other. By means of experimenting in this vein, I turn to reading the discourse of 'US national security' as it is constructed in the document of the USA's 2015 National Security Strategy (White House, 2015) from within this 'cosmopolitized world'. Reflecting on this experiment, I conclude by highlighting the potential that bringing Beck into security studies in this way holds, as well as pointing to the need for future work on the vocabulary of the 'cosmopolitized world'.

Beck beyond 'risk society'

It is Beck's concept of 'risk society' that has mostly attracted attention in the field of security stud- ies. If taken up by scholars who are interested in 'security', Beck's work

usually serves one of three functions. First, it is used as a reference in support of the respective authors' conviction that we are living in times of (more) risks (e.g. Krahmann, 2011). Second, critical engagements with Beck are used to develop theoretical arguments in contrast to Beck's own claims and the premises on which they build; prominently, these are approaches that take 'risk' as a governmental technology (e.g. O'Malley, 2009). Third, Beck's work is applied in order to see whether it explains security-related issues better than other theories (e.g. Coker, 2009; Rasmussen, 2006).

Notwithstanding the valuable insights that engagements with Beck such as these facilitate, the core of his work is often not fully acknowledged or taken seriously in the field of security studies.¹ First, the aim of Beck's writings is not to suggest that our world is more risky than it used to be, or that there are more threats and dangers. As he explains, 'the theory of world risk society should not be confused with a variant of the theory of the imminent decline of the West but should be seen, rather, as a theory of ambivalence' (Beck, 2006: 34). In fact, instead of setting out to present a dark picture of the world, Beck was driven by optimism (see e.g. Beck, 2014, 2015). He tried to escape the pessimism that he felt was shaping contemporary social theorization by establishing the thesis that this pessimism is the flipside of the dogmatic use of old, established concepts. Second, Beck was not a risk analyst, narrowly understood, nor did he explicitly develop a theory of risk. Rather, the way in which he uses the word 'risk' in his concepts 'global risk' and 'risk society' is an attempt to deconstruct the idea of risk. Overall, Beck does not speak of risk to refer to the idea of the probability of a potential unintended consequence, but to question the usefulness of this modern idea in its political function and applications. In this sense, the invented word *Risikogesellschaft* (risk society) is meant to signal that 'risk' and 'society' no longer work as concepts with which to grasp social reality (see e.g. Bayerischer Rundfunk, 2014). Finally, Beck did not set out to develop a theory that explains our world better than other theories. Rather, he set out to draw the picture of a different world altogether. In my view, this is the radical constant in his work that needs to be acknowledged if one wants to take Beck seriously in security studies.

Beck's main thesis is that we live in a social reality that is qualitatively new. He expresses this thesis in his take on the theory of reflexive modernization (see e.g. Beck, 1994). Risk society (e.g. Beck, 1992, 1999), cosmopolitization (e.g. Beck, 2006) and individualization (e.g. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1994) are the three interlinked theorems that together constitute this global theory. Grounded in his thesis about a new social reality, Beck's overarching aim and main scholarly passion was to trigger an epistemological shift in sociology, in particular, and in the social sciences, in general. He was pushing for a shift from 'methodological nationalism' to 'methodological cosmopolitanism', where, as I will lay out below, 'methodological cosmopolitanism' is linked to his concept 'cosmopolitization' and not to the normative project 'cosmopolitanism' (see e.g. Beck, 2009a: 13). As Bronner (1995: 68) puts it, Beck's main conviction was that 'we live in a world

... different from the one in which we think'.

The ambitious goal of a complete rethinking of how we see and think about society accounts for the kind of 'provisionality' that shapes Beck's work. And I argue this provisionality has to be accepted, if not embraced, if one does research with Beck. This provisionality is manifest in Beck's writings in two ways. First, it is manifest in the changing and what appears to be inconsistent use of words and, arguably, even concepts throughout his texts: Is it 'cosmopolitanization' (as e.g. in Beck, 2006) or 'cosmopolitization' (as in Beck, 2011)? Is there a difference between 'imagined cosmopolitan risk communities' (Beck and Grande, 2010), 'imagined communities of global risk' (Beck, 2011) and 'cosmopolitan communities of climate risk' (Beck et al., 2013)? And where exactly is the line between his ideas of 'risk', 'danger' and 'catastrophe'? He sometimes uses these words/ concepts interchangeably. Second, the provisionality is manifest in his theory as such, which does not

always unfold in a strictly consistent way across his various publications. Most obviously, and as he himself acknowledged, there are two interpretations of ‘reflexive modernization’ in his writings, where only one properly captures the essence of his main thesis (see Beck, 2013).

And yet, this provisionality is not a shortcoming in Beck’s writing. It is something that lies in the nature of the exercise in which he was involved and to which he was committed. This provisionality mirrors ‘the ambivalent character of the world [Beck] describes’, argues Bronner (1995: 67). ‘In the state of total change we try to think this change. This is difficult’, Beck explains, self-reflectively adding, ‘hence, we cannot appear with full confidence’, implying the imperative strategy of constant adjustment and rewriting along the path of discovery and theorization (Beck, 2013, my translation). In this sense, Beck’s language use and theory development have always been, and always had to be, about the invention, testing and rewriting of concepts and frameworks – ‘provisional’, playful, somewhat provocative and sweeping, but at the same time inviting and open to critique by virtue of the nature of the task he set himself. They have also always been, and always had to be, about the invention, testing and rewriting of new words to grasp the new reality he saw. In the light of the above, I argue that if one wants to take Beck seriously in exploring new paths for bringing him into security studies, one needs to be open to experimentation and a kind of provisionality of one’s findings. Importantly, one has to explore ‘security’ from within the new world Beck imagines. Inevitably, such a move opens new perspectives, as it implies an original observer position that is grounded in an alternative conception of social reality. The question, however, is how does one do this? What are the concrete signposts of Beck’s world that could guide explorations of ‘security’ within it?

Beck has not left a fully sketched guideline, let alone a comprehensive methodological toolbox for how the empirical exploration of his ‘different’ world should look, or what research based on what he calls ‘methodological cosmopolitanism’ actually entails.² One of the few concrete engagements with this issue is a recent article on ‘conceptual and empirical suggestions for a new research agenda’ (Beck et al., 2013). In this article, the authors suggest that the question ‘How and where are new cosmopolitan communities of climate risk being imagined and realized?’ is the ‘key research question for contemporary social science’ (Beck et al., 2013: 1) in the face of this new

world that Beck has identified. In order to be able to research this question, the authors define ‘cosmopolitan communities of climate risk’ as the central research object for studies of the ‘new world’ and set out this object’s attributes so that researchers can ‘find’ it in empirical studies (Beck et al., 2013: 2; also discussed in Selchow, 2015).

The development of an empirical research agenda that establishes the study of a specific ‘new’ social phenomenon – namely, ‘cosmopolitan communities of climate risk’ – as it is presented by Beck et al. (2013) is promising in many respects, and especially for sociologists who have a scholarly interest in post-traditional communities (e.g. Blok and Tschötschel, 2015; more generally, see also Hitzler et al., 2008). For applying Beck within security studies, however, given the various research interests that guide scholars in this field, it is too specific and narrow. What is needed, I suggest, is a sharper conception of what exactly characterizes Beck’s new world more broadly, a conception that provides what one could and should be guided by and focused on if one wanted to study ‘security’ within this world. To establish this requires not only a close reading of Beck’s work, but also a streamlining and selective reinterpretation of his various and varying ideas, pushing them forward into his ‘new world’.

The ‘cosmopolitized world’

In this section, I introduce a conceptualization of Beck’s world. I call it ‘the cosmopolitized world’. It is grounded in my interpretation of Beck’s ideas, and particularly a close and purposeful reading of his *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (Beck, 2006). As such, it must not be mistaken for a summary of Beck’s social theory, but should be understood as the product of a selection, reorganization, reinterpretation and advancement of Beck’s ideas so as to form the ground for explorations of ‘security’ from within his ‘new world’.

To begin with, the adjective cosmopolitized in ‘cosmopolitized world’ is not to be confused with the word cosmopolitan. It does not refer to the normative project of cosmopolitanism but, as we will see below, is linked to a process that Beck calls ‘cosmopolitization’ (see e.g. Beck, 2009a: 13). I suggest that there are two aspects that shape the ‘cosmopolitized world’. First, it is (to be imagined as) non-linear. Second, it is shaped by the interplay of two moments. These are what I grasp as (a) the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ and (b) the ‘tradition of the national perspective’.

I will sketch each of these two moments in turn, before I come to their interplay and the aspect of the non-linearity of the ‘cosmopolitized world’.

‘Cosmopolitized reality’

The notion ‘cosmopolitized reality’ captures an understanding of social reality as being shaped by three interrelated aspects. First, it is shaped by an enmeshment of lived realities, cultures, horizons of experience and horizons of expectations, which takes place independently of and beyond national borders. Following Beck (2004: 114), this enmeshment constitutes an ‘internal cosmopolitization of the world’ and of modern national societies. This process of ‘cosmopolitization’ is not a conscious and intended process that is triggered and guided by the normative ideals of the (elite) project of cosmopolitanism. Rather, it is to be understood as the product of the side-effects of actions that are targeted at other ends. A notable characteristic of this internal cosmopolitization is that it is a long-term and irreversible process, as Beck (2004: 113) puts it. This is because even actions that can be seen to have been actively and consciously taken against the enmeshment of lived realities fuel the process of the internal cosmopolitization of societies – as a side-effect. Anti-European parties, such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP), provide a good example of this (Beck, 2014). These follow an exclusionary and anti-Europe doctrine but, in order to be ‘successful’ as anti-EU parties, sit in the European parliament. With that, they ‘accidentally’ fuel the process of internal cosmopolitization.

The second aspect that shapes the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ is the existence of ‘global risks’. The term ‘global risk’ refers to the potential consequences of ‘industrial, that is, techno-economic decisions and considerations of utility’ (Beck, 1992: 98). These are decisions that are grounded in modern institutions and basic modern principles. In Beck’s words, they have their ‘peaceful origin in the centres of rationality and prosperity with the blessings of the guarantors of law and order’ (Beck, 1992: 98). Given the technological advancements brought about by industrialization and the progress of modernization and the modern sciences, these decisions need to be imagined as (a) potentially having consequences that stand and remain beyond knowledge;

(b) potentially bringing about *Nichtwissen* (non-knowledge) (Beck, 2009a; see also Wehling, 2006, and the other contributions in this special section); and (c) potentially being ‘socially delimited in space and time’ (see e.g. Beck and Grande, 2010: 418). In short, these decisions need to be imagined as potentially bringing about consequences that cannot necessarily be grasped with the modern idea of ‘risk’ and its implicit (national/international) ‘container thinking’. In this sense, the idea of ‘global risk’ entails a social reality of a ‘borderless’ necessity to cooperate (*Kooperationszwang*), as well as an interrelation of

responsibility (*Verantwortungszusammenhang*) (Beck and Grande, 2010: 417). Consequently, the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ is a social reality in which the ‘global other’ is implicated in the decisions and actions of other ‘global others’ – no matter whether this is perceived and acknowledged as a reality by social actors or not (Beck and Grande, 2010). The adjective global in the term ‘global risk’, then, does not refer to the (geo- graphical) reach of the unintended consequences of decisions, but is applied by Beck as a question mark that casts a shadow of doubt over the idea of ‘risk’ as a (modern) technology to be applied ‘naturally’ in dealing with the world.

The third aspect that shapes the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ is an ‘inherent uncertainty’. This uncertainty is due to the ambivalence between the contemporary horizons of experience and horizons of expectations, on the one side, and modern principles and institutions, on the other. Beck captures this in (his take on) the theory of reflexive modernization (see e.g. Beck, 1994). According to this theory, both the basic principles of modernity (e.g. freedom, market dependence, rationality, progress, statehood) and modern basic institutions (e.g. the nation-state, the family) are radicalized in the course of industrial modernization and its side-effects. These side-effects are actually (in contrast to potentially) occurring, unintended consequences of ‘industrial’ or ‘techno-economic decisions and considerations of utility’ (such as climate change) that have not been accounted for in the ‘risk’ assessments that guided past decisions. As Beck stresses, these side-effects are not necessarily negative. New kinds of family constellations that arise from advancements in reproductive health or from new communication technologies also fall into this category (see e.g. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2013). In this process of reflexive modernization, modern institutions and principles are confronted with the consequences of the progress of modernization itself, which ‘reflexively’ overturns its own foundations, its institutions and principles. This means that lived reality – the horizons of experience and horizons of expectations of the ‘side-effect cosmopolitization’ (*Nebenfolgen-Kosmopolitisierung*) – correlates neither with the institutions of modern national societies nor with their principles. Contemporary individuals enter a *Nicht-Koordinatensystem ihrer Erfahrungen*, as Beck (2013) puts it, ‘a non-coordinate system of their experiences’, which exists beyond existing categories. In this sense, Beck (1991: 41) sees modernity as ‘a sub-political “revolutionary system” without a revolutionary program or goal’.

As is particularly clearly outlined in Beck and Lau (2004), as well as in Beck (2009b), this is to be grasped as a process of ‘politicization’ (see also Holzer and Sørensen, 2003). The word ‘politicization’ denotes the process in which things that used to be perceived as (anthropological) constants move into the realm of choice, decision and conflict.

‘Tradition of the national perspective’

The second moment that constitutes the ‘cosmopolitized world’ is what I grasp as the ‘tradition of the national perspective’. The ‘national perspective’ is a way of looking at the world that is grounded in ‘the equation of the nation-state with national society’, as Beck (2006: 48) puts it

– ‘one of the most powerful convictions concerning society and politics’ (Beck, 2006: 24). In a nutshell, the ‘tradition of the national perspective’ is to be understood as the tradition that is blind to the reality of the internal cosmopolitization of societies that has been sketched above. It reproduces ‘the categories in terms of which we understand reality that take the nation-state as the norm’ (Beck, 2006: 73).³ Accordingly, it produces an ideational layer, a perception of the world that generates institutions that are not only inadequate in the face of the above sketched ‘cosmopolitized reality’, but that fuel the problems these institutions try to tackle. Beck (in Grefe, 2000) calls them ‘zombie institutions’, which are institutions that

appear to be alive but are actually dead. For instance, the tradition of the national perspective ‘fails to grasp that political, economic and cultural actions and their (intended and unintended) consequences know no borders; indeed, it is completely blind to the fact that, even when nationalism is reignited by the collision with globality’ (Beck, 2006: 18), this can only be conceptualized by understanding the revival of exclusive nationalism as a fight against what was conceptualized above as the ‘cosmopolitized reality’.

The ‘cosmopolitized world’

In my concept ‘cosmopolitized world’, the two above-sketched moments, the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ and the ‘tradition of the national perspective’, interplay and bring out historical actualizations of each other that constitute social reality. Hence, both moments need to be taken together. It is this interplay of the two moments, then, that shapes the ‘cosmopolitized world’.

This interplay is not to be mistaken as leading in a particular direction. It is not to be understood as following a distinct trajectory, against which it could be assessed. This is where the aspect of the non-linearity of the ‘cosmopolitized world’ comes in. Putting it differently, it would be misguided to start from the premise that social reality was moving into a distinct (preassumed) direction (see especially Beck, 2016). In this sense, the processes of the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ are not to be mistaken as a reality that leads to a (normative) cosmopolitan consciousness, or cosmopolitan subjects or actors (see e.g. Beck, 2004: 115) – it may or may not do so. Or, the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ might actually never be acknowledged as a reality, leaving perspectives deeply shaped by an explicitly exclusive actualization of ‘the tradition of the national perspective’ – which is, however, not to be thought of as an absence of the ‘cosmopolitized reality’, but as a distinct actualization of the interplay between the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ and the ‘tradition of the national perspective’. Or, if acknowledged, it might trigger ‘the defensive impulses of those who think in nation-state categories’ (Beck, 2006: 74).⁵ Importantly, the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ is not to be mistaken as the opposite of the ‘national’ reality, and ‘the cosmopolitized’ is not to be understood as the opposite of ‘the national’.

With Beck (2004: 15), we need to understand that the ‘cosmopolitized reality’, as I have conceptualized it above, is an integral part of the redefinition of ‘the national’, and, following my interpretation above, of distinct actualizations of the ‘tradition of the national perspective’. The social world and, for instance, ‘security’ in this social world are then to be understood as a distinct historical product of the interplay of the above-sketched two moments. This means that the Beckian ‘cosmopolitized world’ is a world of a ‘both/and’ (‘sowohl-als-auch’) rather than an ‘either/or’ (‘entweder-oder’) (see e.g. Beck and Lau, 2004). As such, similar to imaginations of the world as for instance brought forward by international relations scholars, such as prominently Der Derian and Shapiro (1989), the Beckian ‘cosmopolitized world’ is a world that cannot be grasped through comfortable (modern) dichotomies of inside/outside, national/international, political/non-political, etc. In the ‘cosmopolitized world’, however, the ‘either/or’ is not simply obsolete but replaced through a ‘both/and’. This ‘both/and’ is, as I have argued, the historical product of the interplay of the above-sketched two moments.

This makes the ‘cosmopolitized world’ an uncomfortable place in which to do research. As Nina Degele (2010: 177) observes, ‘serious social scientists do not like the idea of “both/and”’. Importantly, it makes it a place that needs its own language and consequently – to return to the point made at the beginning of this article – that requires flexibility and can only be approached with a degree of provisionality.

Bringing Beck into security studies

By means of experimenting with the developed concept ‘cosmopolitized world’ and in order to test a path for bringing Beck further into security studies, I now want to approach from within this ‘cosmopolitized world’ a security-related issue in which I am interested. This is the discourse of ‘US national security’ as it is manifest in US President Barack Obama’s 2015 National Security Strategy (White House, 2015).⁵

By the discourse of ‘US national security’ I mean the web of meanings that forms social reality under the label ‘US national security’. Following Wæver (2005), central to this discourse are the inter- woven meanings of the subject that is to be secured (i.e. the US collective self), the object in the face of which this subject is to be secured (i.e. threats, dangers, risks), as well as the environment that brings them out and in which they exist (see Buzan and Hansen, 2009; Campbell, 1992; Diez, 2004; Weldes et al., 1999a). Understood in this sense, ‘US national security’ is manifest in language and texts, such as the 2015 National Security Strategy, where texts are taken not as mirrors of an external reality but as ‘hav[ing] concrete and significant, material effects. They allocate social capacities and resources and make practices possible’ (Weldes et al., 1999b: 16–17). They constitute ‘interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others’ (Doty, 1993: 298). The goal of exploring webs of meanings, such as ‘US national security’, through the analysis of language and texts, such as the 2015 National Security Strategy, is then to shed light on these ‘interpretive dispositions’.

In order to approach ‘US national discourse’ within the ‘cosmopolitized world’, I first set out to reconstruct its construction in the text of the 2015 National Security Strategy. This was done from within the security studies discourse through a standard (not specifically ‘Beckian’) constructivist analysis that was guided by the above-sketched aspects of ‘US national security’. Methodologically, the reconstruction of the construction of US national security was, again, done in a standard way, namely, through the deciphering of meanings in the text and the detection of patterns in it through the reorganization of its content. For that, I used ‘flexible’ codes and categories (Schreier, 2013: 171; see also Mayring, 2010: 13) and a cyclic approach (see Flick, 2002: 196, 218; for similar approaches, see Baumann, 2005; Wagner, 2003). The process of ‘deciphering’ and coding was shaped by a pre-knowledge of political language, along with content- and text-analytical research strategies (see Girth, 2002; Fairclough, 2001; Schwarz-Friesel and Consten, 2014; Mayring, 2010; Schreier, 2013), which means that a central first step in unlocking meanings in the 2015 National Security Strategy was to explore various concordances and collocates, using the software AntConc. In order to identify particularities in the construction of US national security in the 2015 National Security Strategy, I used the text of the 2010 National Security Strategy (White House, 2010) as a comparative data source, albeit without conducting a comparative study.

In the following, I first present the reconstruction and the the Beckian interpretation of it.

‘US national security’ in Obama’s 2015 National Security Strategy: A reconstruction

Obama’s 2015 National Security Strategy was published in February of that year. Unlike some of its predecessors, particularly the 2002 National Security Strategy that set out the so-called Bush Doctrine, the 2015 National Security Strategy hardly attracted any attention. This is surprising because the reconstruction of how US national security is constructed in it exposes a complex picture. This picture can be sketched in four points, as demonstrated next.

The USA as a borderless, self-contained and self-interested unit

The USA is a ‘borderless’ unit in a borderless world. More precisely, it is a borderless unit in a world without national borders. There are only a few references to ‘borders’ in the 2015 National Security Strategy. The word ‘border’ appears only four times, with only one occasion concretely referencing US national borders (White House, 2015: 7).⁶ The ‘national

border' does not play a role in the manifestation of the political unit 'USA'. Instead, the USA takes its form as a robust and self-contained unit (a) through its existence outside of world developments (White House, 2015: 5) and (b) by turning into a solid, 'resilient' mass. The USA is the unit that it is because of its disposition 'resilience'.⁷ National borders do not serve a constitutive function in the establishment of the political unit 'USA'.

Furthermore, the USA exists outside of world developments and the 'transitions' (White House, 2015: 5) that are unfolding in the world. As an external bystander, it has an eye on these transitions, seizing opportunities to influence external 'trajectories' (White House, 2015: 5), taking advantage of them or protecting itself against their impacts. Yet it is not inevitably a part of them. Conflicts, for instance, exist as either 'inter-state' or 'within states' phenomena (White House, 2015: 10–11), and, in any case, strictly in a world 'outside' the USA. If it does not set these conflicts explicitly as one of its 'priorities' (White House, 2015: 10–11), the USA is not implicated in contemporary conflicts. The USA is a distanced, contained unit that has its destiny in its own hands.

The focus of the unit 'USA' is to defend, advance and secure its own interests. 'Interests' refer solely and narrowly to US interests. 'Shared' or 'common interests' with actors other than the USA do not play a role. This becomes clear in a comparison with the 2010 National Security Strategy,⁸ which also reveals that in the 2015 National Security Strategy, the USA is not doing anything 'on behalf of' anybody or anything,⁹ just as 'international responsibilities' are embraced only if to do so 'serves [US] interests, upholds [US] commitments to allies and partners, and addresses threats that are truly global' (White House, 2015: 7).

A post-geopolitical, flexible security environment

The security environment in which the USA finds itself is a stable, predictable environment. As yet, this environment is not totally familiar to the USA. It finds itself in a 'new century' (White House, 2015: Preface). By nature, however, it is a stable environment. It is a 'landscape' that is subject to 'shifts' (White House, 2015: 1), but not seismic changes. As a 'landscape', the security environment is 'out there', like (a second) nature. In fact, the 2015 National Security Strategy serves 'as a compass for how this Administration, in partnership with the Congress, will lead the world through [this landscape] toward a more durable peace and a new prosperity' (White House, 2015: 1, emphasis added). The cardinal direction in which the clear set goals ('a more durable peace and a new prosperity') are to be found is known – all that is needed is a functioning compass for the USA, as the 'undeniable leader' (White House, 2015: Preface), to find the right track and follow it towards its final goal.

While the security environment is by nature a predictable and essentially stable landscape 'out there', the strategic environment of actors, alliances and coalitions is 'fluid' (White House, 2015: 5). The one constant in this environment is the USA as the leader and facilitator of international collective action. The leading role of the USA is 'essential'; it is an 'undeniable truth – America must lead' (White House, 2015: Preface). America's role is to trigger and mobilize the international community to face challenges; this leadership is guided by the USA's 'enduring national interests' (White House, 2015: 2) and grounded in the conviction that 'we are stronger when we mobilize collective action' (White House, 2015: Preface).

The strategic environment is a post-geopolitical environment with alliances, coalitions and cooperations that are flexible and target-oriented. It is a world beyond ideology (as an organizational principle), in which there are also no 'inevitable' (White House, 2015: 24). For instance, in reference to the USA's relationships with countries in Latin America, it is clear that 'though a few countries in the region remain trapped in old ideological debates, we

will keep working with all governments that are interested in cooperating with us in practical ways' (White House, 2015: 28, emphasis added). While there are historically grounded alliances that are 'enduring' (White House, 2015: 25), such as with Europe, the approach to secure national security is to mobilize and partner with any capable, effective and, importantly, 'responsible' actors. There are no 'hostile' nations, states and actors in this environment, nor are there 'centers of influence' or, in fact, 'like-minded nations'.¹⁰ Instead, it is a world in which we have 'responsible', 'irresponsible' and 'malicious' actors (see e.g. White House, 2015: 12). It is a world that is about conduct rather than status or ideological stance.

A central strategic focus in this environment is 'shared spaces', which are to be protected. These are 'cyber, space, air, and oceans' (White House, 2015: 7). 'Shared spaces' are a new feature of the world in the 2015 National Security Strategy; they did not exist in the 2010 National Security Strategy. Shared spaces enable 'the free flow of people, goods, services, and ideas'. They are nothing less than the 'arteries of the global economy and civil society' (White House, 2015: 7). As the biological metaphor indicates, these 'shared spaces' are of existential importance in the world of the 2015 National Security Strategy.

Manageable and predictable threats and dangers

In the stable security environment, there are no existential threats to the USA (see e.g. White House, 2015: 5). The environment is also not shaped by any kind of acute crisis that would require concrete security measures. In fact, it is explicitly a post-crisis environment, in which the world has overcome 'the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression' (White House, 2015: 7) thanks to the 'active leadership' of the USA (White House, 2015: 1). Nevertheless, the USA stands at a 'pivotal moment' (White House, 2015: 1) – that is, at a moment that requires action and decisions. This pivotal moment, however, is not a moment of existential but of strategic relevance. It has arisen not because of external developments but because of US action. Two developments have given rise to this moment: on one side is the growth in the USA's economic strength, on the other are the move away from ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the unrivalled military strength of the USA and the renewal of its alliances (White House, 2015: Preface). What constitutes this 'pivotal moment' is that the USA 'continue[s] to face serious challenges to our national security' although it 'is working to shape the opportunities of tomorrow' (White House, 2015: Preface). In other words, the USA did everything right in the past but still faces challenges to its national security – hence, the 'pivotal moment' is for the USA to decide on which direction to go next – as a matter not of existential crisis, but of 'managerial' reassessment.

The post-crisis security environment is shaped by two kinds of 'challenges'. First, there is the 'persistent risk of attacks on America' and its 'allies' through 'violent extremism and an evolving terrorist threat'. Second, there are various issues that 'give rise to anxieties about global security'. These are, concretely, 'escalating challenges to cybersecurity, aggression by Russia, the accelerating impacts of climate change, and the outbreak of infectious diseases' (White House, 2015: Preface). What all these kinds of challenges to US national security share, in addition to the fact that they are not existential, is that they are manageable – although in different ways. The first kind of challenge – namely, attacks on America and its allies – constitutes a 'risk'. It is about a potentiality that is a persistent 'reality'. By its nature as a 'risk', this kind of challenge is calculable and requires expert assessments, including measures of 'intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance' (White House, 2015: 9), as well as a preventative and proactive approach. The second kind of challenge to US national security is different from the first in that it is not about the potentiality of an attack, but about concrete, existing and graspable challenges. They might appear complex and might cause 'anxieties', but a 'clear-eyed' approach (White House, 2015: 4) allows them to be

grasped. This is possible because they are actually not new or unknown. They are ‘escalations’ and ‘accelerations’ of challenges (White House, 2015: Preface) – that is, they are not ‘different in kind’ but ‘different in degree’ from past challenges. They are familiar and, in accordance with the nature of challenges, can be faced and overcome.

A civil security strategy

In the post-crisis security environment, the strategy is to establish a ‘rules-based international order’, designed according to US values and interests, in order to secure US influence and power (see e.g. White House, 2015: 1). The global market is the main focus of attention given that ‘despite its success, our rules-based system is now competing against alternative, less-open models’, manifest in ‘emerging challenges like state-owned enterprises and digital protectionism’ (White House, 2015: 15).

Another key aspect of the strategy is the active shaping of ‘opportunities of tomorrow’ (White House, 2015: Preface) to eliminate challenges to US national security. Influence and ‘smart’ investments are key devices in this strategy, in which the USA ‘must recognize that a smart national security strategy does not rely solely on military power’ (White House, 2015: Preface), not least because ‘large-scale ground wars’ and military interventions are ‘costly’ (White House, 2015: 17). This civil security strategy widens the realm of who is a security actor. In addition to ‘civil society’, two new security actors have appeared: ‘entrepreneurs’ and ‘young people’, notably not just in the USA but across the world and its ‘shared spaces’. Engagement with these key actors is as valuable and important as the support of democratic transition (White House, 2015: Preface). In comparison, national governments are not irrelevant, but nor are they more prominently positioned than civil security actors. They are assigned the role of facilitators to ‘apply on a larger scale’ (White House, 2015: Preface) what civil society has invented and developed. Ultimately, the global market is the field of change and security politics. This is also manifest more generally in the language that shapes the 2015 National Security Strategy. It is about the ‘seizing of opportunities’ and ‘dealing with risks’ (White House, 2015: Preface); this is a dichotomy that serves as the key explanatory device in the document. Opportunities come before risks, and risks are only the calculable flipside of opportunities and chances. It is a market language, the language of entrepreneurs, one that is about ‘investments’ and ‘smart’ moves in a ‘young century’ (White House, 2015: 1), which is full of opportunities and chances for those who are ‘responsible’, ‘innovative’ and follow the rules.

‘US national security’ within the ‘cosmopolitized world’

Systematic analysis of the 2015 National Security Strategy reveals a picture of the discourse of ‘US national security’ that seems full of tensions. There is a tension between the representation of the political subject the USA and the role of civil society, young people and entrepreneurs around the world, who have taken the position of global security actors. There is a tension between the public and the private. There is a tension between the borderless world in which the USA exists and its national security interests. There is a tension between the nation-state USA and a post-crisis world without existential threats. There is a tension between risks and anxieties about global security. And there is a tension between a world beyond geopolitics and an international system based on multilateralism. US national security, as constructed in the 2015 National Security Strategy, cannot easily be grasped and explained through a language of dichotomies. Nor can it be easily explained, for instance, through reference to broad shifts, such as towards ‘prevention’ and ‘preemption’ or ‘resilience’; nor can it be easily captured as a (further) widening or broadening of security (see e.g. Bonss, 2011; Daase, 2010). This brings us back to Beck and the aim of reading ‘US

national security' – that is, to shed light on the 'interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others' (Doty, 1993: 298) – within the 'cosmopolitized world'. In fact, looking at the tensions that seem to shape 'US national security' as it is constructed in the 2015 National Security Strategy, it becomes clear that a Beck-inspired interpretation not only might generate new insights by virtue of the novelty of the concept 'cosmopolitized world' in security studies, but might be positively productive in making sense of exactly these tensions.

Linking back to my conceptualization of the 'cosmopolitized world', in this world these tensions are not (to be read as) tensions but (as) the 'natural' reality of 'US national security'. They are the reality of a 'cosmopolitized' 'US national security', one could say, which is 'US national security' understood in a world that is shaped by the interplay of the 'cosmopolitized reality' and the 'tradition of the national perspective'.¹¹ As sketched above, this interplay is not to be imagined as leading in a particular direction. It is not to be presumed to follow a distinct trajectory, against which it could be interpreted; and it is not about 'either/or'. Rather, it is about 'both/and', as it is to be understood as a particular historical product of the interplay of the two moments 'cosmopolitized reality' and 'tradition of the national perspective'.

Starting on this ground, a reading of the discourse of 'US national security' from within the 'cosmopolitized world' allows us to see that the 2015 National Security Strategy holds what we might call a 'radical/non-radical' 'interpretive disposition'. I use the awkward term 'radical/non-radical' as provisional terminology for want of an existing (and better) expression. It is a testimony to the language vacuum (mentioned above) that makes it hard to name things in Beck's 'cosmopolitized world'. With the term 'radical/non-radical', I mean to identify the distinct 'both/and' dynamics that the 'US national security' discourse holds, where 'radical' refers to possibilities away from a traditional stance of the 'tradition of the national perspective', and 'non-radical' refers to possibilities closer to a traditional stance of the 'tradition of the national perspective'. Referring to what has been discussed above, the 'traditional' stance of the 'tradition of the national perspective' is a perspective that is blind to the reality of the internal cosmopolitization of societies and reproduces 'the categories in terms of which we understand reality that take the nation-state as the norm' (Beck, 2006: 73).

So, in what sense does the discourse of 'US national security' – that is, the 'interpretive disposition' in the 2015 National Security Strategy – hold 'radical' and 'non-radical' possibilities?

To begin with, the 'interpretive disposition' in the 2015 National Security Strategy holds 'radical' possibilities in that traditional security institutions, actors and principles, including national borders, are replaced by other institutions, actors and principles – namely, the market, entrepreneurs and young people. Given that there are no existential threats in the US national security environment, and given that market logic has replaced 'traditional' security logics, it paves the way for particular new security actors with their own desirable dispositions. Notably, the desirable dispositions of these actors are not national dispositions but market-valuable ones. With that, a new cross-planetary demography (of security actors) is sliced and produced, namely 'responsible' young people and entrepreneurs, across national boundaries. This holds 'radical' possibilities, as it opens up the field of 'security' beyond a conception of security as something that is intimately and performatively linked to the existence and survival of the nation-state. It holds 'radical' possibilities because it reproduces a position and world away from the traditional stance of the 'tradition of the national perspective' – particularly given that the dissolution of the idea of the distinctly bordered 'national' is at the heart of nothing less than the strategy to secure the national self.

However, within a ‘cosmopolitized world’ constituted by the interplay of its two moments, the ‘dissolution’ of ‘the national container’ is not (to be seen as) a dissolution of ‘the national container’ per se, but (as) a ‘national’ reality that is the product of the interplay with the ‘cosmopolitized reality’. This gives an interesting twist to the above observation. Going a step further, then, what we actually see from within a ‘cosmopolitized world’ is that the ‘interpretive disposition’ in the 2015 National Security Strategy inherently fuels the increasing enmeshment of lived realities and, with that, the ‘internal cosmopolitization’ of its own society. It inherently fuels these things because, as we have seen above, the dissolution of borders, the focus on the market and the significance of new security actors are (constructed as) a strategic security necessity. With that, this ‘interpretive disposition’ is inscribed and naturalized within nothing less than a traditional stance of the ‘tradition of the national perspective’. And with that, it transforms it.¹²

Yet, at the same time, this ‘fueling’ of the process of ‘cosmopolitization’ and the opening of ‘security’ is distinctly ‘tamed’. This is where the ‘non-radical’ of the ‘both/and’ category comes in. The ‘fueling’ of the process is ‘non-radical’ because even though ‘security’ is opened owing to the replacement of security institutions, actors and principles through the market, this shift is actually ‘only’ a shift from one modern set of institutions and principles to another modern set of institutions and principles, as opposed to a set of institutions and principles that are shaped by a more ‘radical’ stance of the ‘tradition of the national perspective’. In this sense, the ‘radical’ possibilities that this shift holds is inherently ‘tamed’ in a modern frame.

Furthermore, the ‘interpretive disposition’ in the 2015 National Security Strategy holds ‘non-radical’ possibilities in that it reproduces a ‘contained’ political unit, the USA. There are no ‘global risks’, understood in the above-sketched Beckian way, or fundamental uncertainties in the security environment ‘US national security’ as it is constructed in the 2015 National Security Strategy. The threats that exist are controllable and manageable. They are grasped with the concepts of ‘challenges’, ‘dangers’ and ‘risks’. Consequences of actions are predictable, contained and attributable, which makes it possible for the USA to be an ‘outsider’ to the world’s ‘inter-state’ or ‘within state’ conflicts. Consequently, the ‘interpretive disposition’ of the 2015 National Security Strategy holds the possibility of the USA as a security actor that is able to clearly determine – that is, control – its engagement in world developments. In this sense, the contemporary ‘US national security’ environment is an environment without a fundamental enmeshment of the ‘global other’ in the decisions of the USA or other ‘global others’. Consequently, there is no need to cooperate (*Kooperationszwang*) and no interrelation of responsibility (*Verantwortungszusammenhang*). It is a world in which there is actually no ‘cosmopolitized reality’. In this sense, the ‘interpretive disposition’ of the 2015 National Security Strategy reproduces a ‘non-radical’ political subject, the USA, as a global actor in a world of closed containers, in which reflexive side-effects do not exist – or, at least, do not cross borders. This means, then, that it holds the possibility for the political container USA to act in an ‘unrestrained’ fashion in the global world – that is, ‘restrained’ only by choice, not on the grounds of the fate of ‘global others’. In this way, a particular national unit and self USA is reproduced. Yet, again, this does not happen on an ‘either/or’ (‘national/non-national’) but through a ‘both/and’ basis. Through this ‘both/and’, the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ is already and inevitably intimately inscribed a distinct way in the national unit USA, namely by being ‘excluded’ through a ‘non-radical’ (modern) stance of the ‘tradition of the national perspective’.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that if we wish to take Beck seriously, we need to go beyond his ‘risk society’ thesis and acknowledge that his main thesis was that we live in a social

reality that is qualitatively new and, consequently, calls for a radical shift in how we look at and talk about it. To bring Beck into security studies, then, means to study ‘security’ from within his ‘new world’. For that, I argued, a sharper conception of what characterizes Beck’s world is needed. At the heart of my article I provided such a conception, the ‘cosmopolitized world’, which I identified as being shaped by non-linearity and the interplay of two moments: the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ and the ‘tradition of the national perspective’. In this context, I stressed the ‘both/and’, as opposed to ‘either/or’, nature of the ‘cosmopolitized world’. Building on this concept, I set out to test a new path with Beck into security studies and read the discourse of ‘US national security’, as I have reconstructed it from the USA’s 2015 National Security Strategy, from within this ‘cosmopolitized world’. In a discourse-analytical fashion, my aim was to shed light on the 2015 National Security Strategy’s ‘interpretive disposition’ and the possibilities it holds. From the outset, an approach from within the ‘cosmopolitized world’ opens a new perspective as it turns the various tensions that seem to shape ‘US national security’ into the very (‘cosmopolitized’) nature of ‘US national security’. In general, my experimental analysis brought to light a particular ‘interpretive disposition’, which I labelled ‘radical/non-radical’. Grounded in my initial insights, new questions arise to be asked in similar future studies – prominently, of course, whether and how the discovered ‘interpretive disposition’ appears in other distinct discursive moments beyond the narrow case of the 2015 National Security Strategy. Further, my initial insights bring up the question of what exactly is the nature of the particular national unit that is produced through this ‘radical/non-radical’ disposition, as the historical product of the interplay between the ‘cosmopolitized reality’ and the ‘tradition of the national perspective’. Looking over the analysis, it is here that the challenges of following Beck into his ‘new world’ and studying ‘security’ from within it become apparent. While the potentials of social research from within a ‘both/and’ world are apparent, in that it forces us to see a different world altogether, it requires a scholarly imagination and, importantly, language that is strictly beyond the idea of linearity and ‘either/or’. Conceptions such as ‘more national’ or ‘more cosmopolitized’ do not exist in this world and force the search for adequate attributes – such as the ‘radical/non-radical’ formulation tested in the present article – which can only be provisional. It is particularly the lack of an adequate language that makes the new path suggested here for bringing Beck into security studies rocky. What is needed in order to make it more inviting is the development of a political vocabulary of the ‘cosmopolitized world’. For that, we need further scholarly experimentation with and within Beck’s ‘new world’.

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Notes

1. In the sociological scholarship, there is, of course, a wide set of writings that go beyond 'risk society'.
2. This was the focus of Beck's unfinished European Research Council-funded project 'Methodological Cosmopolitanism' (planned for 2013–2018).
3. The translation does not come up to the original: 'nationalstaatlich normierte ... Kategorien des Wirklichkeitsverständnisses' (Beck, 2004: 114).
4. In the original, it is 'Verriegelungseffekt des nationalstaatlichen Denkens' (Beck, 2004: 114).
5. The National Security Strategy is a public document that communicates the US President's 'strategic vision to Congress' (Snider, 1995: 5) and serves to steer 'administrations to think in a coherent way about the beliefs and purposes behind their foreign policy and [communicate] those beliefs and purposes to audiences outside the White House' (Quinn, 2015: 4). For a general discussion of the National Security Strategy, see Snider (1995).
6. This is in contrast to the National Security Strategy 2010, in which national borders in general and US borders in particular play a central role – manifest, for example, in expressions such as 'what takes place within our borders will determine our strength and influence beyond them' (White House, 2010: 2); overall, the word 'border' is used ten times in the 2010 National Security Strategy.
7. For a discussion of 'resilience' and 'resilient' in Obama's National Security Strategy, see Selchow (2016).
8. For instance, 'In order for collective action to be mobilized, the polarization that persists across region, race, and religion will need to be replaced by a galvanizing sense of shared interest' (White House, 2010: 13).
9. In contrast, see the 2010 National Security Strategy, which speaks of 'engagement abroad on behalf of a world in which individuals enjoy more freedom and opportunity', 'working to strengthen international norms on behalf of human rights', and 'developing new partnerships in Muslim communities around the world on behalf of health, education, science, employment, and innovation' (White House, 2010: 2, 5, 22, emphasis added).
10. These play an important role in the 2010 National Security Strategy.
11. Referring back to the important distinction between 'cosmopolitization' and 'cosmopolitanism' in Beck, this is not to be confused with 'cosmopolitan security', as for instance conceptualized by Burke (2013).
12. In view of Beck's latest book, one might need to say it 'metamorphoses' rather than 'transforms' (Beck, 2016).

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