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To cite this article: Peter Hopkins, Kathrin Hörschelmann, Matthew. C Benwell & Catherine Studemeyer (2018): Young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity, *Social & Cultural Geography*, DOI: [10.1080/14649365.2018.1460863](https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2018.1460863)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2018.1460863>



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Published online: 24 Apr 2018.



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Young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity

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ABSTRACT

Debates about 'security' rarely feature children or younger people, whilst research with children and young people seldom focuses upon issues traditionally found within security studies. Building upon long-standing debates about political geographies of youth and political participation as well as feminist geopolitics and emerging discussions about children's and young people's geopolitics, we chart young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity. Key themes explored here include: secure pasts and insecure futures; ontological security and insecure selves; online security and digital insecurities; home(land) securities and insecure households and families; and global securities and insecure worlds.

Paysages quotidiens de sécurité et d'insécurité des jeunes

RÉSUMÉ

Les débats sur la « sécurité » incluent rarement les enfants et les jeunes et la recherche sur les enfants et les jeunes se concentre peu souvent sur les problèmes que l'on trouve traditionnellement dans les études sur la sécurité. En nous appuyant sur des débats de longue date au sujet des géographies politiques des jeunes et de la participation politique ainsi que sur les géopolitiques féministes et les discussions émergentes sur les géopolitiques des enfants et des jeunes, nous dessinons les paysages quotidiens de la sécurité et de l'insécurité des jeunes. Les thèmes clés explorés ici incluent : les passés sûrs et les futurs incertains, la sécurité ontologique et le moi incertain, la sécurité en ligne et les insécurités numériques, les sécurités du chez soi (de la patrie) et les foyers et les familles manquant de sécurité et les sécurités mondiales et l'insécurité des mondes.

Los paisajes cotidianos de seguridad e inseguridad de los jóvenes

RESUMEN

Los debates sobre 'seguridad' rara vez incluyen a niños o personas más jóvenes, mientras que la investigación con niños y jóvenes rara vez

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 13 March 2018
Accepted 20 March 2018

KEYWORDS

Young people; children; security; insecurity; geopolitics

MOTS CLÉS

jeunes; enfants; sécurité; insécurité; géopolitiques

PALABRAS CLAVE

jóvenes; niños; seguridad; inseguridad; geopolítica

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se centra en cuestiones tradicionalmente que se pueden encontrar en los estudios de seguridad. Sobre la base de debates de larga data sobre geografías políticas de la juventud y la participación política, así como la geopolítica feminista y las discusiones emergentes sobre la geopolítica de niños y jóvenes, se trazan los paisajes cotidianos de seguridad e inseguridad de los jóvenes. Los temas clave explorados aquí incluyen: pasados seguros y futuros inseguros; seguridad ontológica y el yo inseguro; seguridad en línea e inseguridades digitales; seguridad nacional y hogares y familias inseguros; y seguridades globales y mundos inseguros.

Introduction

As much scholarship inspired by the ‘new sociology of childhood’ has demonstrated, young people are not simply the passive recipients and bearers of sociopolitical developments, but play a key role in bringing about societal futures (e.g. Diuk, 2013). In security politics it is, after all, children’s and young people’s futures, which are primarily at stake and they are very much at the centre of debates. Despite the deep impact of security politics and in wider forms of securitisation and desecuritisation, on young people’s lives and their complicated positionings in relation to these, debates within ‘Security Studies’ rarely feature any consideration of children and young people – let alone age – as variables of analysis (Beier, 2015; Brocklehurst, 2005). This marginalisation in academic research on security often mirrors the striking absence of young people at global policy events, such as the 2017 Munich Security Conference. Young people are treated as citizens-in-the-making in policy-making and research concerning security (Lawy & Biesta, 2006; Maira, 2009). Where they are consulted and given opportunities to participate in political decision-making, there is a tendency to treat “youth” as a homogenous and separate generational group, thus eclipsing the diversity of their perspectives and the range of conflicting views, intersecting inequalities and inter-generational relations experienced and negotiated by younger people (Hörschelmann & Reich, 2017; Vanderbeck, 2007).

Furthermore, discussion about children’s and young people’s everyday lives are rarely framed using the terminology and discourse found within ‘Security Studies’ and instead tend to focus on issues of safety and risk. In childhood studies and children’s geographies, concerns about the well-being of children tend to focus upon debates connected with minimising risk and danger whilst promoting safety; these all invoke ideas of security but are rarely framed in such a way. By contrast, research about young people often responds to their position as simultaneously marginalised and excluded whilst also being dangerous and ‘out of control’; again security is an underlying theme but rarely is it explicitly addressed. So, whilst ideas of security appear as an undercurrent in research about childhood and youth, the figure of the child or young person is mostly absent in security studies with a small number of notable exceptions (e.g. Beier, 2015; Brocklehurst, 2005, 2006, 2015). Some work in childhood and youth research touches upon the themes we explore here through its focus on, for example, geopolitics (Benwell & Hopkins, 2016), militarisation (Beier, 2011), or conflict, violence and peace (Harker et al., 2017; Leonard, 2013; Wells & Montgomery, 2014), however, an explicit focus on landscapes of security and insecurity in the lives of children and young people has not found reflection in wider debates. As noted by Beier (2015) in the introduction to a special issue on “Security/Childhood”, there is a need for a critical set of conversations

between security studies and childhood and youth studies. We demonstrate through this special issue that social and cultural geographies of young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity should form a key part of these conversations.

There have been debates in four interrelated fields upon which we can draw to assist us in advancing understanding of young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity. First, political geographers interested in the lives of children and young people have been drawing attention to the political agency of children and young people for some time (e.g. Hörschelmann, 2008; Hopkins, 2007; Hopkins & Alexander, 2010; Hopkins & Todd, 2015; Philo & Smith, 2003, 2013; Skelton, 2013). An important contribution of this work has been to demonstrate the complex ways in which young people's lives shape and are shaped by politics, politicians and participation, including recognition of the ways in which children and young people are active social and political actors. Sitting alongside work about the political geographies of children and young people, a second set of debates upon which we draw in this collection is interdisciplinary work about young people and political participation (e.g. Henn & Foard, 2012; O'Toole, 2003). Scholarship in this area has enabled a broadening of traditional understandings of politics and political participation beyond simply focusing on patterns of voting or political party membership. This has enabled researchers to explore the diverse ways in which young people are political and engage in politics. A third area upon which we can draw is feminist geopolitics and in particular research about embodied geopolitics (e.g. Hyndman, 2001, 2004) and the relationship between the global and the intimate (e.g. Cowen & Story, 2013; Pain, 2009, 2014). A significant contribution of this work is that it has demonstrated the ways in which geopolitics is embodied, emotional and enters into the personal fabric of everyday life. Fourth, more recently – and drawing upon political geographies of youth and feminist geopolitics – a critical geopolitics of children and young people has started to develop (Benwell, 2014; Benwell & Hopkins, 2016; Harker et al., 2017; Hyndman, 2010; Kuus, 2007; Staeheli et al., 2013; Studemeyer, 2015; Wells, 2015; Wells & Montgomery, 2014). Much of this work integrates debates about political geographies of youth with those found in youth participation and feminist geopolitics. What follows briefly addresses theoretical and conceptual contexts in which scholars are approaching the landscapes of young people's securities and insecurities whilst introducing the four papers that comprise this special issue. Following this, we briefly investigate key themes and debates within this emerging field which include a focus on everyday landscapes of security and insecurity in younger people's lives in their own terms.

Young people, security and insecurity

Beier (2015) notes that it is not enough to simply 'add in' children to security studies or to 'find' children in security studies as both approaches rely on imposing mainstream understandings of security onto children and young people. He urges that thinking about children in security studies necessitates 'theorising childhood' and bringing this to bear on conceptualisations of 'the political':

Thinking about childhood in relation to security, then, necessarily entails a challenging of prevailing commitments and common senses concerning the political, in which status quo interests may be deeply invested and by which status quo relations of power are sustained. Fundamentally at issue here are particular renderings and boundaries of political subjecthood which work to objectify children and youth and locate them outside of political life. (Beier, 2015, p. 7)

Part of the challenge of understanding young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity then, is about ensuring that our approach to 'security' acknowledges its multidimensionality, complexity and multiplicity. This is about recognising the centrality of children and young people to security – as agents and subject to different forms of security and securitisation – such as in military work, as peace activists or being involved in radical political groups. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that security and securitisation are often conducted in the name of children and young people; discourses of childhood and youth are often invoked in such a way that it becomes a necessity to ensure security for children's future. A wide range of security issues interconnect in young people's lives, as Human Security literatures focused, especially, on personal security recognise (Breslin & Christou, 2015; Gasper & Gómez, 2015). In geography, Philo (2011) has made a similar point, cautioning against 'big-S' Security issues being given precedence over 'small-s' security whilst observing that both are interconnected. Recognition of these interconnections will assist us in advancing appreciation of young people's everyday social and cultural geographies of security and insecurity. It will also pave the way towards careful analyses of the specific ways in which different forms of (in)security interweave across uneven social and cultural landscapes of young people's lives (cf. Hörschelmann, 2016). These debates provide the background for the four papers that follow. We now introduce each of these in turn.

The first paper in this special issue is by *Elizabeth Olson*; she takes an historical perspective to explore the relationships between youth, security and caregiving in the US Little Mother's Leagues. This initiative began in 1911 in New York as a summer school run in collaboration with schools with the aim of training young girls to care for their infant siblings. Through a critical analysis of archival data, this paper makes the significant point that understandings of human security that only position children as receivers of care fail to account for the crucial role that some children and young people play in terms of caring for themselves and others. Olson makes two crucial points in conclusion: first, that the absence of children in debates about global caregiving undermines attempts to recognise the relational and mutually constitutive nature of human security; and second, reinforcement of stereotypes of specific lifecourse positionings restricts our understandings of the complex configurations of care including how caregiving can mesh together security and insecurity in troubling ways.

The two papers that follow this both adopt a framework that employs ideas about ontological security and insecurity in the lives of young people. The first of these two is by *Katherine Botterill, Peter Hopkins and Gurchathen Sanghera*; it explores the psycho-social and emotional strategies of self-securitisation used by ethnic and religious minority young people in contemporary Scotland. This paper draws upon an analysis of focus groups and interviews with 382 young people from a diverse range of ethnic and religious minority groups from across urban, suburban and rural Scotland. This paper identifies pre-emptive and proactive strategies adopted by young people as pathways towards ontological security. Pre-emptive security strategies rely upon emerging or predicted threats to their sense of security and are motivated by the fear of what may happen when young people encounter others. These strategies occur where young people had experienced discrimination or were anticipating it. Relying upon a fuller notion of agency, pro-active security strategies – often embodied and verbal but also non-verbal – are self-conscious efforts to counter possible discrimination by resisting and working against dominant discourses of exclusion.

The second paper that uses ontological security as a focus takes us to the Falkland Islands where *Matthew Benwell* critically investigates the voices of two generations of citizens born

before and after the 1982 war to explore how they think about geopolitics, security and insecurity. Specifically, this paper focuses upon the views of Falkland Island youth as well as adult Islanders in relation to security and insecurity in the context of ongoing sovereignty debates between the U.K., Argentina and the Islands themselves. Despite being regularly frustrated by their marginalisation in relation to these debates, Islander youth sought to have their voices heard and to influence geopolitics and foreign policy in diverse ways. Benwell makes the point that debates about ontological security have tended to overlook generational differences and make an assumption that secure states equate to secure citizens.

In the final paper, *Nicola Ansell, Flora Hadju, Lorraine van Blerk and Elsbeth Robson* draw attention to young people's often contradictory positionings in globally uneven security discourses and politics. They examine how international institutions have responded to the challenges of exceptionally high AIDS prevalence and recurrent food shortages in southern Africa by framing them as security concerns that demand immediate attention. These securitisation discourses draw in young people as both agents of risk and protection as well as potential victims. This paper critiques global discourses of securitisation as they fail to engage with the complex situated ways in which people experience insecurity on the ground or to suggest political solutions that would address felt insecurities.

Each paper in this collection makes an important contribution to debates about young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity with specific attention being paid to the agentic role of children and youth when it comes to such debates. To set these issues – and the papers that follow – within this emerging literature, we now chart some of the key themes within this field. Our focus here is upon: historical intersections of childhood and security; ontological security and embodied well-being; insecurity in the digital age; private spaces of security; and young people's placements in global security discourses. We consider each of these in turn.

Secure pasts; insecure futures

More multidimensional understandings of young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity can be developed through a focus on temporality and the intersections of space-time. This could include a focus upon marginalised histories of young people's securities and insecurities (as found in the papers in this collection by Olson and by Benwell) as well as work focusing on issues of temporality and time-space in the contemporary period and into the future. Mills (2012) provides a useful insight into the challenges of doing historical children's geographies whilst pointing out that such work is not only restricted to archival research; different approaches, including oral and life histories as well as different 'types' of archival material (personal, photographic, online' [Mills, 2012, p. 358]) have the potential to be employed here (see also Mills, 2013).

A useful approach here would be to focus on young people's biographies and security futures including young people's senses of place and agency in producing space in the context of security concerns. A possible approach here could be to consider adopting a more biographical approach to children's and young people's lives such as that found in Henderson et al's (2007) study about young people's transitions to adulthood. Here, attention to the past, to critical moments in younger people's lives and to the future has the potential to offer important insights into young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity (also

see Hörschelmann, 2018). Future changes and transformations in social and cultural relations are, after all, often first witnessed amongst younger people (Woodman & Wyn, 2015).

Ontological security; insecure selves

A focus on the security or insecurity of the self – or what has been termed ontological security – is as important when it comes to exploring the embodiment of security and securitised subjectivities. Bondi (2014, p. 332) draws upon Giddens to note that ‘a sense of ontological security is a psychological achievement that enables most people, most of the time, to take for granted – to trust – that our ordinary, everyday worlds are reliable and dependable’. A sense of ontological security or insecurity is not necessarily binary opposites but operate along a continuum people might slowly move in and out of (Bondi, 2014). A focus on ontological security and insecurity is useful as it helps to scale down thinking on security to focus on ‘security of being’ (Kinnvall, 2016) and on the embodied well-being of individuals (Botterill et al., 2016). This therefore challenges the traditional focus upon the global and nation-state scales as the primary focus of security studies.

Attention here can usefully focus on the ways in which young people’s security landscapes are embodied, emotional, intimate and marked by age, gender, and racialised social and cultural relations. Furthermore, a focus on the body also allows researchers to pay closer attention to young people’s everyday and lived experiences of securitisation. Exploration of the often-overlooked aspects of security landscapes that feature in young people’s everyday lives present an important focus here whether this is about contestation over identities and belonging alongside de-securitisation through to structural, symbolic and everyday violence or abuse and maltreatment in domestic and institutional spaces (e.g. Anda et al., 2006; Hopkins, 2007; Hörschelmann & Reich, 2017; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998; Tyner, 2012; Willis et al., 2015).

Online security; digital insecurities

Amongst the less obvious, yet increasingly significant, spaces of security and insecurity in young people’s lives are virtual spaces that intersect with and overlap in complex ways with other imagined and material security landscapes. Such contexts often provide significant locations when it comes to appreciating the multifaceted nature of young people’s everyday landscapes of security and insecurity. Anxieties associated with negotiating online environments arise in many everyday discourses about children’s and young people’s security whether this be about online bullying or potential exposure to problematic advertising or images. Added to this could be concerns about the security of children and young people in connection with online grooming or child sexual abuse, which has been identified as an absent presence in geography, a topic which geographers remain silent about (Willis et al., 2015).

Online and digital contexts can provide paradoxical spaces of security and insecurity for children and young people, particularly those who occupy marginalised social positions or who belong to stigmatised groups. Digital environments offer mechanisms for young people to make friendships, find information and connect with other youth. Online environments are often seen to provide younger people with their initial opportunities to discuss LGBT issues before ‘coming out’, yet Hawkins and Watson (2017) warn that unhealthy behaviours

may be encouraged by inaccurate information that is found or shared in such contexts. Furthermore, McDermott et al. (2013) discuss the ways in which young people with marginal sexualities and genders engage in cybertalk regarding issues of stress and self-harm. Attentiveness to the ambiguities found within digital contexts is a crucial part of the complex landscape of young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity.

Home(land) security; insecure households/families

Geographers' work about childhood and youth has tended to focus upon debates about safety and risk in public spaces (e.g. Pain, 2006) with the important caveat that for children, the home often poses risks and more accidents take place there. As suggested by Katz (2008), an important re-framing of home(land) security for children and young people could usefully focus upon the complex ways that discourses of security and insecurity shape and are shaped by domestic environments and family relationships. Such contexts are clearly marked by social inequalities associated with socio-economic positioning, gender, sexuality, disability and migrant status. Furthermore, the context of the family and household provide a key focus for intergenerational relations (as emphasised by Benwell in his paper in this collection) where tensions between security and insecurity may often be played out.

Concerns about household and family security and insecurity clearly interweave with debates about online and digital context for children and young people. Children's and younger people's negotiations of ontological security and digital security may be strongly mediated by family relationships and household dynamics. As geographers, we are ideally positioned to recognise, understand and critically analyse the relationalities between the different landscapes of security and insecurity that we are discussing here as experiences of the household and family interconnect with, shape and are shaped by embodied, digital and global securities and insecurities historically, at the moment and into the future.

Global security; insecure worlds

One of the key challenges for those seeking to map, analyse and problematise social and cultural geographies of young people's everyday securities and insecurities is their often changing and regularly uneven topography. Security and insecurity map onto complexly scaled global, inter-regional and urban landscapes of polarisation and peripheralisation. Understanding differential power geometries and parochialising dominant western security discourses, while at the same time tracing structural and relational connectivities is a tall but indispensable task of such work. The difficulties that accompany such efforts have been brought to the fore particularly by research and political activism on the military recruitment of minors and on the victimisation and agency of child soldiers (Boyden & de Berry, 2004; Brocklehurst, 2006; Cheney, 2005; Hart, 2006).

Young people's experiences of living close to significant borders, their negotiations of international migration, their participation in global anti-war activism or their strategies to resist neoliberal globalisation are just some of the issues that may feature in understanding young people's everyday landscapes of security and insecurity on a global scale. Factors that shape senses of security and insecurity here may focus, for example, on the ways in which younger people feel included and enmeshed within social movements (e.g. Brown & Yaffe, 2016), or their emotional negotiations of contentious borderlands such as those found in

Cyprus (Christou & Spyrou, 2016). Furthermore, children and young people who do not necessarily actively participate in such movements or reside close to key geopolitical borderlands may well find that their senses of global security and insecurity are mediated by their negotiations of news coverage, the information they find online or learn about at school or in the home (Lemish & Götz, 2007). Everyday landscapes of security and insecurity are, therefore, not only relational but can be shaped by factors positioned nearby as well as those that are geographically distant and remote.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all of those who participated in the 'shared securities future' paper sessions at the AAG conference in Chicago in April 2015.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/K000594/1].

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