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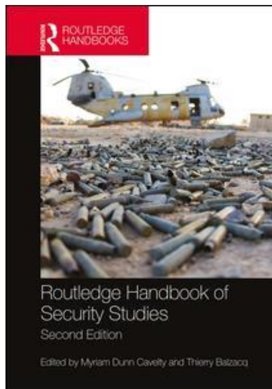

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Poststructuralist Approaches to Security

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7 POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACHES TO SECURITY

Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster

Since the early 1990s, the field of Security Studies has witnessed the growth of poststructuralist approaches to security (Buzan and Hansen 2009). Drawing largely on ideas and concepts from political theory, continental philosophy, and sociology, poststructuralist approaches have inspired an understanding of security not as 'a noun that names things' but 'as a principle of formation that does things' (Dillon 1996: 16), where the central objective is not to define what security is but to interrogate security as a form of productive power that makes reality intelligible and actionable in particular ways. The central point of departure in poststructuralist approaches to security is that representations of threats define the relationship between self and other as antagonistic, which in turn justifies violent practices and calls for the restriction of democratic principles and political agency. For these reasons, poststructuralists are generally critical of security and instead want to stimulate a wider process of reflection and action leading to different understandings of social and political relations, which do not imply a self/other antagonism. One of the main concerns for poststructuralist thinkers has therefore been how to resist security, unmake its practices, and challenge its exclusionary logic (Huysmans 2014).

This chapter aims to provide a broad (although necessarily simplified) account of the ways in which the poststructuralist literature has engaged the question of security. We begin with a brief discussion of the poststructuralist problematization of Security Studies as a field of knowledge that undergirds and legitimizes a range of violent practices enacted in the name of the sovereign state. We then go on to consider how poststructuralists have conceptualized and theorized security as a form of productive power. First, we turn to understandings of security as a sovereign form of power. Here, poststructuralists have drawn upon the work of Carl Schmitt and especially that of Giorgio Agamben to suggest that practices of security constitute political community by delineating friend and enemy. Second, we examine poststructuralist understandings of security that are based on Michel Foucault's work on governmentality and biopolitics. These scholars have pointed out that security does not just concern the sovereign decision upon the enemy, but also the biopolitical question of managing the well-being and life chances of populations. Here, the power of security lies in its potential to inscribe limits, divisions, and hierarchies between different categories of the population. Concerned with the violence and insecurity that security fosters in the constitution of political communities, the final section focuses on poststructuralist challenges to security and points to the different ways in which security practices are resisted and their power unmade.

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Challenging Security Studies: discourse, power, materiality

'The most far-reaching contribution of post-structural approaches to security', writes Anthony Burke (2013: 77), 'is to have brought the very idea of security under critical scrutiny'. Until the mid-1980s, Security Studies as a field had predominantly understood security as the defence of the state against the threat of other states under conditions of anarchy. Security was conceptualized as national security and intimately linked to the study of war and peace (for an overview, see Buzan and Hansen 2009).

Poststructuralists increasingly took issue with these assumptions and pointed out that they rested on particular ontological and epistemological foundations. Drawing on post-positivist approaches to science, they claimed that knowledge produced in Security Studies should not be taken for objective reflections on reality 'out there'; rather, analyses of security were said to partake in the very constitution and reification of social reality. Our access to the world is mediated through interpretative practices, including scientific ones, which in turn shape the social reality on the basis of which actors understand and behave towards themselves and each other. Security is effectively a 'regime of truth' whose emergence and stabilization is made possible through the reiteration of (scientific) discourses, the deployment of power relations, and mobilization of methods.

The attribution of insecurity to certain individuals or groups, places or activities happens only through historical processes, discourses, and practices. Moreover, these ascriptions of danger have performative power, and they come to inscribe social and political relations, subjectivities, and institutions. Poststructuralists both explore the conditions under which it is possible to make authoritative claims about security and the effects of such claims on reality. They have drawn attention to the mutual constitution of self and other through the antagonistic logic of war and foreign policy (Campbell 1992; Hansen 2006). Security discourses depend upon and sustain particular representations of the world. David Campbell's (1992) study of American foreign policy and identity has explored how discourses of danger divide the world between a clear inside and outside, where identity is located within the political community with security practices attempting to exclude difference, heterogeneity, and otherness.

Since security cannot be thought about without a prior account of what entity or political community needs securing, representations of threat and insecurity are also always political statements about the desirable nature of the political community (Walker 1997). In his seminal analysis of strategic studies, Bradley Klein (1994) forcefully showed how that field, by taking the state as its 'natural' point of departure, actively contributed to the process of state formation while reproducing an image of the international arena as an anarchic system of states where security can only be achieved at the expense of other states' security. It presupposes trust and identity between members of a community, while it relegates indeterminacy, fear, and anarchy outside the social order.

The performative power of security emerges not just through discursive practices, but also through particular methods of knowledge production. Poststructuralist analyses have tended to focus on discourse and power, but more recently materiality has been shown to undergird questions of truth, security, and politics. The distinction between discourse and materiality has been the subject of much writing in social sciences and has informed poststructuralist approaches as well (e.g. Coole and Frost 2010; Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams 2014). The main focus has been on how security not just enacts sociality but also materiality in particular ways. For instance, critical infrastructure protection assumes a stable materiality and silences debates about decaying infrastructure and privatization of infrastructure under neoliberalism (Aradau 2010). At the same time, materiality has underpinned discussions of methods. The focus on methods – e.g. graphs, visualizations, diagrams, and statistics – as inscription devices shows that method debates are as much about politics as knowledge-making (Aradau and Huysmans 2014). It is the authority of

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statistics that allows 'professional *managers* of unease' to produce a regime of truth about what constitutes security and what not (see Bigo 2006).

The next two sections offer a brief overview of how poststructuralist approaches have analysed security as a regime of truth underpinned by particular power relations.

Security, sovereign power, and exceptionalism

Poststructuralist approaches have reformulated the relation between security and the sovereign. Instead of deriving security from a taken-for-granted *raison d'état*, these approaches have shown how sovereignty and security are co-constitutive. This understanding of security has drawn on the work of the Copenhagen School, which defines security as a speech act by means of which an actor presents an issue as an existential threat that justifies extraordinary measures to neutralize that threat (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998). Upon this view, security is a modality that elevates issues above politics and everyday haggling by investing them with a sense of intensity and urgency.

This definition shares important traits with Schmitt's rendering of the political as the exceptional decision that constitutes the border between friend and enemy (Huysmans 1998; Williams 2003). According to Schmitt, this situation is best captured by the metaphor of 'war', for although war need not be actually present between friends and enemies, 'the ever present possibility of combat' grounds the domain of the political and constitutes the authentic self-delineation of a political community (Schmitt 1996: 32).

Agamben's (1998, 2005) reworking of the state of exception has inspired many poststructuralists to further develop our understanding of security as sovereign power. First, his work adds the important insight that the state of exception does not just produce sovereignty but also its mirror image of bare life, i.e. life that can be killed with impunity. Underpinned by sovereign power, security is understood as an exceptional practice that draws boundaries between political life (*bios*) and abject, disqualified, or bare life (*zoe*). For Agamben, the concentration camp exemplifies the space where we find the most extreme form of bare life, in as far as prisoners do not enjoy legal protection against the atrocities of the guards who act as sovereigns.

Agamben's observations have informed a range of analyses of the war on terror and contemporary security policies. The war in Iraq (Diken and Laustsen 2005; van Munster 2004), refugee camps and airport holding zones (Noll 2003; Salter 2008), humanitarian intervention (Dauphinée and Masters 2007; Edkins, Pin-Fat, and Shapiro 2004), detention centres of terrorist suspects (Neal 2006), shoot-to-kill policies of the London police (Vaughan-Williams 2007) have all been recognized as exceptional practices by means of which the life of some people is reduced to that of bare life. Second, Agamben's work points to the antagonistic relationship between democracy and security on the one hand and law and security on the other. For Agamben, the state of exception is explicitly linked with fascism, which raises the profound question to what extent security practices instil forms of non-democratic politics at the heart of contemporary liberal societies based on the rule of law (see e.g. Bigo and Tsoukala 2008; Honig 2009).

Despite its wide application in poststructuralist approaches, Agamben's theory of the exception has been criticized for offering a simplified and ahistorical picture of security. Whatever the spatial and temporal transformations of practices, security is ultimately always found to constitute a binary relation of inclusion/exclusion, friend/enemy, democracy/state of exception and *bios/zoe*. The understanding of security as something exceptional, however, downplays other, more routine forms of power and knowledge. Vivienne Jabri (2006) has argued that the metaphor of 'war' associated with security has become a transnational strategy of control that targets states, communities, and individuals. Rather than referring to a generalized state of affairs, the state of

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exception is inscribed differently upon various sectors of society and experienced differently by particular categories of populations.

Similarly, Didier Bigo (2002, 2006), who focuses on the security experts that manage 'unease' within society on a daily basis, points out that exceptional security practices can be understood in the context of ongoing processes of bureaucratic and market-driven routinization. Moreover, recent analyses of exceptional spaces show that even these are not devoid of agency, rules, and regulation. For instance, Guantánamo Bay is imbued with knowledge and technologies of governance: from ration cards and hygiene education to psychological therapy. They are not empty spaces of 'bare life', as they are governed by bureaucratic technologies and regulations that are often reminiscent of practices with a distinct colonial or other political history (Johns 2005; Neal 2006). Rather than the limit of social and political relations, or the excluded inclusion of bare life, camps can be seen as veritable laboratories of governance, where particular technologies of governance are experimented with and deployed (e.g. Bulley 2014).

Governmentality and the biopolitics of security

Security practices are heterogeneous and historically variable. Poststructuralist scholars have particularly drawn on Michel Foucault's analyses of how different regimes of power function in heterogeneous ways that go beyond the sovereign question of territoriality and centralized legitimate authority. Foucault argues that during the eighteenth century sovereign power gradually transformed into and became complemented by new forms of power: discipline and biopolitics. Disciplinary power focuses on the individual, while biopolitics takes populations and their lives as the object of governance, while the advent of the biopolitical state brings about a change in the development of the modern state from the 'city-citizen' game to that of pastoral care of life and the living (Foucault 2007). A governmental mode of analysis unpacks security as a specific type of ordering of the *polis*, of governing circulation and managing populations. Biopolitics implies that security is neither a form of war nor a form of surveillance, as descriptions of the Panopticon have commonly held. As emphasized by Bigo, security as biopolitical 'is related to normality and liberty, not with war and survival, nor with coercion and surveillance' (Bigo 2008: 107).

In liberal societies security practices are directly related to the promotion and protection of the mobility and circulation of populations, goods, and services rather than the protection of territories (Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008; Dillon and Reid 2001; Duffield 2007). This is not to say the boundaries are no longer relevant or that individuals and populations are not normalized. Practices of managing circulation and preventing risky events ultimately produce categories of individuals who are to be protected at the expense of the exclusion and elimination of others. As racial boundaries delimit and divide the life of the species between life worth living and life which is to be curtailed (Foucault 2004), security practices are exposed as *insecuring*, dividing categories of populations, and preparing some for elimination, disciplining or therapy. In Dillon's (2005: 41) words, the 'continuous biopolitical assaying of life proceeds through the epistemically driven and continuously changing interrogation of the worth and eligibility of the living across a terrain of value that is constantly changing'. The effects of security therefore need to be unpacked through concrete and historically situated analyses of practices.

The biopolitical management of populations also introduces a specific temporal element in the analyses of security. The governmentality of populations and the conjoint betterment of life already contained an implicit temporal element. Temporality becomes explicitly problematized when scenarios of danger concern the occurrence of events in the future life of populations and sovereignties. Security practices intervene to 'tame' the future and to recuperate the temporality of progress and linearity. Whether understood through statistical calculations

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of probability (Lobo-Guerrero 2007), scenarios of preparedness (Anderson 2010; Collier and Lakoff 2008; Lakoff 2006), speculation (de Goede 2012), or imaginations of catastrophe (Aradau and van Munster 2007, 2011), security practices do not only work upon space but also upon time and are increasingly turned towards unpredictable and unknowable futures. These anticipatory practices bear important political effects for law, rights claims, justice, and democracy, in that they reduce the importance of experience, memory, narratives of the past, evidence, and proof (de Goede and de Graaf 2013; Kessler 2011; Krasmann 2012).

Unmaking security

These various analyses diagnose the political effects of security as troubling. As an exceptional practice, security works against democracy, foretells of violence, and enacts exclusions. As a governmental and biopolitical practice, security is entwined with bureaucratic modes of regulation that divide life to be bettered from life less worth living. For many poststructuralists, the question of how security practices can be resisted or 'unmade' (Huysmans 2006) has emerged as an important question. Drawing on diverse strands of continental philosophy, they have offered diverging and sometimes competing answers. However, all approaches share an interest in transforming the relationship between self and other. For Rob Walker (1997: 78), a critical discourse about security depends upon 'emerging accounts of who we might become, and the conditions under which we might become other than we are now without destroying other, ourselves, or the planet on which we all live'. At least three approaches to unmaking of security can be discerned: ethics/responsibility, resistance/agency, and emancipation.

Ethics and responsibility

A first group of poststructuralist thinkers has sought to unmake security through the notion of ethics and responsibility. They stress the interdependence between self and other as crucial, because it undermines the exclusionary logic of security by pointing at the need to recognize the fundamental ambivalence, heterogeneity, and difference that contaminates all identities. Whereas discourses of danger portray the other as the condition of impossibility for the existence of a secure, homogeneous identity, these ethical positions stress that alterity is deeply enmeshed with the subject. Rather than homogeneous and separate, self and other are inextricably entwined. Upon this view, an '*ethical relation* in which our responsibility to the other is the basis for reflection' can replace the inimical and antagonistic relations that security brings about (Campbell and Shapiro 1999: x).

Lene Hansen (2006) has already drawn attention to the complexity of self/other relations and the degrees of difference that are constitutive of identity. But there are different ways in which poststructuralist authors have confirmed and sought to reformulate securitized relationships as radically interdependent. Some, like David Campbell, have drawn on the work of Derrida and Levinas. According to Levinas' philosophy, the ethical relationship with the other is defined by responsibility towards the other. Although security may define our relationship to the other in terms of abjection, violence, and domination, the structure of responsibility nevertheless summons us to recognize 'the structural condition of alterity prior to subjectivity and thought' (Campbell 1999: 41). Even if we can never fully respond to the calls of others at all times, the understanding of subjectivity in terms of responsibility helps us resist discourses of security that depend on the other's suppression and domination in favour of forms of belonging that respond to the ethical call of the other.

Judith Butler (2003: 15) comes to similar conclusions, but she grounds subjectivity in the practice of mourning and corporeal vulnerability: 'The body implies mortality, vulnerability,

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agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well'. Bodily vulnerability experienced in the loss of the other's life (for example, as a result of disease, death, or violence) can have a transformative impact on the self who, constituted in relation to the other, no longer is the same after the loss. For Butler, the experience of fragility in the context of a loss is not just a private matter but a political principle around which to reinvent and rearticulate social ties on the basis of bodily suffering: 'To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself' (Butler 2003: 19).

Both the principles of responsibility and mourning ethically reconfigure the antagonistic logic of security, in which the other is not encountered as grievable life but as an enemy who is not worth mourning over. The ethical imperative is to recognize vulnerability and to inquire and deconstruct into the social and political conditions by means of which some forms of life appear (non-)grievable. For example, Edkins' (2003) writings on trauma and Zehfuss' work (2007) on memory critically examine how traumatic events related to war and suffering have entered collective memory, pointing out the significance of remembering an identity that does not derive simply from the desire to secure oneself in the face of the other.

Resistance and agency

Poststructuralist approaches have sometimes been criticized for their quasi-exclusive concern with 'we', the subject. The 'other' is often envisaged as derivative of the constitution of 'us'. Different others succeed one another, subjected to the need of identity reproduction. In Campbell's analysis of how American identity is reproduced through re-writings of dangers, the others are 'faceless faces', substitutable to one another. The other only exists as a constitutive outside, as the limit to the domain of subjectivity. The weak or the other, Barkawi and Laffey (2006) argue, appear as only bearers of rights and objects of emancipation rather than wilful agents.

By focusing on the '"unliveable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject' (Butler 1993: 3), several scholars have attempted to recuperate the other as something more than a blank space defined only through negation. Here, the constitution of the subject through discourses of danger comes up against the intransigence of political agency and the resistance of political subjects. Isin and Rykiel (2007: 184) have argued that a distinction needs to be drawn between the camp as a space of abjection, where subjects were eliminated after having been stripped of citizenship and 'abject spaces' – spaces where people are rendered inexistent, invisible, and inaudible. The difference has profound political implications: abject spaces are simultaneously spaces of resistance, where abjection is challenged and sovereign practices rendered ineffective.

Agency is not only present in the refugee camp (Puggioni 2006), but informs other exceptional spaces and practices (Mezzadra 2006; Nyers 2006). Migrants and refugees, for example, engage in daily practices of resistance against securitization. Focusing on the agency of the other, Nyers (2003) rethinks cosmopolitanism from the standpoint of migrants, the cast-offs of the global order. Arguing that the migrant is the cosmopolitan figure per se, he calls for a move away from an understanding of cosmopolitanism that aims at the constitution of world citizens behind the horizon of contemporary politics towards an understanding of cosmopolitanism that is located in concrete struggles. The "No One Is Illegal" initiative and other anti-deportation campaigns are examples of abject cosmopolitanism in action insofar as they radically call into question claims to sovereignty and principles of border control. Local struggles are the concrete situations where a democratic cosmopolitanism is enacted and establishes new forms of relationality with the other.

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Emancipation

At first sight, emancipation appears to be in tension with poststructuralist approaches, particularly given the criticism of universality that underpins emancipatory ideas. However, several authors have brought together a poststructuralist analysis of security with emancipatory concerns. In our reading, emancipation configures resistance to security through an 'unconditional principle', drawing on political stakes that are set at a distance, referring to a *de jure* universality, equality, or freedom as the reference point for emancipation. Drawing particularly on the work of Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou, recent literature on emancipation and security shifts the political concerns of danger and risk towards those of equality and freedom. Thus, this literature develops a different understanding of emancipation than the one associated with Ken Booth's (1991) approach to 'security as emancipation'. Rather than thinking order, this literature attends to ruptures, interruptions, and disorders that challenge the ways in which security practices constitute communities and govern populations.

Rancière's (1999) view of universal rights as something simultaneously present (as written inscriptions) and non-present (not enacted) points at an irresolvable *aporia* that functions as the necessary background condition for any emancipatory politics of equality (rights are out there to be taken). For example, most states claiming that human rights and freedom are universal values have also securitized their borders when it comes to the circulation of the poor, who today move under the name of 'economic refugees', 'illegal immigrants', or '*bogus* asylum seekers'. According to Rancière, the *de facto* denial of mobility to large parts of the people of the world is one of the most significant denouncements of equality in our time, that draws our attention to the fact that the universal right to the freedom of movement is only a right of those who make something of that universal inscription. Rens van Munster (2009) has drawn attention to how undocumented immigrants in France, the *sans-papiers*, have appropriated for themselves the European inscription of the freedom of movement. As Madjiguène Cissé (1997 emphasis added), one of the spokespersons for the movement, argued: 'When these rights are under threat, it is legitimate to struggle to have them reinstated . . . Freedom of movement is not something invented. It *confirms* an existing situation.'

Equality is the other principle that informs emancipatory political action. Equality can be understood as a claim in tension with the hierarchical practices that security presupposes. In particular, Aradau (2008a, 2008b) has pointed out that equality as a presumption can help to unmake the hierarchical logic that security entails, while at the same time furnishing a principle upon which a different relationality with the other can be conceived.

Conclusion

With its emphasis on the importance of representation, performativity, and power, poststructuralism has entered Security Studies as a means by which to challenge the common-sense assumptions of realist and constructivist approaches about the reality of security. Yet, poststructuralism is not a unified body, let alone a theory. There are different, sometimes irreconcilable, interpretations of security and its political effects which in turn inform different views of politics and security. Nonetheless, at a time where security literally seems to be everywhere, poststructuralist approaches have proved a significant intellectual reservoir for interrogating the concept of security. What unites the approaches analysed here under the rubric of poststructuralism is a commitment to critique as a condition of possibility for alternative political practices.

This chapter has engaged with some of the strands and representatives of poststructuralist thought and the challenges that these have posed to Security Studies. Unpacking security as an

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exceptional or governmental practice has led to complex analyses of its functioning and political effects. As security draws limits and divisions among categories of the population, mobilizes knowledge and culture to render some forms of life 'bare', inferior or less worth living, the question of 'unmaking security' has emerged as one of the most innovative areas of research. The discontent with the proliferation of security issues, the effects of practices upon political communities, the constitution of the subject and democracy will lead to increasing interest in transformation, resistance, ethics, or emancipation over order and discipline.

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