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## **RECLAIMING THE POLITICAL: EMANCIPATION AND CRITIQUE IN SECURITY STUDIES**

The critical Security Studies literature has been marked by a shared commitment towards the politicization of security, that is, the analysis of its assumptions, implications and the practices through which it is re/produced. In recent years, however, politicization has been accompanied by a tendency to conceive security as connected with a logic of exclusion, totalization and even violence. This has resulted in an imbalanced politicization that weakens critique. Seeking to tackle this situation, the article engages with contributions that have advanced emancipatory versions of security. Starting with, but going beyond, the so-called 'Aberystwyth School' of Security Studies, the argument reconsiders the meaning of security as emancipation by making the case for a systematic engagement with the notions of reality and power. This revised version of security as emancipation strengthens critique by addressing political dimensions that have been underplayed in the critical security literature.

### **Introduction**

These are crucial times for the critical security literature (or Critical Security Studies, CSS<sup>1</sup>). Fifteen years after the idea of a 'critical' engagement with security was advanced (Krause and Williams, 1997b), this body of work has succeeded in showing the limitations and dangers of predominant ways of thinking and practicing security. The popularity of critical approaches has grown exponentially in many academic circles, so that CSS is no longer at the margins. In fact, securitization theory, one of the foremost critical approaches, can be argued to be 'about as mainstream as it is possible to get' (Croft, 2007: 508) – at least outside the United States. This has happened in a context of proliferation of the critical label in the discipline of International Relations. But will the popularity of CSS blunt its critical edge? In what ways is it still relevant to speak of a critique of security? Are there still critical goals to achieve? If so, how can CSS be strengthened to perform its tasks? Prompted by these questions, this article sets out to examine the present

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<sup>1</sup> This designation is used in Krause and Williams (1997b) and Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2010).

situation and future prospects of CSS, focusing on the role that emancipatory notions of security can play within it.

The argument begins by providing a new 'map' of CSS, organized around a core commitment shared by all approaches: the intention of challenging ideas and practices of security by seeing them as inherently political. The article then asks how CSS has lived up to this commitment. It shows that whilst there has been immense progress in destabilizing taken-for-granted assumptions and in questioning security policies, there are still important limitations in CSS. Specifically, there has been a tendency to conceive security as connected with a logic of exclusion, totalization, undemocratic politics and even violence. Meanwhile, there has been a relative lack of theoretical innovation on the strands of CSS that seek to identify alternative visions of security. As a result of this, the accomplishments of CSS are arguably modest in what pertains to engaging with practical transformative politics.

In order to address this situation, the article revisits emancipatory notions of security. Starting with, but going beyond, the 'Aberystwyth School' of Security Studies, the argument advances a revised version of 'security as emancipation,' one focused on an in-depth engagement with the political dimension of reality and with the multifaceted character of power. This new version of security as emancipation brings politics back into some of the blind spots of CSS. It tackles the current imbalance in the politicization of security, thereby strengthening critique.

### **Critical Security Studies and politicization**

In a recent survey of the field, Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams (2010) have argued that the way we understand CSS depends on the map that is superimposed upon it. Maps are narratives that construct reality in specific ways – illuminating some issues and rendering others invisible. Whilst some maps may have detrimental effects, others can be beneficial for the critical security field, by helping to identify problems or by realizing untapped potential.

The map of CSS suggested here is based on the notion of the 'politicization' of security (Fierke, 2007: 33). It is possible to argue that the

CSS challenge to the dominance of realism in Security Studies was achieved primarily by framing security, and the study of it, as political phenomena. This meant seeing security as something more than a natural response to a self-evident threat, and Security Studies as something more than just the provider of expert knowledge to tackle threats 'out there in the world.'

Since its inception during the post-war period, Security Studies had been connected to politics only insofar as it reacted to changing political circumstances and served as an instrument of policy-making.<sup>2</sup> This 'reactive' period of security theory overlooked deeper connections between security and politics. For Karin Fierke, 'the demise of the political' in security theory was brought about by the prominence of neo-realism, which 'in the search for elegance and parsimony... removed any traces of the human, the political and the cultural from international relations' (2007: 25). The debates on the redefinition of security from the 1980s onwards also suffered from the same problem: for Barry Buzan, they were primarily driven by policy-makers and 'people on the ground arguing that contemporary conditions make economic, environmental and/or societal threats more important than military ones' (Buzan, 2000: 3).

Importantly, however, in the 1980s Security Studies also witnessed what has been termed a 'return to theory' (Wæver and Buzan, 2007). The influence of post-positivism and critical International Relations theory, as well as a growing realization that the study of security had normative implications, led some authors to see the field as something more than a repository of accumulated findings. Research in Security Studies gradually became aware of the political origins of its concepts and of its own connection to political arrangements. Buzan pioneered this new take on the relationship between security theory and politics, by arguing that security was a politically and ideologically contested concept (1991: 7-11).

Critical Security Studies can be seen as the corollary of this tendency to see security research as a political process in which claims are produced and practices are imagined and legitimized. CSS sought to go beyond previous 'broadening' and 'deepening' moves by reconsidering the concepts and methodologies hitherto used in Security Studies (Krause and Williams, 1996). This was supplemented by an analysis of the politics behind the construction

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<sup>2</sup> See the overviews provided in Neocleous (2008) and Buzan and Hansen (2009: 66-100).

of security knowledge: ideas of security were seen as political insofar as they result from interpretation, contestation and struggle between actors.

CSS also set out to explore the connection between security theory and the wider political order, by showing that the way we conceptualize security cannot be separated from our ideas about how politics works or should work. For Krause and Williams, the stepping-stone for rethinking security should be 'making the definition of the *political* a question rather than an assumption' (Krause and Williams, 1997a: xi, emphasis in the original). In this context, CSS also drew attention to the impact of understandings and practices of security upon social relations and, more broadly, upon the constitution of the political order. This has led CSS to conceive security theory as a political activity in its own right.

CSS is thus the result of a growing recognition of the political dimensions of security: the assumptions and struggles that underlie ideas and practices; the context in which these are located; the processes through which they are framed and reproduced; and their political implications. One can see the development of CSS as an attempt to add further depth and sense of purpose to the politicization of security. CSS signals the moment in which the study of security became self-consciously political, and in which the politics of security began to be approached in a more systematic way.

Organizing a map of CSS around the notion of politicization has clear advantages in relation to existing narratives about the field, which have been described by Peoples and Vaughan-Williams as follows:

the first is an intellectual narrative based on the negative definition of critical approaches to security against more 'traditional' approaches. The second is a range of temporal narratives used to make claims about the trajectory of the development of critical security studies in relation to historical events... The third concerns a set of spatial narratives that emphasises the emergence of different 'schools of thought', each anchored by a geographical reference point (2010: 3).

Seeing CSS as the corollary of a tendency towards the politicization of security provides a narrative that is arguably more nuanced than the binary view provided by the 'intellectual narrative.' By highlighting the ways in which security theory is constitutive of the political process, the prism of politicization also shows that CSS was not merely reactive to political events, as 'temporal narratives' suggest. Moreover, using politicization as a gravitational centre for different trajectories in CSS preserves the network-like

spirit of the 'spatial narratives' whilst helping to stave off artificial divisions.<sup>3</sup> Importantly for the purposes of this article, looking at CSS through the prism of politicization allows one to shed light into its current limitations.

### **Politicization and the limits of CSS**

The politicization of security has been interpreted and pursued differently in the CSS literature. Some authors have focused on the ways in which 'security' comes about. This has been done by highlighting the role of language in the definition of ideas and practices of security (Wæver, 1995). The exploration of 'how security is done' has also been achieved by looking more broadly at context and practices. Authors have explored how vocabularies and rationalities of security are introduced or withdrawn – or, in other situations, emerge and disappear – via social interactions, bureaucratic processes and institutional dynamics (Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2006; see also Balzacq, 2011). Here, instead of being the result of an overt political intention manifesting itself in a securitizing move, security emerges through the articulation of different elements.

Politicization has also been pursued by looking at the political effects of security – in other words, 'what security does.' In this respect, the critical literature has considered the relationship between the securitization of issues and political procedure. Whilst some authors have focused on exceptional consequences (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998), others have highlighted surreptitious facets (Bigo, 2007). The broader effects of security upon the political order have also been considered. For Jef Huysmans, for example, security contributes to defining the character of political and social relations within a given society. Security understandings and policies, by presupposing 'a process of political identification' and by 'constructing political agencies,' effectively 'open a space within which a political community can represent and affirm itself' (Huysmans, 1998: 238).

But the politicization of security has also meant something else. Going beyond this 'negative or deconstructive' stance – which seeks to expose the contingency and effects of existing security arrangements – some authors

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<sup>3</sup> A spatial narrative of CSS is Wæver (2004), who identified three 'schools' of thought – Copenhagen, Aberystwyth and Paris. As has been argued (Sylvester, 2007; Mutimer, 2009), these readings may lead to exclusionary and essentializing boundary delimitations.

have offered a more 'positive or reconstructive' stance (Krause and Williams, 1997a: xiii).<sup>4</sup> This latter stance has focused on the normative assessment of security arrangements, that is, on a judgment about the desirability of ideas and practices – in other words, 'what security should be.' It has also sought to provide alternative versions of security and to contribute to change. As will be explored below, this version of politicization has been pursued by authors advancing emancipatory visions of security.

The development of CSS has benefited from the interplay of different takes on politicization. In particular, the investigation of 'how security is done' and 'what security does' have become sites of fruitful dialogue. Synergies between critical approaches – for example, between securitization theory and poststructuralism – have been established. At the same time, however, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the normative judgment and political transformation of security have not witnessed the same level of engagement and collaboration. It can indeed be argued that the reconstructive side of the critical literature has failed to keep up with the great theoretical development of the deconstructive side. This has resulted in a politicization of security that is arguably imbalanced: whilst CSS has been successful in contesting predominant security arrangements, its achievements when it comes to providing a normative agenda and informing political change are arguably more modest.

Different explanations could be advanced for this. One could point to the pitfalls of defining alternatives or programmes for change in cases that are not always clear (Neufeld, 2004). The reluctance to engage with 'what security should be' could thus simply be explained by caution. However, it is possible to identify deeper reasons for this imbalance in politicization, which relate to the ways in which security itself has come to be understood in the critical field. The reconstructive agenda in CSS has clashed with the growth of a radical understanding of critique as the permanent questioning of security. According to this view, the task of critical scholars is to incessantly question ideas and practices by showing that they are neither natural nor necessary – insofar as they result from political processes and serve certain purposes. If one could speak of a result of this process, it would be the

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<sup>4</sup> One should not overplay the separation between the two agendas: deconstruction has a normative outlook and reconstruction depends upon deconstructive moves. Nonetheless, these agendas have been prioritized differently.

permanent disruption of what is taken for granted. This understanding sees critique as something that must constantly begin anew, in order to avoid the risk of falling back into essentialized thinking.

This take on critique has impacted upon the way in which politicization is pursued by many in the critical field. Since the inception of CSS, the idea of critique has rested primarily upon the destabilization of realist, 'traditional' or predominant ways of thinking and doing security. This was followed by the problematization of the very reality of security. In the wake of securitization theory, according to which security is a modality for dealing with issues and not something 'out there,' the attention of CSS was increasingly diverted to the claims and practices through which security is constructed. Securitization theory set the scene for this engagement by refusing to assume that security was 'a good to be spread to ever more sectors' (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998: 35). Instead, security was deemed to entail the bypassing of democratic decision-making. Numerous studies offered examples of the connection between security and un-democratic practices implying control, surveillance and sometimes coercion (for an example, see Bigo et al., 2006).

Meanwhile, the problematization of securitizing practices is seen to confirm a wider malaise with the very idea of security. The continuum between the critique of securitization (in specific cases) and the critique of security (in itself) is present in a recent statement by Ole Wæver, in which he highlights 'the inevitable effects of any securitization' in the form of a 'logic of necessity, the narrowing of choice, the empowerment of a smaller elite' (2011: 469), before arguing that '[t]he concept of *security* is Schmittian, because it defines security in terms of exception, emergency and a decision' (2011: 478, emphasis in the original).

In fact, a profound distrust towards security is present in the work of Michael Dillon, who understands security as a 'generative principle of formation' (1996: 127), a register of meaning that entails a politics of calculability, closure, exclusion and violence. Dillon identifies in Western thought a 'metaphysical politics of security' that makes 'politics a matter of command; membership of a political community a matter of obedience; love synonymous with a policing order; order a function of discipline; and identity a narcissistic paranoia' (1996: 130). Similar concerns are present in the work



of Didier Bigo, for whom security is a liberal political register that strives to make the world calculable, 'makes a fantasy of homogeneity and seeks the end of any resistances or struggles' (2008: 109). Mark Neocleous takes these concerns in a more radical direction by linking security to fascism (2011: 186).

In the works of these authors one can identify a tendency to see security as inherently connected to exclusion, totalization and even violence. The idea of a 'logic' of security is now widely present in the CSS literature. Claudia Aradau, for example, writes of an 'exclusionary logic of security' underpinning and legitimizing 'forms of domination' (2008: 72). Rens Van Munster assumes a 'logic of security,' predicated upon a 'political organization on the exclusionary basis of fear' (2007: 239). Laura Shepherd also identifies a liberal and highly problematic 'organizational logic' in security (2008: 70).

Although there would probably be disagreement over the degree to which this logic is inescapable, it is symptomatic of an overwhelming pessimistic outlook that a great number of critical scholars are now making the case for moving away from security. The normative preference for desecuritization has been picked up in attempts to contest, resist and 'unmake' security (Aradau, 2004; Huysmans, 2006; Bigo, 2007). For these contributions, security cannot be reconstructed and political transformation can only be brought about when security and its logic are removed from the equation (Aradau, 2008; Van Munster, 2009; Peoples, 2011).

This tendency in the literature is problematic for the critique of security in at least three ways. Firstly, it constitutes a blind spot in the effort of politicization. The assumption of an exclusionary, totalizing or violent logic of security can be seen as an essentialization and a moment of closure. To be faithful to itself, the politicization of security would need to recognize that there is nothing natural or necessary about security – and that security as a paradigm of thought or a register of meaning is also a construction that depends upon its reproduction and performance through practice. The exclusionary and violent meanings that have been attached to security are themselves the result of social and historical processes, and can thus be changed.

Secondly, the institution of this apolitical realm runs counter to the purposes of critique by foreclosing an engagement with the different ways in

which security may be constructed. As Matt McDonald (2012) has argued, because security means different things for different people, one must always understand it in context. Assuming from the start that security implies the narrowing of choice and the empowerment of an elite forecloses the acknowledgment of security claims that may seek to achieve exactly the opposite: alternative possibilities in an already narrow debate and the contestation of elite power.<sup>5</sup> In connection to this, the claims to insecurity put forward by individuals and groups run the risk of being neglected if the desire to be more secure is identified with a compulsion towards totalization, and if aspirations to a life with a degree of predictability are identified with violence.

Finally, this tendency blunts CSS as a resource for practical politics. By overlooking the possibility of reconsidering security from within – opting instead for its replacement with other ideals – the critical field weakens its capacity to confront head-on the exceptionalist connotations that security has acquired in policy-making circles. Critical scholars run the risk of playing into this agenda when they tie security to exclusionary and violent practices, thereby failing to question security actors as they take those views for granted and act as if they were inevitable. Overall, security is just too important – as a concept and a political instrument – to be simply abandoned by critical scholars. As McDonald has put it,

[i]f security is politically powerful, is the foundation of political legitimacy for a range of actors, and involves the articulation of our core values and the means of their protection, we cannot afford to allow dominant discourses of security to be confused with the essence of security itself (2012: 163).

In sum, the trajectory that CSS has taken in recent years has significant limitations. The politicization of security has made extraordinary progress in problematizing predominant security ideas and practices; however, it has paradoxically resulted in a depoliticization of the meaning of security itself. By foreclosing the possibility of alternative notions of security, this imbalanced politicization weakens the analytical capacity of CSS, undermines its ability to function as a political resource and runs the risk of being

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<sup>5</sup> In this context, Matti Jutila (2006) and Rita Floyd (2010) have argued for a context-specific approach to securitization/desecuritization.

politically counterproductive. Seeking to address these limitations, the next section revisits emancipatory understandings of security.

### **Emancipation in CSS: reclaiming the political**

The idea that security and emancipation are connected has been developed most explicitly by Ken Booth and Richard Wyn Jones, two authors commonly identified with the 'Welsh School' (Smith, 2005) or 'Aberystwyth School' (Wæver, 2004) of Security Studies.<sup>6</sup> Leaving aside the question of whether one can speak of a 'school' in this case – or whether it is useful to speak of schools at all – the work of these two authors is perhaps the most influential example of how 'security as emancipation' has been theorized in CSS.<sup>7</sup> Booth has conceived security as the removal (or at least alleviation) of constraints upon the lives of individuals and groups; he argues that emancipation encompasses 'lifting people as individuals and groups out of structural and contingent oppressions' that 'stop them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do, compatible with the freedom of others' (Booth, 2007: 110, 112).<sup>8</sup> 'Oppressions,' or threats, can range from 'direct bodily violence from other humans (war), through structural political and economic forms of oppression (slavery), into more existential threats to identity (cultural imperialism)' (Booth, 1999: 49).

Security as emancipation is supported by three ideas that have the potential to address the imbalance of politicization currently impairing the critical project. The first is the wish to engage in a comprehensive way with the 'reality' of security. This approach sets out to engage with the conditions of existence of 'real people in real places' (Wyn Jones, 1996: 214) by taking two analytical steps. Firstly, the individual is seen as the irreducible unit of political life and thus the ultimate referent of security. Secondly, security as emancipation begins its exploration of security, not from an envisaged condition of being free from care, but with actual insecurity as a 'life-

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<sup>6</sup> There are other approaches advancing emancipatory visions of security. Some authors have used the concept of emancipation when discussing human security – see for example Thomas (2007 [2001]) and Gibson (2007). The next section will engage with contributions to the feminist security literature that also have a strong emancipatory component.

<sup>7</sup> Their work has inspired the theoretical and empirical pursuits of other authors, such as Alker (2005), Ruane and Todd (2005), Bilgin (2008) and Toros and Gunning (2009).

<sup>8</sup> An earlier definition can be found in Booth (1991: 319).

determining condition' (Booth, 2007: 101). The meaning of security is not based on a universal, *a priori* notion of what being secure is, but rather stems from the experiences of insecurity of real people in real places.

This should not be mistaken for the desire to present security as self-evident. Security as emancipation sees the knowledge about security as a social product and process, which derives from political interests, reflects existing opportunities and constraints, results from power struggles and is oriented towards political goals. Understandings of security are embedded in a social setting in which facts are established by political negotiation and sometimes struggle.<sup>9</sup>

This discussion points towards a second idea in the security as emancipation framework: the fact that it assumes a thoroughly politicized notion of security and thus sees itself as a form of praxis committed to political change – specifically, the transformation of arrangements that are implicated in the re/production of insecurities. Thus, on the one hand, security is underpinned by political and ethical assumptions. It is a 'derivative concept,' insofar as 'security outcomes (policies, situations, etc.) *derive* from different underlying understandings of the character and purpose of politics' (Booth, 2007: 109, emphasis in the original). On the other hand, understandings of security have important implications for politics. Reality is supported – or can alternatively be challenged – by existing versions of it. The condition of insecurity can be transformed not only by social struggles, but also by ideas that shape these struggles. Theories draw the boundaries of political imagination and possibility; they are appropriated by actors and help to constitute their self-perception and behaviour. By being constitutive of reality, security theory is ultimately a form of politics.

It thus becomes clear that critique for emancipatory approaches is not the questioning of security in the general sense. Predominant ideas and practices of security do deserve close scrutiny and, very often, fierce opposition. However, by emphasizing the insecurities affecting people, this approach moves beyond the idea that 'security' is merely a representation of reality or a modality for dealing with issues. Rather, critique sets out to impact upon political actors' perceptions and actions, so as to pave the way

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<sup>9</sup> For Booth, '[t]here is an "out there" which can only be engaged through the theories "in here," but what is in our minds is only part of reality, never its whole. A critical theory of security is therefore empirical without being empiricist' (2007: 246).

for a reconstruction of security along more open, inclusive and democratic lines. Critique strives to redress immediate insecurities and to work towards the long-term objective of a life less determined by unwanted and unnecessary constraints.

This leads to a third idea: the reconstructive agenda of emancipatory approaches is supported by a practical strategy for transformation. Booth has advanced the term 'emancipatory realism' (2007: 6) to denote the grounding of security as emancipation upon the real condition of insecurity and its wish to transform it. In fact, emancipatory realism draws on immanent critique as an analytical method and a political strategy. Immanent critique was one of the stepping-stones of Frankfurt School Critical Theory: for Max Horkheimer, philosophy should highlight contradictions and unlock potentialities in current arrangements. In his words, '[p]hilosophy confronts the existent, in its historical context, with the claim of its conceptual principles, in order to criticize the relation between the two and thus transcend them' (1974 [1947]: 182).

Immanent critique follows logically from the acknowledgment of the insecurities of individuals and groups, and plays into the normative and political agenda of security as emancipation. This is because the immanent method is at once analytical and connected to political praxis: it 'engages with the core commitments of particular discourses, ideologies or institutional arrangements on their own terms, in the process locating possibilities for radical change within a particular existing order' (McDonald, 2012: 60). The internal contradictions of predominant security arrangements, made visible by immanent critique, constitute fault-lines where alternative visions of security can be fostered. Immanent critique also entails the identification of transformative possibilities in the form of ideas and actors in particular contexts that have the potential to contribute to change.

Taken together, these three ideas – insecurity as the starting point; theory as praxis; and immanent critique – constitute a promising stepping-stone for reclaiming the political in CSS. They show that it is possible to avoid the closure inherent in pessimistic views of security: security is ultimately about the experiences of real people in real places, and predominant versions of security can be challenged and eventually transformed. These ideas also help to reclaim the political by strengthening

the capacity of CSS to recognize political complexity. By drawing attention towards insecurities, emancipatory approaches add further layers in which the political construction of security can be scrutinized – thus allowing for a better understanding of the meanings attached to security in particular historical and social contexts. Finally, these ideas can help reclaim the political in CSS by bringing this field closer to practical transformative politics. Immanent critique allows for judgments to be made in relation to existing understandings and practices of security, in light of how they respond to the needs of the most vulnerable. Simultaneously, the identification of contradictions and potentialities offers concrete steps for change.

In sum, security as emancipation has the *potential* to address the current imbalance in the politicization of security. There are, however, important issues that need to be addressed if this approach is to constitute a viable resource for CSS.

### **Rethinking emancipation**

Security as emancipation has been met with some suspicion. It has been criticized for being idealistic (Eriksson, 1999); for wishing to impose Western values (Ayoob, 1997; Barkawi and Laffey, 2006); because of its connection to ‘liberalism’ (Shepherd, 2008: 70); and for assuming an essentialized individuality (Sjoberg, 2011). It has been accused of relying on an abstract moral framework that ignores contemporary security (McCormack, 2010); and it has even been connected with Western military interventionism (Chandler, 2006). These criticisms seem to rely on the assumption that security as emancipation is but an expression of the modern, universalist Enlightenment narrative of emancipation (analysed, among others, by Pieterse, 1992; Laclau, 1996). This has resulted in the lack of a sustained engagement with what the proponents of security as emancipation have actually written (but see Aradau, 2008).

However, the work of Booth and Wyn Jones shows that security as emancipation does not assume an abstract individual or an essentialized human. In addition to highlighting the corporeal, concrete nature of the referent of security, Booth has defined ‘human sociality’ (2007: 210) as one of

the mainstays of his approach: according to this idea, being human is an open condition based on the capacity to invent oneself as such. Responding to the ethnocentrism charge, Pinar Bilgin (2012) argued that the idea that some values 'originate' in a particular culture is itself based on essentialized views. Moreover, far from presupposing a blueprint to be imposed or a unidirectional path towards an emancipated end-state, this literature has painstakingly argued that emancipation only makes sense when seen as a localized and unfinished process. The meaning of emancipation can only be determined by local stakeholders, when faced with concrete choices between more or less emancipatory options for a given situation.<sup>10</sup> A passage in Booth's work shows the extent to which this approach has successfully dealt with the most common criticisms:

[f]alse emancipation... is any conception that understands emancipation as timeless or static (whether in relation to ideas, institutions, or situations); undertakes emancipatory politics at the expense of others (making the emancipatory goals of others impossible); or uses emancipation as a cloak for the power of 'the West' or any other entity claiming to have the monopoly of wisdom (Booth, 2007: 113).

It can be said that the persistence of a climate of suspicion towards the idea of emancipation – conjoined with the growing tendency to see security as something to be avoided – has led to CSS being, in the current situation, particularly inhospitable to notions of security as emancipation.<sup>11</sup> This has impaired the theoretical development of emancipatory approaches, which have devoted a substantial amount of their energies to the defensive reiteration of their own assumptions. Moreover, this development has been detrimentally affected by the fact that security as emancipation is still commonly identified with the Aberystwyth School – which, in turn, has shown some reluctance to engage with contributions from other critical approaches to security.<sup>12</sup> The prominent position of the Aberystwyth School in the emancipation literature has also meant that discussions are overwhelmingly centered on – and limited by – a view of emancipation as the removal or alleviation of constraints upon the lives of individuals and groups.

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<sup>10</sup> Wyn Jones has spoken of 'realizable' (1999: 77) and 'concrete utopias' (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Neocleous sums up this environment when he claims – without further explanation – that Booth is 'as mistaken as one can possibly be about security' (2008: 5).

<sup>12</sup> See the observations in Booth (2005a: 269-271; 2007: 40-41).

There is, however, scope for nudging the debate in a more productive direction – one that allows for a deeper engagement with the actual shortcomings of security as emancipation and that, as a result, enables its potential to be fully realized. In fact, whilst Booth and others have done much work on fine-tuning the account of *what emancipation is*, not enough attention has been given to the complexities of *what one is to be emancipated from*. Here, the literature has remained at a rather unspecified level: in order to justify the need for emancipation, Booth has either referred to the experiences of the ‘victims’ of insecurity (2007: 160) or described a global historical crisis characterized by

the combustible interplay of interstate conflict, globalization, population growth, extremist ideologies, apparently unstoppable technological momentum, terrorism, consumerism, tyranny, massive disparities of wealth, rage, imperialism, nuclear-biological-chemical weapons, and brute capitalism – as well as more traditional cultural threats to peoples’ security as a result of patriarchy and religious bigotry (Booth, 2005b: 1-2).

A thorough understanding of the condition of insecurity requires that we go beyond simple enumeration – as extensive as it might be. How exactly are these situations a threat? How do they constitute impediments upon life? How do they translate into claims for security and emancipation? Looking at the claims themselves does not solve the problem, particularly when one is faced with conflicting claims, or when one begins to question the ways in which the ‘victims of insecurity’ are defined. In order to provide a convincing account of the need for emancipation and devise practical steps to achieve it, emancipatory approaches need to include a sophisticated account of what the problem is. The condition of insecurity upon which visions of emancipation are to be predicated must not be taken for granted.

Two themes, largely overlooked by Booth and Wyn Jones, can help to specify the condition of insecurity. By improving its capacity to understand the political intricacies of the ‘reality’ of security and the different dimensions of its power, security as emancipation would be in a better position to contribute to the critical security field.

To begin with, security as emancipation has much to gain from fully taking on board the ways in which the reality of security is traversed by politics – even in its most ‘material’ core. More precisely, this approach needs to shift from an unquestioned reliance upon material individuals (or bodies)



suffering insecurity towards an analysis of the politics of materialization. The work of Michael C. Williams shows that an engagement with materialization is essential for understanding the modern politics of security. He argues that the security understandings that constitute the modern sovereign state were underpinned by a transformation of the way in which the individual was conceived. This transformation implied the materialization of the individual, that is, the 'reduction of the "referent objects" of security to abstract, individual persons, rendered as atomistic, material bodies united through a political authority' (Williams, 1998b: 438; see also Williams, 1998a). Thus, instead of a truthful depiction of reality, the focus on material individuals is the result of political practices.

Judith Butler has explored materialization by arguing that bodies need to be understood politically as well. She maintains that gender is not an essential biological characteristic of the body but rather an organizing principle. In her words, gender 'does not describe a prior materiality, but produces and regulates the intelligibility of the materiality of bodies' (Butler, 1992: 17; see also Butler, 1993). She gives the example of the practice of coercive surgery on infants and children with sexually indeterminate or hermaphroditic anatomy, which aims at normalizing their bodies in accordance with idealized morphologies. For her, the body is always embedded within culturally and historically specific processes of materialization.

Williams and Butler highlight the importance of questioning what is taken for granted as 'real' – even when this reality appears to us as embodied and material. Their contribution is important for emancipatory approaches because unpacking the politics of reality is an essential step towards a detailed and nuanced view of the insecurities that justify emancipation. It provides the opportunity to conceptualize insecurities beyond the enumeration of threats, namely by identifying the social relations and structures that constitute the condition of insecurity.

Emancipatory accounts in the feminist security literature (Tickner, 1995; Hoogensen and Rottem, 2004; Lee-Koo, 2007; Basu, 2011) provide indications of how insecurity can be specified along these lines. Starting from the analysis of the gendered practices that place certain individuals and groups in situations of vulnerability, feminist approaches have helped to

unpack situations of insecurity by highlighting some of the social relations, political structures and institutional settings that produce and perpetuate it. The gender-security nexus scrutinized by feminist authors – with the aid of a series of innovative research methodologies (see for example Ackerly, Stern, and True, 2006) – shows that it is possible to go beyond the enumeration of threats and conduct an analytically rigorous critique of important aspects of insecurity. Security as emancipation can be strengthened by expanding on these insights and exploring in greater depth gender-based relations and structures of insecurity – in addition to other aspects that have been largely overlooked, such as class and economic relations (Herring, 2010).

The security as emancipation literature can also benefit greatly from a more developed understanding of power. Despite mentioning the term frequently, Booth has remained at a very abstract level in what comes to pinning down what power is and does. No indication is given as to how power operates; no systematic analysis is provided of its effects. Even though a Gramscian understanding of hegemony is present in Wyn Jones's writings, his critical approach to security has not included a detailed engagement with the power of predominant security understandings and practices. How can these be seen as instances of power? How do they reflect and reproduce existing relations and structures? An engagement with these questions is essential if security as emancipation is to provide a sophisticated analysis of existing insecurities. At the same time, an emancipatory approach must be based upon a solid diagnosis of the power relations and structures in which claims for emancipation and possibilities for transformation are embedded.

The understanding of power in security as emancipation can be enhanced, first, by the incorporation of Michel Foucault's notion of power as government. So far, security as emancipation has overwhelmingly relied on the assumption that security understandings and practices work through the determination of action – that is, by encroaching upon and restricting what would otherwise be free decision and action. This latter view is present in the work of Steven Lukes, for whom power consists in 'the ability to constrain the choices of others, coercing them or securing their compliance, by impeding them from living as their own nature and judgment dictate' (2005: 85). Action can be constrained by coercion, threat, by the delimitation of acceptable and desirable behaviour or by foreclosing dissent and alternatives.

The idea of power as government (Dean, 1999) introduces important revisions to this model. It sees power as not merely constraining but also productive. For Foucault, government signals a shift, from the exclusive concern with the protection of the sovereign towards the optimization of the natural capacities of individuals and populations – in the name of an efficient economic and political organization. This means that power does not just repress and stifle subjects, but plays a fundamental role in constituting them (Foucault, 2000 [1982]). Seeing power as productive of subjects enables a recognition of its multiple instances and sites: power becomes a network of relations between various nodes – such as schools, hospitals, prisons and armies – that interact in the management of actions and dispositions.

Incorporating this view of power into the security as emancipation framework has decisive implications for the latter's ability to recognize the effects of predominant security arrangements and to act upon them. It allows this approach to analyse in detail how security is involved in the constitution of subjects. In addition to these analytical benefits, power as government can also reinforce the political agenda of security as emancipation: after all, in order to be truly effective, the identification of opportunities for resisting and transforming security arrangements requires a recognition of their power, its multiple sites and modalities, and the way it runs through the fabric of society in the form of social relations.

Whilst adding the notion of governmentality would help security as emancipation catch up with recent developments in the critical security field, a further revision of its understanding of power would allow this approach to 'give something back.' It is surprising that an approach that has drawn from the Marxist tradition to highlight the global production of inequality is yet to include an in-depth account of the domination side of power – and, concomitantly, of understandings and practices of security as instances of domination. Domination can be conceived as 'a condition experienced by persons or groups to the extent that they are dependent on a social relationship in which some other person or group wields arbitrary power over them' (Lovett, 2010: 2). Iris Marion Young's work supplements this definition: for her, the groups themselves must be seen as collective experiences and 'forms of social relations' (2011 [1990]: 44), and not entities reified around shared attributes. Thus, rather than a binary confrontation

between a dominating and a dominated group, domination is at once a structural phenomenon and the result of fluid and complex relations. Young writes:

[d]omination consists in institutional conditions which inhibit or prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions. Persons live within structures of domination if other persons or groups can determine without reciprocation the conditions of their action, either directly or by virtue of the structural consequences of their actions (Young, 2011 [1990]: 38).

Even though a dominated group need not have a correlate, consciously dominating one, Young recognizes that a situation of domination implies the existence of a group that is systematically privileged in relation to another. Put differently, to be dominated means to be involved in an unequal relationship, the terms of which are not fully controlled by all groups involved. The terms of the relationship force some groups to be subordinate or deferential 'in order to secure reasonably good outcomes or results' (Lovett, 2010: 47). Determination of action is thus embedded in a broader relational and structural context.

In addition to there being imbalance or inequality, domination also means that a certain degree of arbitrariness is present. Arbitrary power implies that decisions are made or effects are produced to the benefit of certain groups, without the constraint of effective rules and procedures and not reflecting the interests of all parties affected. Dominated groups are thus vulnerable to decisions and outcomes with a high impact upon their life, and which they cannot control or predict.

This notion of power as domination advances the emancipatory agenda by taking further the idea of power as determination of action and by allowing for a specification of the 'oppressions' that Booth mentions in his definition of emancipation. Domination allows for an enquiry into the context-specific, structurally-constrained relations through which life chances are curtailed for some and through which vulnerability is intertwined with the systematic production of disadvantage. Simultaneously, domination is also useful in that it supplements governmentality: firstly, it allows for an analysis of the connections between structures, disadvantaged subject-positions and their accompanying subjectivities; secondly, it adds a normative edge that, as has been noted (O'Malley, Weir, and Shearing, 1997), is often

lacking in governmentality studies. More precisely, it provides a clearer direction for the transformation of existing power relations in the transformation of unequal subject positions. By incorporating, into its account of power, the notions of governmentality and domination – with the former’s focus on the fluid production of subjects and the latter’s emphasis on systematic disadvantage in subject-positions – security as emancipation has the potential to make an important contribution to critical security debates.

In sum, the reconsideration of security as emancipation advanced here is based upon a view of the reality of security as a politically-shaped ensemble of relations and structures. It sees the power of security ideas and practices as entailing the constitution of subjects and political possibilities via governmental strategies and, often, via practices of domination. This revised version of security as emancipation yields a more detailed view of the condition of insecurity, a more substantiated assessment of the need for emancipation and a more grounded judgment on the potential and strategies for alternative security arrangements.

With these revisions in place, security as a form of emancipation can be understood as the transformation of structures, relations and processes of subject-constitution that entail systematic disadvantage and vulnerability; this transformation is enabled by the creation of spaces in people’s lives in which they can make decisions and act beyond the basic necessities of survival.<sup>13</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This article advanced three main arguments. Firstly, the commitment to politicization that constitutes the cornerstone of Critical Security Studies has been detrimentally affected by a tendency to conceive security as having an undesirable logic. This happens at a time when critique is blunted by the proliferation of the ‘critical’ label and by the successes of CSS in highlighting the problems with predominant ways of thinking and doing security.

Next, it was argued that security as emancipation can potentially provide a platform for reclaiming the political in CSS. By taking insecurity as its starting point, by conceiving theory as a form of praxis and by mobilizing

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<sup>13</sup> See, in this respect, Basu and Nunes (forthcoming 2012).

immanent critique, this approach promises to address the current blind spots of politicization.

Finally, the article provided a revision of security as emancipation that addresses the shortcomings of the versions provided by Booth and Wyn Jones. Two themes are central to this revised version: the recognition of the political relations and structures underpinning the reality of security; and the engagement with the multifaceted nature of power as determination of action, government and domination.

This article has suggested that a re-engagement with – as well as reconsideration of – security as emancipation is crucial for addressing the current impasse in CSS. As in previous moments in the development of this field, there is much to gain from dialogue between approaches. However, this discussion also suggests that it is perhaps time to abandon the idea of a division of labour between the deconstructive and reconstructive sides of CSS. This was at the heart of the Copenhagen School's reluctance to consider at length the transformative potential of its work.<sup>14</sup> It was also accepted by Booth, for whom deconstructing security is ultimately a conservative stance that diverts attention from the 'real condition of insecurity.'

In contrast with this division of labour, this article has begun to show the fruitfulness of a cumulative vision of critique. Indeed, the reconsideration of security as emancipation proposed here points toward a notion of critique that is committed to deconstruction but also unashamedly reconstructive. It brings together insights that for too long have been kept apart in the critical literature, and introduces other insights that so far have been insufficiently considered: that security has no fundamental logic; that a detailed analysis of its assumptions and effects can be achieved by problematizing its reality and by working with a broad notion of power; that one can make judgments about the desirability of security arrangements by considering structures and relations of vulnerability and disadvantage; and that, on the basis of this, it is possible to identify potential and devise strategies for transformation. The conjunction of these insights can help realize the promise of the critical security literature and provide critique with a renewed strength and sense of purpose.

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<sup>14</sup> '[An emancipatory approach] can do what we voluntarily abstain from, and we can do what it is unable to do' (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998: 35).

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