

No way out: desecuritization, emancipation and the eternal return of the political — a reply to Aradau

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Claudia Aradau addresses important issues within the securitization approach of the Copenhagen School. Discussions of security, securitization and desecuritization always involve implicit or explicit stances on political preferences. Unsatisfied with both desecuritization and the identification of security with emancipation, she goes on to develop an alternative take on the problem. De-coupling emancipation from security, Aradau tries to locate emancipation as the counter-strategy to securitization in a realm beyond and outside the reach of exceptional politics, sovereign authority and exclusionary moves. What Aradau underestimates is the central, indeed constitutive, role that security plays in the ontotheology of politics. *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2006) 9, 62–69.

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Introduction

Claudia Aradau (2004) deserves credit for addressing important issues within the securitization approach of the Copenhagen School (CoS). As she rightly points out, discussions of security, securitization and desecuritization always involve implicit or explicit stances on political preferences. Aradau shows that one of the advancements of the securitization approach is its ability to problematize the securitization of actors or issues in terms of its normative implications. As Wæver himself has noted, securitization might not always be the preferred strategy to pursue in order to deal with political problems since this strategy suspends the normal, deliberative processes of politics (Wæver 1995: 54–57). Aradau further elaborates on this normative conundrum, investigating in particular the problems associated with moving issues and actors out of ‘security’. Unsatisfied with both ‘desecuritization’ and the identification of security with emancipation as the available strategies to accomplish this goal, she goes on to develop an alternative take on the problem. De-coupling emancipation from security instead, Aradau tries to locate emancipation as the counter-strategy to securitization in a realm beyond and outside the reach of exceptional politics, sovereign authority and



exclusionary moves. The problem with this attempt is that it thereby tries to locate the solution to the problem of security and securitization outside of politics. This is all the more problematic as she herself points out ‘that desecuritization has to be first tackled politically’ (Aradau 2004: 389). Yet, by trying to avoid all the pitfalls and monsters that security introduces into politics, Aradau in effect ends up in a de-politicized and therefore purely transcendental space. To try to eliminate security is to try to eliminate politics. What Aradau underestimates is the central, indeed constitutive, role that security plays in the ontotheology of politics. By ignoring this role, she ends up in a position that strongly resembles the Liberal solution to conflict, that is, a commitment to a rarified intercourse of subjects without a social identity (Aradau 2004: 402) that belong to a self-immanent community whose (transcendental) reality precedes any political act that would have established it.

Emancipation vs Politics

Aradau comes to this position after reviewing two alternatives. Firstly, her discussion of the CoS’ own notion of desecuritization focuses above all on the way in which this process recalls and re-affirms the authority of the Sovereign that decided upon the securitization of the issue in the first place. In other words, desecuritization still leaves the previously securitized issue or actor at the mercy of the undemocratic and exceptional power of this Sovereign. Desecuritization in this sense simply reproduces the very problem that securitization imports into a political order, that is, the power to suspend deliberative democratic processes. Repeating a traditional Liberal prejudice, she posits ‘authority against democracy’ (Aradau 2004: 394).

Secondly, her critique of the position of the ‘Welsh School’, which equates security with emancipation, primarily focuses on the way in which the logic of the former concept contaminates the latter one and therefore effectively vitiates it. Reclaiming security for those who have so far been ‘security have-nots’ simply shuffles the categories of secure and insecure actors around, without breaking the exclusionary logic of security itself. Securing one group, according to Aradau, always excludes other groups, defines them as a new threat, and therefore reproduces the security problem all over again (Aradau 2004: 399). We are left with the paradoxical insight that security itself cannot produce any security.

I do not really have an issue with Aradau’s ‘pathology of security’ that informs her attempt to find an escape from its logic. I agree that any discussion about security in general, and de/securitization in particular, implies a stance on the question of what constitutes politics or, in Schmitt’s terms, the Political. My critique here is more about her attempt to escape this logic and to formulate a political strategy outside and beyond the problems that she



correctly associates with this logic. In her argument, Security, and therefore Decision and Exception, are opposed to Emancipation and Democracy. Given her preference for the latter, emancipation needs to chart a course that avoids the pitfalls of the former issues. Aradau thereby reproduces the problems associated with the Liberal project: the displacement of politics and the replacement of authority with democracy, of decision with deliberation. Yet the Political, Sovereignty and the Decision have a way of returning despite these efforts. There is simply no way out of the conundrums of our political thinking, and no security outside of security.

In order to trace the logic of this argument, let me begin by providing a wider definition of security than employed by both Aradau and the CoS.

Security and Politics

For Aradau, and also for the CoS, security refers to the strategies and practices of authorized actors or institutions. As a speech act, it requires the ontologically prior existence of these actors. Security forms part of politics. But we might gain a better understanding of the problems that occupy Aradau and others if we reverse this order and make politics part of security. In Mick Dillon's words, 'modern politics is a security project.' Security is 'concerned with securing the very grounds of what the political itself is; specifying what the essence of politics is thought to be. The reason is that the thought within which political thought occurs — metaphysics — and specifically its conception of truth, is itself a security project' (Dillon 1996: 12–13). Committed to finding a fixed point or a foundation for knowledge, politics and order, and yet faced with a world characterized by contingency and difference, the first order of politics is to secure identities, boundaries, concepts, meanings, histories, truths ... 'Security, then, finds its expression as the principle, ground or *arche* [...] upon which something stands, pervading and guiding it in its whole structure and essence' (Dillon 1996: 13).

Much poststructuralist research has demonstrated (and deconstructed) the processes through which these 'securitizations' have occurred. In this context, the work of Campbell and others demonstrates the way in which states constantly produce and reproduce their national identities through discourses of in/security, in which the possibility of community and order on the inside is constituted through the construction of the outside as different, dangerous and disorderly (Walker 1993). Community and order, in other words, owe their existence to this process of delineation and exclusion. Aradau, and with her many Liberals, never problematize the processes through which communities and order are established, thus forgetting that the discursive, political or other forms of interaction among its members are made possible in the first place by



such practices. Inclusion and community can only be had at the price of exclusion and adversity.

A further consequence of this critical reflection is that, in a sense, desecuritization can never really happen. The production of insecurity and the designation of issues and actors as threats to the state, the community, the society, is part and parcel of the re-iterative, performative production of national identity. States can never be secure, as such stasis, that is, the cessation of securitization moves, would mean their death (Campbell 1998: 12). States therefore continuously securitize issues and actors in order to produce a national identity. Desecuritization is therefore perhaps best understood as the fading away of one particular issue or actor from the repertoire of these processes. At some point, certain 'threats' might no longer exercise our minds and imaginations sufficiently and are replaced with more powerful and stirring imageries. Desecuritization as a speech act, on the other hand, seems to be a contradiction in terms. To declare that a particular issue or actor no longer constitutes a security threat and does not require extra-ordinary measures simply opens up a 'language game' in which more often than not the correctness of the declaration, its implications and consequences become the topic of further debate. Hence, the issue or actor never leaves the discourse on security within which the securitization embedded it. After all, even a denial of a connection still maintains the potentiality of that connection.¹ To sum up, an issue becomes desecuritized through a *lack* of speech, not through speech acts affirming its new status.

Finally, these reflections of course also re-introduce the Sovereign into the picture of political order. After all, to paraphrase Schmitt, sovereign is he who decides on the exception (Schmitt 1996: 13). The decision about inclusion and exclusion, about the boundaries between a community and its outside, between order and anarchy, is the defining moment of the Sovereign. Moreover, his ability to suspend order and declare a 'state of exception' for the purpose of protecting that order against existing threats is an inherent condition of possibility of any such order. He is therefore not an external force, itself an exception to political order and democracy, as Ardaud seems to suggest. As Sergei Prozorov has elaborated, the Sovereign operates on precisely this borderline between political order and its outside. 'Sovereign is [he] who is simultaneously *inside* the space of order as the source of its constitutive principles and *outside* it as something that cannot be subsumed under these principles, a surplus that in relation to the order in question is unfathomable, monstrous and obscene' (Prozorov 2004: 280). As the source of order and law, the Sovereign cannot be subsumed under either one of them, yet he is not disconnected from them either.

Politics is therefore always indebted to the very phenomena that Aradaud tries to exorcise from it. A commitment to the notion of self-immanent



communities tries to escape the necessary play of Sovereignty and Exclusion. A 'deification of discussion' (Prozorov 2004: 279) replaces an appreciation of the Decision. And violence and conflict are consequently to be overcome through discourse, as if conflict were only a matter of 'distorted communication' (Habermas 2003: 35).

The Politics of Emancipation

Aradau obviously makes a more elaborate argument about emancipation, yet her approach essentially repeats the problems I sketch out here. By trying to escape the logic of politics and its debt to Sovereignty, Decision, and Exclusion, she ends up in a position that in effect only hides, but never escapes, the play of the Political. Both solutions that she suggests are ultimately reproducing logics of exclusion and authority that she bemoans in her critique of the securitization approach.

Aradau seems to offer two solutions or strategies for the problem of emancipation in lieu of desecuritization. One strategy pertains to the others within our communities, the other strategy to 'the dangerous, risky others [that] have no place in the community and [that] can make no claim to the rights ... bestowed to all members of the community' (Aradau 2004: 404). As for the first group of 'security have-nots', she suggests a strategy of realizing universal norms that so far are realized only in a particularistic and exclusionary fashion. Emancipation is therefore a political struggle to universalize universalities, to overcome residual exclusions and to realize the 'superior values of the community, such as the legal and ethical values of the state itself' (Aradau 2004: 403). Emancipation, Aradau contends, 'needs to show a gap or contradiction between these official principles and the actual practice' (*ibid.*). This way, exclusion can be transcended and hierarchy overcome.

But I would argue that something is still excluded, and that a hierarchy is re-affirmed even in this emancipatory project, based allegedly on 'recognition' and 'universality'. Excluded from the agenda in this process is the identity of the subaltern, the 'security have-not', as *different*. As Aradau (2004: 402) suggests herself in a crucial turn of her argument,

What is first needed is a process of dis-identification, a rupture from the assigned identity and a partaking of a universal principle. Thus, women are not women but equal citizens. Migrants are not migrants but workers with equal rights.

Exclusion, on an ontological basis, therefore remains part of the emancipation process. The other *as other*, as a moment or instant of Difference, has to be



eliminated, her identity to be universalized so as to fit into the ‘universal principle’. The price of emancipation, in other words, is the elimination of difference; recognition can only be granted if the question of identity and difference is settled in terms of the former. Physical inclusion therefore requires ontological exclusion, the other has to cease to be who she used to be.

Aradau’s notion of emancipation here reproduces the matrix of identity/difference so aptly described by Todorov (1999: 42):

Either he conceives [the others] as human beings altogether, having the same rights as himself; but then he sees them not only as equal but also as identical, and this behaviour leads to assimilationism, the projection of his own values on the others. Or else he starts from the difference, but the latter is immediately translated into terms of superiority and inferiority [...]. What is denied is the existence of a human substance truly other, something capable of being not merely an imperfect state of oneself.

Exclusion therefore also re-establishes hierarchy, and with that, authority, as a decision on the proper (universalist) identity has to be made; and this decision in turn has to be enforced.

When it comes to ‘dangerous, risky others [that] have no place in the community’, Aradau’s solution to the issue of desecuritization and emancipation is equally problematic. Firstly, one should point out that Aradau is herself conducting a securitization move here by defining, indeed reifying, these actors as dangerous and risky, and assigning them a place outside of the community. Her advocacy of a ‘ternary strategy’ in which representatives of the community challenge state practices towards these others, and withdraw legitimacy from these practices by declaring them to be conducted ‘not in our name’, is based on this reification and reproduces it as the securitized status of the Others is never cast into question. The target of the emancipation process is therefore not the Other, but the State of the community and its ‘non-democratic institutional practices’ (Aradau 2004: 405). Secondly, as she notes: ‘In this case too, emancipation functions as a strategy of dis-identification. The London anti-war march under the banner “Not in our name” is indicative of such a strategy of dis-identification from state practices’ (*ibid.*).

In other words, in this case the whole process really concerns those members of the community that emancipate themselves from the authority of the state, denying this state the democratic legitimacy on which its political practices depend. The issue is therefore less the inclusion of these Others, and more about the relationship between community and state.² But as with the first strategy, dis-identification re-introduces exclusion and hierarchy into the language game of emancipation. The designation of certain state practices as, for instance ‘un-American’, a designation that is currently *en vogue* in the United States as a way to de-legitimize the incarceration of prisoners in



Guantanamo Bay, of course excludes the advocates and supporters of the Bush Administration's policies as outside the proper American identity. To support this policy is to betray the very fundamentals of America's values and commitments, and to condone the values of its enemies. Moreover, by assuming a position from which to judge about such inclusion and exclusion, about belonging to the community of values that constitutes the American people, the critics and opponents of the current administration re-invoke the position of the People as Sovereign, to which the government owes its legitimacy. By questioning the authority of the administration to speak in its name, it re-invokes in a sense the original social contract through which this authority was founded in the first place.

Conclusion

Neither of Aradau's strategies of emancipation can ultimately escape the logic of the Political. In either case, issues of exclusion and power re-emerge as integral and necessary parts to the solution. Emancipation, in other words, cannot be conducted, cannot even be thought against the metaphysics of Western political onto-theology.

Aradau's argument about the necessary linkages between securitization, de-securitization, and our normative choices about what concept of the Political we commit ourselves to, is therefore as persuasive as it is ambiguous. On one hand, she is of course correct in problematizing this linkage. Unless we want to turn Securitization into a purely positivistic and therefore sterile mapping of securitization and desecuritization moves and strip it of any political relevance, these are precisely the questions we need to address. Yet at the same time, our leeway for finding effective strategies for de-securitization or emancipation is much more limited than Aradau would seem to hope for. We can find these strategies only within the parameters of the Political, never outside of it. The problems and antinomies inherent in our way of doing politics cannot be wished away.

Notes

1 The best discussion of this and other tricks that language plays on us is found in Culler (1982).

2 Aradau (2004: 405) states that this strategy 'can also function by including those who are constructed as threatening in the political community and thus activating the first strategy', yet again this runs up against her own securitization mentioned above.

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