

Limits of security, limits of politics? A response

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My article, 'Security and the Other Scene: Desecuritization And Emancipation' has triggered reactions to the political claims it put forth. The most controversial claim — in the eyes of the critics — was the formulation of the impossibility to think security only analytically, outside any political project. The other main criticism concerned the concept of politics formulated in the article. In my response, I argue first that political decisions are necessary to cut across the 'indiscernability of knowledge'. Moreover, security is the political concept *par excellence*, as it entails questions about the politics that we enact. Second, I expose the closure that Schmitt's concept of the political entails for our possibilities of thinking a different politics.

Journal of International Relations and Development (2006) **9**, 81–90.

doi:10.1057/palgrave.jird.1800073

Keywords: analysis; emancipation; politics; security; theory

Introduction

Reading the responses to my article on 'Security and the Democratic Scene' I also had ambiguous feelings of engagement/disengagement.¹ Disengagement was triggered by what seemed to me a dismissal of that which did not fall within the realm of the familiar or known. Thus, a politics of dis-identification and contestation of concrete universality became the equivalent of liberal identity politics, despite a clear dis-identification from Habermasian approaches and liberalism in the article (Aradau 2004: 390, 402). Engagement was, however, prompted by the important questions that the reactions to the article have raised about the concept of politics and the role of theory. My article was part of a larger project that tackled the relation between security and politics and attempted to think another concept of politics that was neither politics of security nor a politics of liberal discussion.² The desire to fall back upon a politics of 'text and talk' that would resonate with a liberal politics of negotiation and discussion or upon a politics of exception as the ultimate and only possible horizon of all politics appeared to me as symptomatic of some of the impasses of critical thought nowadays.



A politics of ‘text and talk’ is ambiguous about its own limits. ‘Text and talk’ already implies legitimate speakers who can formulate meaningful discourses rather than apolitical rants or engage in a debate rather than in irrational outbursts of violence. Yet, as I have pointed out in ‘Security and the democratic scene’, the gates of communication sometimes need to be opened by force. Moreover, assuming that securitization, just like any other discourse, allows for argumentative contestation obscures the way in which security practices (rather than just discourses) have ordered societies to the exclusion of the enemies of order. In my reading, securitization is not only a discursive (and institutional process) of contestation over meanings and actions, but a process of ordering that closes off forms of social antagonisms and struggles for justice and delegitimizes their claims in these terms. My main concern has been to keep open these spaces of social struggles, which are not always already defined by the limits of the system. It is in this sense of struggles for justice that securitization closes off that ‘political projects’ gain their meanings. Rather than contingent penchants of political theorists, political projects are defined in struggles that traverse the social fabric.

Hayward Alker’s and Andreas Behnke’s responses seem to me to be discourses of limits, of the limit or boundary that analysis, politics and security ultimately entail. Rita Taureck’s contribution is an extreme version of the problematique of analysis and politics.³ Why would analysis not be a ‘limited’ form of political engagement (as in the Copenhagen School — CoS — approach)? Or how could one attempt to challenge the always present and necessary limit of the constitution of community? My reply will tackle these issues in a two-part discussion of the relation between analysis and politics on one hand and of security and the concept of the political/politics on the other.

Analytical or Political? The Role of Theory

What is the relation of analysis and politics? The question goes back to the debates on the role of theory and practice, ideology and science. Marxism as a science from the standpoint of the proletariat or a poststructuralist theory that recaptures the silenced voices of power are similar answers to the relation of theory and practice, of politics and analysis. Does the analyst need a political project, asks Alker? The analyst can expose the functioning of the world and we are to recognize the ‘semi-autonomous existence of comparative, analytical, perspectival spaces’ (Alker 2006: 70). ‘Semi-autonomous’ seems to me to be the revealing word here inasmuch as theory is never simply analytical, separate from the political project that defines social struggles and never simply political, devoid of tools with which to gauge these social struggles.



Yet, how does theory think its own conditions of emergence, the subjective position of the analyst? As Étienne Balibar (1995) put it, ‘writing in the conjuncture’ needs to be read along the lines of ‘writing in the *conjuncture*’ and ‘*writing* in the conjuncture’. One writes both in the political conditions of a conjuncture and in the conditions of other writings, of other theories and debates. A conjuncture is traversed by social struggles; it is never complete, never closed and thus open to several interpretations. Analysis is confronted with its limit without an awareness of the struggles and antagonisms that constitute a conjuncture. Analysis is not extraterritorial to politics but is directly linked with the space of politics. It occurs in both a conjuncture of struggle and antagonism and in a conjuncture of theoretical debates.

Without understanding the conjuncture and its struggle, analysis as a tool that would give insights into the world leaves us in a political impasse. One could position oneself simply in a conjuncture of writing and discuss modes of power without a link with the political conjuncture. Yet, what does an analysis of power and its two, three or four modes mean if it does not shed light on the practices of power? Foucault’s analytics of power exposed disciplinary institutions in their productive effects upon bodies to be made docile, incorporated within the order of the normal. Foucault’s analyses cannot be extricated from the theoretical and political conjuncture in which he wrote. Relying on analysis and its insights confronts us with a political impasse. Outside its conditions of possibility, analysis creates situations of the indiscernibility of knowledge.

Human trafficking is an excellent example of both the impasse of text/talk and the indiscernibility of analysis. One cannot simply deny that stories of exploitation and severe physical and psychological abuse simply happen. One cannot also deny that migratory projects that view ‘trafficking’ as part of a larger project towards gaining financial autonomy are also real experiences. Experts, practitioners and academics will keep disputing which categorization is representative for the securitization of human trafficking: is it victims of exploitation and violence or autonomous illegal migrants who have not fared too well? This indiscernibility in the debate about the ‘truth’ of trafficking mobilizes debates about the ‘truth’ of prostitution and its subjects. What is prostitution? Is all prostitution a form of slavery and hence equivalent to trafficking? Is prostitution a form of work to which women should be entitled? Much of the feminist debates have focused on the difference between prostitution and other types of work. The abolitionist perspective sees ‘prostitution as slavery’ (Barry 1995) and the degradation of women. The ‘work argument’ sees prostitution as simply another form of work. Such different approaches to prostitution have been supported by specific experiences in prostitution; the prostitute’s body has been contestedly represented as a site of work, a site of abuse, power, sex, addiction, and even



pleasure (Bell 1994: 99). The body of trafficked women has also been contestedly represented as a site of abuse, of trauma, or of autonomy.

Arguing in favour of prostitution as being similar to other types of work or other types of work as similar to prostitution (on the side of defenders of the sex industry) does not lead anywhere politically. Prostitution *is* and *is not* like other types of work: endless sociological comparisons do not provide any answer to the situation in which trafficked women and prostitutes find themselves nowadays. What counts is not whether prostitution is or is not work, is or is not similar to other forms of work, but whether naming it as 'work' has any political potential. One cannot rely upon a formalization of argument, of contestation, but one needs to consider the political effect of the decision to name prostitution as work in a particular context, that is, the context of trafficking as a security issue.

Prostitution has been reclaimed as work and this re-naming is related to struggles for the 'recognition of women's work for basic human rights and for decent working conditions' (Kempadoo 1998: 3). The claim 'we are all workers' — in a form of universal address that refuses to distinguish between native and foreign prostitutes — has been part of social struggles in which sex workers and activists have challenged both the non-rights of prostitutes and the non-rights of illegal migrants. The claim of prostitution as work challenges the wrong that state policies do to both native/legal and foreign/illegal prostitutes. It also challenges the constitution of trafficking as either a threat of illegal migration or a threat to vulnerable (foreign) women. Prostitution as work is thus a political decision that cannot be derived from the available analytical knowledge. Prostitution as work is political inasmuch as it opens a space of rights and action for 'victims of trafficking' and closes a space of discrimination and abuse for prostitutes (whatever their national appurtenance). Politics is therefore an intervention in a situation of contested representations, an intervention that is not accountable from the position of knowledge/analysis, but from the standpoint of struggles that traverse the conjuncture.

Rita Taureck's accusation of misunderstanding the theory of securitization shares some similarity with the distinction between the analytical and the political. Should we give up the analytical framework of securitization for ethical concerns, Taureck asks. Keeping them separate is suggested as an answer that would not misinterpret the analyst's desire for explaining the world. Securitization theory, she argues, is 'not a *political* statement on the part of the analyst, but rather [...] a theoretical tool of analysis' (Taureck 2006: 53). Another division of labour in the academic world? Let the analysts do their analysis and 'normative' scholars can ask their ethical (political?) questions *a posteriori*, in another space that can be kept separate from the space of analysis. I am not interested here in how Taureck would account for the



conditions of the emergence of theory and the position of the analyst — maybe by a regressive move to a stance of detached observation — but in the split she wants to introduce in the speech act theory.

The critique I am making is not however — along the lines of deconstruction — that of the ‘normative dilemma’. I have suggested that politics is primary inasmuch as security works with assumptions of community, order, border and identity, which need to be made explicit and I have proposed another concept of politics that is disruptive of the ordering of security. Even if one stays within the CoS framework, defining securitization as a performative speech act has political consequences that can only be brushed off by ignoring the theoretical and political context in which the theory of speech acts functions. As Ole Wæver (2000: 286) has confessed,

A speech act is interesting exactly because it holds the insurrecting potential to break the ordinary, to establish meaning that is not already in the context. It reworks or produces a context by the performative context of the act. While it is important to study social conditions of successful speech act, it is necessary always to keep open the possibility of failure of an act.

Speech acts are interesting because they are always already political. Wæver has drawn on Butler’s performative speech acts as her theorization opened up the possibility of speaking with authority when one does not have the authority to speak (Aradau 2004: 395). The case of Rosa Parks (the black woman who famously refused to give her place on a bus to a white person) has been a paradigmatic example for Butler’s politics of performative speech acts. Political engagement is thus inextricable from the theory of speech act and its analysis of how situations of domination are reversed.⁴

Neither Liberal nor Schmittian: The False Alternative

Andreas Behnke’s reply is situated within the horizon of modern politics as the Political, the sovereign decision that institutes communities by the constitution of the enemy. Security would on this account be the inescapable horizon of the Political/politics. According to Behnke, this understanding of politics (as ultimately a politics of security) is fatally missing from the article. Thus, any political move (a move that would unmake security or deconstruct) is not only irremediably destined to depoliticization, but also to reproducing the logic of exclusion and authority. As Behnke (2006: 62) puts it, ‘The Political, Sovereignty and the Decision have a way of returning despite these efforts’.

Behnke is right that I do not accept that all modern politics is a politics of security. I do not accept his premises and the Schmittian way of closing off politics. In the space of a reply, I cannot engage in-depth with this reading of



Schmitt that has found fortune in recent (international) political theory. Paraphrasing Foucault, my argument is that we should reject this new form of blackmail, Schmitt or liberalism, which leaves no space for politics proper. Security is not the ultimate horizon of politics, the fatal destiny of a modernity out of which only some form of ontological messianism can save us. Schmitt was very much aware of the impossibility to reduce politics to security. Security introduces a limit to politics or, in Jacques Rancière's terms, turns politics into police. In quoting Mick Dillon, Behnke (2006: 62) defines security as 'the principle, ground or *arche*... upon which something stands'. The political/security is therefore the *arche* of community, its mode of ordering and stabilization. Yet, politics proper is without *arche*, without principle or grounding, as I shall try to explain in considering the common enemy of Schmitt and liberalism.

In my reading, Schmitt's concept of the political is as much a way of closing off politics proper as liberalism. Schmitt's concept of the political has been taken up as a way to open the political against liberal consensual politics. Schmitt opens the concept of the political to antagonism, yet he closes the antagonism along the lines of community and nationalism. His concept of the political excludes 'internal antagonisms' (Schmitt 1996: 32). Schmitt effects this closure of politics through the idea of the homogeneous community, whose substance can vary historically from the nation form to that of the German *Volk*, but whose homogeneity gives content to the state (Müller 1997). The Political, Sovereignty and the Decision are haunted by what they try to exclude to institute a community.

Liberalism reformulates politics as a competition between acknowledged agents and closes down politics by strategies of recognizing adversaries. Schmitt reproaches liberalism exactly for the disavowal of its own conditions of possibility, the disavowal of the exception and of politics as friend/enemy. Yet, in grounding the Political in the sovereign decision, Schmitt disavows the conditions of possibility of his own theorization. The distinction he draws between *hostis* and *inimicus* (enemy and foe) (Schmitt 1996: 26) serves to exclude a whole series of enemies. The foes are the unjust enemies, bandits, pirates and revolutionaries. For liberals, those are an anathema to the unfolding of politics defined by negotiation and consensus-forming strategies. For Schmitt, they are the internal enemies who destroy the necessary homogeneity of the community. Thus, one could say that the common enemy of both Schmitt and liberalism is the one who threatens civil peace and the maintenance of stability.

Another facet of the common enemy appears if we place Schmitt and liberalism in relation to Marxism. Schmitt is aware that there are alternatives to 'pluralism' that are not defined as the constitution of a homogeneous community and the repression of internal antagonism. His reference to Lukacs



in *The Concept of the Political* seems to indicate that Schmitt is acutely aware of this alternative of a revolutionary politics (Schmitt 1996: 63).⁵ Politics is therefore not about the constitution of the community but about the dissolution or disruption of the given community. Schmitt privileges the counter-revolutionary mode as order-instituting at the expense of revolutionary politics. Schmitt's politics excludes those who might struggle against the social order itself. Without endorsing Lukacs' proletarian politics, one can position another mode of politics that is concerned with the dissolution of community. This concept of politics is different from both Schmittian ultra-politics and liberal para-politics.⁶

For both Jacques Rancière and Étienne Balibar, politics is not simply formalized antagonism, which constitutes a homogeneous community and where the 'content' is irrelevant.⁷ Politics has its own universal, equality, which appears in the differentiation of community from itself. Politics processes a structural antagonism, a wrong that a certain ordering of the community entails. The *arche*, the principle or the grounding of community, is also rule or domination and in this sense politics is without *arche*, it challenges the ruling order or the police, in Rancière's terms. One could therefore distinguish movements (or arguments) by the oppressed which function as verifications of equality and action which reclaim forms of ethical or religious identity.

In this understanding of politics, democracy is not the liberal parliamentary system or a mode of discussion, which has excluded its own decisionist grounds. Democracy is the mode of being of politics, 'the name of a singular disruption of this order of distribution of bodies as a community [...] through a singular mechanism of subjectivation' (Rancière 1999: 99). Dis-identification does not mean the rejection of difference, but the disruption of given forms of representation. The difference of the subaltern is given through practices of representation and identification that a singular political subjectivation challenges. The form of politics is not that of discussion, but is a polemic that challenges the very situation of interlocution. Let the subaltern be different means remaining within the regime of the police, within the proper distribution of places.

Dis-identification is a form of subjectification that challenges proper places. In saying 'We are the people', the Leipzig demonstrators became subjectified as the 'true people' when they were obviously not the totality of the people.

For me, the people is not a sort of group. The people is not a mass. It is simply the name of an act of subjectivation. This means that there is a moment, take the manifestation in Leipzig in 1989, when certain people went out in the streets and said 'we are the people'. However, 'we are the people' does not mean 'we are the masses', 'we are its representatives'... For me, politics is never a question of identity (Rancière 2004).



Politics is thus about the aporia of identity or about the difference of the political community from itself. The people of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was different from itself, through the exclusion of the ‘part of no part’, of those who had no entitlement to politics. Politics is therefore about two worlds that exist in one and about making visible a wrong through a verification of equality. One world is that which is ordered according to an *arche*, that of security, of proper places and identities, whereas the other is the disruptive emergence of the people as the ambiguous subject of politics. This politics is not without dangers, it can always succumb to the universal it challenges, to the order of the police or conversely to its own particularity. Thus, in 1989 GDR ‘we are the people’ became ‘we are one people’ in an identitarian expression of the proper community, a community that has rediscovered the *arche* of national identity.

Conclusion

Two problematiques have emerged from the responses to my article on ‘Security and the Democratic Scene’: one concerning the relation of analysis and politics, and the other on security/the political and politics. The position I have tried to explain here has privileged the political conditions of the emergence of theory and a concept of politics that is both different from a Schmittian definition of the political and liberal consensual politics. It is to a certain extent a wager I have taken in what was for me a theoretical and political impasse: the voice of science exposing the ‘truth’ of society and the folding of politics upon identity/difference. I do not suggest that this is the only way to tackle this impasse or the only practicable politics. My theoretical and political wager is placed in a context defined by expert/managerial politics and a ‘dangerous’ revival of Schmitt and of a politics that externalizes social antagonisms in the construction of ‘us’ vs ‘them’.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Jef Huysmans for inspiring (dis)agreements and to Tobias Blanke for being political.
- 2 My Ph.D. thesis is entitled *(In)Different Politics: trafficking in women, from security to emancipation* and focuses on a concept of indifferent politics or a politics indifferent to differences. Against the categorization and ordering of society that implies the distribution of places and bodies in the community, an indifferent politics challenges and interrupts this very distribution.
- 3 Taureck argues for the separation of the two or the postponement of political engagement for the sake of analyzing the ‘way of the world’. She however conflates the dilemma of speaking security and my own critiques of what the primacy of politics entails in relation to the understanding/analysis of security.



- 4 One need not agree with Butler's analysis to understand the political import of a speech act for resistant politics. For a compelling discussion of the case of Rosa Parks and of the differences in Butler's and Bourdieu's accounts of agency, see Lovell (2003).
- 5 Also see Balibar's discussion of Schmitt, Lukacs and revolutionary politics (2002).
- 6 Para-politics accepts political conflict, but reformulates it as negotiation between acknowledged parties. In ultra-politics, the political conflict returns by means of a false radicalization, by reformulating it as a war between 'Us' and 'Them' (Žižek 1999).
- 7 See Rancière's reply to criticism formulated during a 2003 conference dedicated to his work (Rancière 2003).

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