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From securitization theory to critical approaches to (in)security

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Response to Sarah Bertrand, 'Can the subaltern securitize'?

Sarah Bertrand's article invites us to reflect – or reflect anew – upon the status of critical theorising in security studies and to engage seriously with the (post)colonial moment in critical security studies, and particularly in securitization theory. In reading the 'colonial moment' through the silence implied in securitization theory, Bertrand's article advances two key criticisms of securitization theory at the intersection of postcolonial and feminist scholarship. In so doing, it builds on Barkawi and Laffey's discussion of the erasure of agency in 'The postcolonial moment of security studies'.[1] It also explicitly engages with Lene Hansen's criticism of the silencing that securitization entails for women's insecurity, thus also implicitly contributing to debates in feminist security studies more broadly.[2]

The editors' invitation to be part of a Junior-Senior dialogue based on Bertrand's article asked us to both engage in a real debate and use the dialogue as a platform to develop potential orientations for moving security studies forward in some way. In this intervention, I start by addressing the critique of silencing and the epistemology of securitization theory developed in Bertrand's article and then offer a few reflections on orientations for critical work on (in)security today, two decades after the publication of Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde's seminal work on securitization.[3] A critique of silencing, its implications and (re)significations of speech acts have been key devices of inquiry in critical work in security studies and International Relations. Bertrand's article takes up the challenge of developing a typology of silence and unpacking the mechanisms of silencing in order to formulate a critique of securitization theory.

In a first part, I focus on what silence as an analytical category entails for how we understand security practices and not just securitization theory. While securitization theory has undoubtedly risen to dominance in critical security studies, it seems to have become more of an impediment to critical research than useful equipment. As one of my students in a Critical Security Studies module has put it this year, securitization hides more than it helps us see. Bertrand's critique of securitization sheds light on the colonial dimensions of this impasse. Therefore, in the second part, I want to reflect on some theoretical and methodological orientations for what I call critical approaches to (in)security. Critical approaches to (in)security do not subscribe to a school or a theory but focus on transversal conceptual and methodological work across established disciplinary boundaries. The orientations I propose here take (i) the analysis of security practices in the direction of disputes, controversies and struggles; (ii) the analysis of security's effects into the unpacking of the

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[1]Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, 'The postcolonial moment in security studies', *Review of International Relations*, 32:2 (2006). Pinar Bilgin has also argued that Western-centrism has been 'constitutive of security studies'. Pinar Bilgin, 'The 'Western-centrism' of security studies: 'Blind spot'or constitutive practice?,' *Security Dialogue*, 41:6 (2010).

[2]Lene Hansen, 'The Little Mermaid's silent security dilemma and the absence of gender from the Copenhagen School,' *Millenium*, 29:2 (2000).

[3]Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

'conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans';[4] and (iii) the production of security knowledge towards an analysis of power's investment in ignorance. These orientations have started to inform recent critical work on (in)security, and thus I want to reserve some space to point to some of this existing work, which I hope will be taken up more in the future exactly to contest the dominant articulations of what it means to do critical work in International Relations and security studies.

Speaking and silencing: Epistemologies of (in)security

Drawing on literatures in feminist legal studies, particularly the work of Jennifer Hornsby and Rae Langton on pornography and silencing, Bertrand proposes to unpack the range of mechanisms of silencing underpinning securitization theory. She locates three modes of mar-ginalisation of the subaltern that securitization theory enacts: locutionary silencing, illocutionary frustration, and illocutionary disablement. The dynamics at work here are either between the securitizing actors and the securitized 'others' (through silencing) or between audiences and securitized 'others' (through unwillingness to listen/hear/understand). What emerges in the analysis is both the unavailability and the limitations of speech. Or, in other words, the article attends to the inequalities and differentials of listening/hearing/understanding. As Bertrand argues, 'one may try to securitize but fail to be heard for not using or not knowing how to use a hegemonic language'.[5] She helpfully nuances silencing as not simply exclusion or absence and proposes to unpack mechanisms of silencing at the intersection of analytic feminist philosophy on silence and speech acts, on the one hand, and securitization theory, on the other.

This leads to a two-pronged approach to silence. Firstly, silencing is not just not speaking, but incorporates not listening/not understanding. This is rendered through the supplementation of locutionary by illocutionary silence. As a result of these processes of silencing, three further logics of silencing emerge, where the unspoken/misheard/misunderstood insecurity is to be spoken 'for' by security theorists. To put it differently, securitization theory is enabled as a 'capacity contract' of both domination and disavowal.[6] NGOs, for instance, often endow themselves with the power of re-presenting and thus dispossessing others of their claims. A securitizing actor wrests the speech of security from the subaltern and thus reproduces domination through silencing. Moreover, securitization theory is underpinned by a disavowed racialised geography of knowl-edge and insecurity which is divided along the lines of Western/non-Western worlds. This, Bertrand argues, is the 'colonial moment' in which the subaltern is not only dispossessed of the capacity to speak, but this capacity is appropriated by the analyst who speaks for/securitizes for the subaltern. This colonial moment as a feature of the theory is particularly important as it reappropriates critical attempts to extend the theory and address its limitations and 'traps' critical scholars into doing 'the very thing they are denouncing'.[7]

I have found Bertrand's typology of silence and its mechanisms a helpful intervention to render visible the tensions of speaking/not speaking security and its racialised assumptions. Silence, indeed, can be a helpful analytical inroad to understand security practices. Addressing silence and silencing would alert critical security studies to the move of 'giving voice' to others' insecurity or reproducing security speech acts. At a minimum, it would entail some reflection on the discursivity of security – in all its forms – which has increasingly engulfed political speech. It would also require us to revisit the relation between speech and silence in feminist debates.

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[4]Alexander G Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 14.

[5]Sarah Bertrand, 'Can the subaltern securitize? Postcolonial perspectives on securitization theory and its critics', *European Journal of International Security*, 3:3 (2018), pp. 281–99 (p. 287).

[6]Stacy Clifford Simplican, *The Capacity Contract: Intellectual Disability and the Question of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), p. 68.

[7]Bertrand, 'Can the subaltern securitize?', p. 283.

At the end of her article, Bertrand indicates that it is not speech act theory per se that is the problem, but securitization theory and its deployment of a particular approach to speech act theory. Yet, how is this distinction to be drawn? Bertrand takes Wæver's emphasis on the illocutionary versus the perlocutionary reading of speech acts as the motivator for using Hornsby and Langton's framework of illocutionary silencing. Indeed, Wæver has insisted on his analysis of securitization 'as an illocutionary and not a perlocutionary act in order to organize the theory around the constitutive, transformative event of actors reconfiguring the relationship of rights and duties rather than seeing an external cause–effect relationship between speech and effects'.[8] This aligns Wæver with the Langton position on speech acts and sets securitization theory apart from Butler's engagement with speech acts.

Yet, the Butler-Langton disagreement is exactly over how speech act theory is deployed and is constitutive of an important debate about politics and critique in feminist work. Significantly, in her critique of Katherine MacKinnon and Rae Langton, Butler argues that 'pornography has moved from a reliance on the perlocutionary model to an illocutionary one'.[9] Butler also wants to think the possibility of failure of the speech act as a 'condition of a critical response'. While it is not my aim to revisit this debate, I think it is important to make explicit the assumptions about speech act theory at work in securitization theory and also inquire into what Bertrand's adoption of the Hornsby/ Langton model entails for the analysis of silence and silencing. It also means that perlocutionary readings of speech act theory cannot be as readily dismissed as simply sociological, as Wæver suggests. Rather, I would argue, they are political. As Butler puts it in her critique of the illocutionary model of speech acts, such a framework would be effectively depoliticising:

> When the scene of racism is reduced to a single speaker and his or her audience, the political problem is cast as the tracing of the harm as it travels from the speaker to the psychic/somatic constitution of the one who hears the term or to whom it is directed. The elaborate institutional structures of racism as well as sexism are suddenly reduced to the scene of utterance, and utterance, no longer the sedimentation of prior institution and use, is invested with the power to establish and maintain the subordination of the group addressed.[10]

Analysing security practices as power/knowledge (or including a perlocutionary reading of speech act theory) would allow us to attend to sedimented and institutional operations of power, which in turn would draw attention to the analytical potential and limitations of silence itself.[11] For Wendy Brown, silence can become resistance when it 'is not *enforced* from above but rather *deployed* from below' so that 'refusing to speak is a method of refusing colonisation, of refusing complicity in injurious interpellations or in subjection through regulation'.[12] Yet, silence remains limited in its capacity to transform power relations. It is also limited analytically, in that attention to silence and silencing cannot account for what Brown has called 'compulsory discursivity'.[13] The subaltern is forced to speak about herself, to give incessant intimate details. Think about the compulsory discursivity of the asylum seekers whose credibility is assessed again and again, who need to undergo lengthy interviews in order to order to ease suspicion about the risks that they might pose or the veridicity of their accounts. Rather than silenced through the denial or misrecognition of speech, the other is subordinated through the injunction to speak, to confess

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[8]Ole Wæver, 'The theory act: Responsibility and exactitude as seen from securitization', *International Relations*, 29:1 (2015).

[9]Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

[10]Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 81–2.

[11]On resistance to sovereign power through silence, see Jenny Edkins and Véronique Pin-Fat, 'Through the wire: Relations of power and relations of violence', *Millennium*, 34:1 (2005).

[12]Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 97.

[13]Ibid., p. 85.

and to make oneself visible. Simone Browne draws attention to power's incessant demand for visibility when she analyses the so-called 'lantern laws in colonial New York City that sought to keep the black, the mixed-raced, and the indigenous in a state of permanent illumination'.[14] The enforcement of visibility is juxtaposed to the enforcement of speech.[15] What do these dynamics of silence and discursivity mean for critical analyses of security practices? In the next section, I turn to the case of the Cologne sexual attacks, which Bertrand explores as a site for the impossibility of critique in securitization theory. I use this case to draw out potential orientations for critical approaches to (in)security.

Critical approaches to (in)security

In using securitization theory as a potential lens to analyse the 2015–16 Cologne sexual attacks, Bertrand highlights the limitations of securitization theory as 'critical theory'. The representation of the attacks has mobilised an unsurprising dynamic of white women threatened by dangerous brown men. Bertrand argues that both 'white German women' and 'male Muslim migrants' have been silent or silenced in the profusion of media hype and securitization ensuing the attacks. Others have securitized 'for' them. Thus, if 'the possibility to exercise critique is thereby effectively disabled'[16] through the homogenisation and essentialisation of categories, as Bertrand argues, it is here that we need different conceptual and methodological equipment to work with.

The Cologne attacks have brought anti-feminist discourses to the fore (or a particular public representation of feminism) for having been 'silent' about the attacks. Similar arguments about silence were raised against the state institutions, which were accused by extreme right organisations such as PEGIDA of being silent for fear of appearing to be racist. Yet, German women were not silent; their speech was endlessly elicited in the media and appropriated in what came to be known as *Anti-Genderismus* (anti-genderism).[17] Their securitizing speech was elicited, even cajoled by the media, used by right-wing anti-feminist discourses and appropriated in gendered and racialised narratives. Bertrand argues that reading the Cologne attacks through the securitization lens would 'turn the observer into a securitizing actor whose reference to objective "facts" then constitutes an attempted securitization "for" a marginalized group'.[18] While I think many securitization scholars would take issue with the representation of the impasse in distinctly positivist terms of 'observers' and 'facts', I see the impulse to securitize as the most serious impasse of the theory in engaging the Cologne events. Neither the women nor feminist activists were silent/or silenced, but instead mobilised to dispute these representations and claims.

Therefore, firstly, the Cologne attacks can be analysed starting from the struggles and contestations over the events themselves. These contestations and struggles involved a multitude of actors, from the police, the state of North-Rhine Westphalia, activist organisations, the far-right groups Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and PEGIDA, and different feminist movements. Starting from these struggles would allow us to avoid the privileging of security and to attend to the refusal to speak security, which is not silence, but a technique of subversion. Lara Montesinos Coleman and Doerthe Rosenow have suggested foregrounding struggles in order to decentre security. As they aptly put it, 'struggles reveal fractured and contingent assemblages of power and

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[14]Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 67.

[15](In)visibility has made possible nuanced understandings of the relations between governing practices and resistance, without necessarily having recourse to securitization. On (in)visibility, governance, and resistance, see Leonie Ansems de Vries, 'Politics of (in)visibility: Governance-resistance and the constitution of refugee subjectivities in Malaysia', *Review of International Studies*, 42:5 (2016) and Martina Tazzioli and William Walters, 'The sight of migration: Governmentality, visibility and Europe's contested borders', *Global Society*, 30:3 (2016).

[16]Bertrand, 'Can the subaltern securitize?', p. 295.

[17]Eva von Redecker, 'Anti-Genderismus and right-wing hegemony', *Radical Philosophy*, 198 (2016).

[18]Bertrand, 'Can the subaltern securitize?', p. 295.

violence in all their heterogeneity'.[19] While the Cologne attacks led to a very public struggle over the meaning of the events, critical approaches to (in)security would need to engage with a range of methodological devices that include struggles, disputes, controversies, or frictions.[20] Contesting, subverting, resisting, or undoing (in)security does not rely on reproducing (in)security but mobilising against its operations within complex assemblages of power. This entails attention to controversies, contestations, struggles, and frictions, where agency is not located with a set of dominant actors but entangled, claimed, and reclaimed. What is important about Cologne is to understand the refusal to securitize, whether manifest in the analysis of sexual violence or in the enactments of solidarity. To speak and to speak security are neither equivalent nor politically the same. A critique of securitization theory also needs a critique of (in)security and security practices. Starting with struggles, controversies, disputes, or frictions as methodological devices can be one such critical methodological orientation. While each of these methodological devices speaks to different theoretical approaches to the social and political world, they allow critical work to move beyond the opposition to governance/resistance and to study social, political and economic enactments, circulations, and contestations of (in)security.

Secondly, the Cologne attacks raise questions about the relation between what was said and unsaid, between language and materiality, human and nonhuman. Eyal Weizman has coined the concept of 'violence at the threshold of undetectability'[21] to express the idea that violence is often rendered undetectable when we lack the technologies, sensors, and material equipment to shed light on dispersed state practices. As the projects in the exhibition 'Forensic Architecture' show, these increasingly algorithmic and datafied modes of producing (in)security are difficult to render visible given the unequal distribution of security devices and the range of territorial, juridical, and material thresholds that power produces.[22] I suggest that violence is always 'at the threshold of undetectability', even when at its most spectacular. One of the arguments made by feminist activists in the wake of the Cologne attacks was exactly that sexual violence is not limited to a spectacular moment but needs to be understood as a continuum of violence. It is the continuous production of thresholds of undetectability that is constitutive of gendered and racialised regimes of worth. 'Forensic Architecture' raises important questions for critical work both about the role of public forums in the contestation of violence and about the reappropriation of material and methodological devices – from satellite images to pattern analysis in data – to contest these thresholds.

Finally, one of the key elements in the public mobilisation after the Cologne attacks was the production of knowledge about what happened, what was known and what was not known. Testimony played a key role in the 'compulsory discursivity' around the events, as it was mobilised alongside the knowledge of the police, that of journalists, or that produced through surveillance. As Bertrand rightly argues, reducing silence to the problem of speech focuses on marginalisation or exclusion. We also need analytical tools to attend to how knowledge and non-knowledge are simultaneously produced, reproduced, and contested.[23] Security practices are underpinned by the production of multiple forms of knowledge and non-knowledge, whether as

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[19]Lara Montesinos Coleman and Doerthe Rosenow, 'Security (studies) and the limits of critique: Why we should think through struggle', *Critical Studies on Security*, 4:2 (2016), p. 216.

[20]For analysis and arguments concerning struggles and controversies, see Lara Montesinos Coleman and Doerthe Rosenow, 'Security (studies) and the limits of critique: Why we should think through struggle', and Peer Schouten, 'Security as controversy: Reassembling security at Amsterdam Airport', *Security Dialogue*, 45:1 (2014). The concept of disputes was developed by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, 'The sociology of critical capacity', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2:3 (1999). Anna Tsing has proposed the concept of 'friction' to include not just contestation, but many other interactions such as translation, alliance, or accommodation. Anna Tsing, 'Frictions', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012).

[21]Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

[22]{https://www.forensic-architecture.org/past-events/}.

[23]Claudia Aradau, 'Assembling (non) knowledge: Security, law, and surveillance in a digital world', *International Political Sociology*, 11:4 (2017).

ignorance, uncertainty, ambiguity, or mendacity. For instance, many refusals of asylum are based on an evaluation of claims as lacking credibility 'because of alleged inconsistencies in their answers; because aspects of their narrative are inconsistent with available COI; or because their story is deemed inherently unlikely'.[24] After the Cologne attacks, Germany looked to declare Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia safe countries of origin, thus barring the possibility of asylum claims through the production of strategic ignorance about the political, social, and economic situations.[25] The production of not-knowledge helps us attend to the epistemic injustices, which do not necessarily map along the lines of silence/speech, inclusion/exclusion. It also avoids the problematic binary between truth and 'post-truth', which has gained increased currency in international relations and social sciences more broadly.

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[24]Anthony Good, 'Anthropologists as providers of country of origin information in the British asylum courts', in Benjamin N. Lawrance and Galya Ruffer (eds), *Adjudicating Refugee and Asylum Status: The Role of Witness, Expertise, and Testimony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[25]Subsequently, this proposal was rejected by German parliamentarians, while increased police and surveillance measures were put in place.