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Can the subaltern (in)securitize? A rejoinder to Claudia Aradau

Sarah Bertrand

London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)

Claudia Aradau's response to 'Can the subaltern securitize?' engages with issues of silence and resistance arising from my work and also lays out directions and avenues of research for the field of critical (in)security studies. Aradau suggests, in particular, reorienting the field around the study of struggles and contestations, the role of detectability/undetectability in the analysis of violence, and the production of strategic ignorance as a form of non-knowledge. These themes resonate strongly with the arguments I put forward in my article: focusing on the visible/invisible, the heard/unheard, the legible/illegible, as well as on the processes and struggles underwriting the making of these categories are some of the tools I used to develop my thesis about a colonial structure in securitization theory.

Much of Aradau's engagement with the theme of silence in my work starts with reading it as a critique of securitization theory's reliance on illocutions instead of perlocutions. While this is an excellent point, it is not the one I put forward. My critique is more fundamental: it is about drawing on speech acts in the first place, whether illocutionary or perlocutionary. Therefore, I start my discussion (i) with a clarification of my own position regarding illocutions/perlocutions and continue this engagement; (ii) with a discussion of the idea of silence as resistance, which Aradau brings up in connection to her remarks about perlocutions. In doing so, I link Aradau's intervention back to the main issue of my manuscript: that of a colonial structure in securitization theory. I conclude (iii) by distinguishing something we might call (in)securitization studies from a critical approach to insecurity.

I. Two approaches to critiquing marginalisation in securitization theory: the illocutionary and the perlocutionary perspective

There are two different perspectives from which we can critique the marginalisation process that securitization theory entails: the perlocutionary and the illocutionary perspective.

Perlocutionary perspective

Highlighting marginalisation in securitization theory from this perspective entails recasting securitizations as perlocutions and then focusing on what this new framework makes visible in opposition to the old illocutionary model. This move thus requires stepping outside of the parameters set up by securitization theory from the very beginning. Because perlocutions focus on the effects done by speaking, they involve a longer temporal frame and therefore open up the possibility of taking into consideration the sedimentation of 'elaborate institutional structures of racism as well as sexism'.[1] As Aradau aptly argues, this casts a political (rather than a merely sociological) light on the process of securitization: it structurally enables the analyst using securitization theory as perlocution to highlight the processes of marginalisation involved in deploying it.

[1]Judith Butler, as cited in: Claudia Aradau, 'From securitization theory to critical approaches to (in)security', *European Journal of International Security*, 3:3 (2018), pp. 300–05 (p. 302).

Illocutionary perspective

Highlighting marginalisation in securitization theory from this perspective starts with an acceptance of the given illocutionary framework. The work that this trajectory of critique requires is twofold: it needs to paint the 'elaborate institutional structures of racism as well as sexism'[2] and it needs to find connection points within the illocutionary framework to link these two together. This is what I have endeavoured to do in my article. I put forward the notion of disabling frames in order to highlight some of the processes that produce the visible/invisible, legible/illegible, heard/unheard. I then drew on Hornsby/Langton as a way to break up the illocutionary framework into speaking/hearing/understanding and thus open up connection points between the illocutionary framework and the processes that produce the visible/invisible, legible/illegible, heard/unheard.

The difference between the perlocutionary and the illocutionary angle of critique can be captured by the inside/outside dichotomy: the perlocutionary perspective is a critique from 'outside' in that it relies on a different framework in order to articulate the critique; the illocutionary perspective is a critique from 'inside' in that it starts from the established premise and works from within to open up the space for critique. Where the longer temporality of perlocutions automatically opens up a space for deep-seated inequalities to be rendered visible, the temporal snapshots provided by illocutions require additional labour to make apparent what their structure erases. I see each of these perspectives of critique as equally valid. I also agree with Butler's analysis that the use of perlocutions is in principle more politically enabling than the use of illocutions. A securitization theory framed through a perlocutionary lens would certainly have a much more critical handle on processes of 'securitization', even though it would not solve the problem of having to speak security 'for' the subaltern in order to securitize their issues. I articulated my critique through the illocutionary angle instead of the perlocutionary one quite simply so as not to be dismissed for not engaging with the actual illocutionary framework originally set up by Ole Wæver.

It flows from this that my point of critique goes beyond what the illocutionary/perlocutionary distinction articulates. My point is more fundamental. It is about drawing on speech acts in the first place, whether illocutionary or perlocutionary. What I tried to distinguish in my article was the difference between two things: a use of speech acts to read a specific practice that would otherwise not be legible, on the one hand, and the definitional caging of a slice of reality into speech, on the other. I read the former as an ad hoc strategy that can be deployed for critical purposes, while I see the latter as a gate-keeping practice that regulates access to the slice of reality locked into discourse. As such, it is one thing to read foot dragging through a speech act lens to highlight the agency and resistance practices of peasants. It is another to lock the existence of and accessibility to resistance into the successful completion of speech acts. Hence, I would like to suggest that there is an important difference between scholarship examining the framing of issues in terms of 'security' and the effects of that move, on the one hand, and scholarship that definitionally locates the existence of and access to security in discourse, on the other.

II. Silence as resistance?

The central argument I put forward in 'Can the subaltern securitize?' is that securitization theory creates a situation where – akin to Rudyard Kipling's white man's burden – one feels compelled to speak 'security' for the subaltern who cannot securitize. This is what I called the colonial moment in securitization theory: a situation where the subaltern is first silenced and can then only be spoken for. The idea of *silence as resistance* brought up by Aradau in connection to her discussion about perlocutions implies a different pattern. Here the colonial move is not enabled by and enacted through silence but embedded instead in the incitement of a specific type of

[2]Butler, as cited in Aradau, 'From securitization theory to critical approaches to (in)security', p. 302.

speech. It is located in the regulation of its content and its frequency; in determining that there should be speech in the first place and in reappropriating it for different purposes. There is also a difference between the normative assumptions underpinning these different ways of thinking about silence. Underwriting my own argument is a notion of silence as obstacle and hindrance. In order to argue for a colonial structure in securitization theory, I relied on a conception of silence as exclusion and a conception of silence as superimposition of another voice onto one's own speech. The normative underpinnings of the idea of silence as resistance are clearly different: here silence functions as an expression of agency, as the articulation of a form of power. In this framing of silence, it is speech that enables the colonial overlay, not the absence of it.

This raises an interesting question: to what extent – if at all – is the notion of silence as resistance compatible with the securitization framework? Prima facie, for silence to be a form of resistance, it cannot be forced or imposed. There needs to be choice, that is, there needs to be the option of speech. It is only in the context of an incitement *to speak* that refusing it can be read as a form of resisting the exercise of power. As Aradau notes, asylum seekers whose claims are repeatedly evaluated for consistency or truth may find themselves in such a situation. Refusing to speak in the context of migration regimes that force them to repeat their stories over and over again can be read as resistance. If we look at securitization theory, however, it becomes clear that from the vantage point of the subaltern, this ability to choose between security speech and silence is not necessarily available: if, as I argued before, the subaltern cannot securitize, then silence denotes their failure to do so, and not the power of resistance.

Let us complicate the picture by looking at the difference between speech and security speech within the context of securitizing illocutions. As I argued, within the context set up by securitization theory, one can be silent while screaming loudly. This means that one can speak in the sense of uttering meaning through voice or body but still be 'silent' because one is not heard or listened to. In that sense, the asylum seekers of Aradau's example might actually already be silent in the sense of illocutionary frustration or illocutionary disablement, even while repeating their stories over and over again. It is within the context of these different types of silence that we can read the possibility of choice and hence resistance: the asylum seekers of Aradau's example might chose to stop uttering words and hence move from a situation of illocutionary disablement or illocutionary frustration to a self-chosen situation of locutionary silencing. While such a move denotes agency and could indeed be read as a form of resistance, its results in terms of securitization outcome remain the same: whether or not the subaltern choses a situation of locutionary silencing over a situation of illocutionary frustration, they remain silen(ced) and unable to securitize. While silence may thus be read as resistance, it does not automatically signify a successful securitization or (in)securitization and hence 'resistance' within this framework.

What about those cases of what we might call a 'weaponised' form of silence? Cases of lip sowing or self-immolation,[3] cases of silent mass demonstrations. Here there is silence in the sense of not uttering words, but there is speech in the sense of uttering meaning through the performance of the body.[4] This sublimation of silence into speech, however, does not guarantee being heard or listened to; it does not guarantee a successful securitization. What these reflections show is that even though a refusal to speak or utter meaning can be read as a form of resistance, this same refusal isn't necessarily 'resistance' within the context of securitization theory – at least not if it doesn't translate into a successful securitization or (in)securitization. For this to be the case, a whole set of sociological relations need to be in place. Whether one refuses to speak in a death camp, in a high security prison, in an immigration booth, in a public

[3]See Banu Bargu, *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Banu Bargu, 'The silent exception: Hunger striking and lip-sewing', *Law, Culture and the Humanities* (2017), Online First, available at: doi:10.177/143872117709684.

[4]See Lene Hansen's point about the body and performativity: Lene Hansen, 'The Little Mermaid's silent security dilemma and the absence of gender in the Copenhagen School', *Millennium*, 29:2 (2000), pp. 285–306.

demonstration, in a parliamentary hearing, or in a university classroom, the intention of 'resistance' that can be attributed to this act has varying chances of succeeding. And for it to be read as resistance within the theoretical framework set up by securitization theory, it needs to be successful. This links back to the point of critique I tried to clarify in my first section: outside of the context of securitization theory, the sort of weaponised silence expressed by someone sowing their lips together can be read as a speech act of resistance and this can be done to critical effect. But within the context of securitization theory, it cannot be read as resistance unless the securitizing or (in)securitizing speech act is successful. Just like the claim to security, the claim to resistance is locked away into discourse, into the successful completion of a securitizing or (in) securitizing speech that is audience dependent.

III. From securitization theory to (in)securitization studies?

Aradau suggests a turn from securitization theory to critical approaches to (in)security. Where securitization theory is 'elite-centric, ... conservative, politically passive, and neither progressive nor radical',[5] the focus on insecurity promises to re-centre the weak to the forefront of analysis. But can the subaltern (in)securitize?

Whether to '(in)securitize' is taken to mean 'to determine what counts as insecurity', or 'to determine what, in discourse, does not become a security issue', it is clear that the subaltern cannot (in)securitize. If a person, group, or issue is (in)securitized by speaking about it – as for example in the cases of a strategic production of ignorance mentioned by Aradau – we have already seen that forms of locutionary silencing, illocutionary disablement, and illocutionary frustration impede this process for the subaltern. If a person, group, or issue is (in)securitized by being silent about it – as perhaps in the case of those German women who tried to (in)securitize their situation in the aftermath of the New Year's Eve events – then the subaltern seems to be equally marginalised from it. For silence to be seen as a form of resistance and hence effective (in) securitization, there needs to be a choice, and not just a choice between two different forms of silence. A whole set of power relations, to which the subaltern are by definition unlikely to have access, needs to be in place. In order to (in)securitize their issues, the subaltern, hence, needs to be spoken for, to be (in)securitized for by others – at least if the epistemology of (in)security is taken to be discursive.

In practice, then, what counts as 'insecurity' is determined by those with power. Any critical approach to insecurity is thus faced with the challenge of not simply reproducing these power dynamics in its analysis. In short, the critical study of insecurity ought not simply to become a new version of (in)securitization studies. Aradau makes some interesting suggestions in that direction.

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Sarah Bertrand is a PhD Candidate and Graduate Teaching Assistant in the International Relations department at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). She is also an editor of Millennium: Journal of International Studies, vol. 46.

[5]Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 215.

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