

**POLITICS, SECURITY, CRITICAL THEORY:
A CONTRIBUTION TO CURRENT DEBATES ON SECURITY**

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This paper argues that critical debates about security have yet to engage in a thorough discussion about the conflicting understandings of the relationship security/politics present in the field of Critical Security Studies (CSS), a theoretical gap that has led to fundamental clashes regarding the value of security and the desirability of securitization. This paper aims to make a contribution by undertaking a critical reassessment of the assumptions regarding the security-politics nexus that underlie critical approaches to security.

I will start by showing why it is important that critical approaches to security clarify their assumptions about the political and, concomitantly, the security-politics nexus (I). I will argue that an implicit consensus about security as an undesirable realm of suspension of politics has achieved a position of particular relevance in the debate; I will argue that this view runs against some of the main tenets of the Welsh School of security studies, a situation that can explain the uneasy position of the latter *vis à vis* other critical approaches (II). I will then draw from the Critical Theory tradition to undertake a critique of understandings of the political underlying the critical debate (III). Departing from this critique, an alternative understanding of security as a democratic and integrative good will be suggested (IV).

I - Critical Security Studies: challenge, dialogue, silence

This section will put forward an overview of the intellectual evolution of Critical Security Studies (CSS) – since its inception as a multifaceted challenge to ‘traditional’ accounts of security up to the current situation, in which a systematic dialogue between different critical approaches is gaining importance. The objective will be to highlight the centrality within CSS of understandings about the political and the security-politics nexus, and to demonstrate that a thorough discussion about these assumptions – which is crucial to the development of current debates – is yet to take place.

By CSS I mean the critical debate that had its first expression with the publication, in 1997, of an edited volume by Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, and that has served since as an umbrella term to designate a variety of approaches to security that hold as their objective the problematization of realist/statist/masculinist/militarist/ethnocentric accounts, as well as the development of alternative views that aim to be more politically aware, historically and sociologically grounded and normatively oriented. I am not claiming that critical approaches *started* in 1997 – to do so would be to overlook the invaluable influence of earlier developments such as peace research and feminist thought – but merely suggesting that this edited volume marks the beginning of a systematic interaction between different critical approaches.

It is consensual to argue that CSS was born under the double sign of ‘challenge’ and ‘dialogue’: challenge to the *status quo* of security studies and dialogue between different views, backgrounds and disciplines. The balance between these two signs can be said to have changed in the past ten years, with the slow but steady introduction of many critical concerns into the political agenda – environmental and human security are but two examples – and with the growing need to systematise critical achievements, insights and experiences. This does not mean that the ‘challenge’ component has stopped being important, but rather that the intellectual reproduction of CSS and its gradual consolidation as a field have underscored the importance of a more systematic interaction

between different approaches. This tendency is evident if we compare the seminal 1997 volume – which presented a plurality of chapters with no explicit attempt at establishing a consensus – with the recent manifesto put forward by the ‘c.a.s.e. collective’ (2006), an initiative that gathers some of the most productive authors in the field.

Even though CSS was and is a field characterized by plurality of opinion and dissent, since its inception it had a unifying idea that can be characterized as an intention of politicization, that is, a desire to ‘bring the political back into security studies’. This thrust was made explicit right from the outset. The organizers of the 1997 volume argued that the new strand of security studies wished to impose itself by putting into question the patterns and schemes by which knowledge about security was produced and, consequently, by questioning the way security studies conceived and addressed ‘reality’ – be it the reality of its subject in the strictest sense, be it the wider realm of social and political life (Krause and Williams 1997). As a consequence, an effort of historical and political framing was seen as essential. The groundings of ‘traditional’ conceptions of security were identified in particular understandings of subjectivity and sovereignty – in other words, it was argued that the common understandings about security were inherently connected with specific understandings about how the political world should be understood:

‘[g]rasping the contemporary meaning and nature of security, then, means coming to terms with the historical dynamics that constitute contemporary world politics, and the way in which security is understood within the dominant modes of contemporary thought’ (Krause and Williams 1997:36).

Traditional security studies were seen as theoretically framed by a particular political and historical worldview, one that, in turn, they were implicated in reproducing. The embeddedness of security within a statist-anarchic understanding of world politics constrained the relationship between security studies and its subject in a triple way: firstly, the theoretical imagination of security studies (that is, what is conceived as possible and legitimate knowledge) became limited to considerations about survival and stability of the state *vis à vis* the uncertain intentions of other states; secondly, the

seemingly permanent character of current political arrangements contributed to the crystallization of security knowledge as unchanging in its ‘core truths’, thereby enshrining a set of parameters of scientificity and legitimate academic inquiry; thirdly, by accepting unquestioningly these political arrangements, security studies became a powerful tool in their reproduction.

CSS thus aimed at undertaking a step back. The objective was to give security a historical, political and social content by questioning its meaning and value. The former referred to the concept of security itself (what is it to be secure and from what kinds of threats?) and to its referent object (who or what is to be rendered secure?). The latter referred to the ethico-political context in which security comes about (how does a ‘security issue’ arise?), to its effects (what does ‘security’ do?) and to the normative desirability of a security situation. Downplaying the ‘scientific’ and ‘truthful’ character of traditional accounts, CSS showed the relationship of mutual dependency between representations of security, normative choices and the way security concerns and practices are played out in the social and political world – in other words, the interconnection between what security is deemed to be, the political and normative considerations behind these accounts and their effects in practice. The denial of the necessity and naturalness of existing accounts ultimately aimed at reintroducing the possibility of agency.

Thus, CSS was, from the beginning, a political endeavor that attempted to open up the way for a problematization of the concept of security that could provide the intellectual background against which reflection and debate about desirable practices could be undertaken. The different critical approaches within CSS have assumed this commitment in different ways, but the intention of politicization can be deemed omnipresent. Wæver, whose ‘securitization theory’ has been accused of being conservative and thus only marginally critical (Booth 2005c:271), explicitly stated that

‘[t]he securitization approach points to the inherent political nature of any designation of security issues and thus it points an ethical question at the feet of analysts, decision-makers

and political activists alike: why do you call this a security issue? What are the implications?’ (1999:334).

Wæver highlights the ultimately political and ethical standpoint upon which security analysis is undertaken¹. Although departing from different understandings about the security-politics nexus, as will be seen in section II of this paper, Booth’s and the Welsh School’s conception of security as derivative of prior political conceptions points to the same interdependency between security analysis and a political/normative intention. Finally, the sociological explorations undertaken or inspired by the Paris School are clear attempts to provide security analysis with a ‘thick’ political content – it is no surprise that concepts such as ‘field’, ‘capital’ and ‘struggle’ acquire particular importance.

The centrality of ‘politicization’ to CSS is nicely summed up in a recent document that can be said to constitute the latest (and, given its authors, perhaps the most authoritative to date) expression of what the field is all about:

‘What underpins critical approaches to security in Europe is the identification and denunciation of *depoliticization*, both in the social realm and in the realm of academia. The present article is therefore to be understood in part as a call for the return of a certain number of issues to the realm of politics’ (c.a.s.e. collective 2006:445).

Thus, for the c.a.s.e. collective, security analysis is ultimately aimed at ‘defin[ing] a modality for a more appropriate engagement with politics’ (2006:477).

Given the centrality that CSS attributes to ‘politics’ in security analysis – be it as the lens through which security issues are approached, be it as the final objective of the analytical effort – it is surprising that so little has been said about the nature of the political and its relationship with security. Notable exceptions are the work of Dillon (1996) and Walker (1997 and 2007), both explicitly embedding reflections about security within broader problematizations of the political. Nonetheless, the impact of these works on actual

¹ For an interpretation of the ethics of securitization along Habermasian lines, see Williams (2003:521-524).

debates *between* critical approaches can be considered somewhat marginal, even though Dillon's remarks about the ontological foundations of modern politics and Walker's connection of security with the formation of subjectivity have informed the individual work of several critical security analysts².

It can be argued, however, that within CSS as a field and a *locus* of discussion between different approaches, the nexus politics-security has been treated with an increasingly uncomfortable silence. This has led to a number of ambiguities as to what regards the relative status of security and politics within the CSS endeavor. In particular, one can observe in CSS important discrepancies concerning: a) the nature of the political; b) the value of security *vis à vis* politics; c) their interpenetration and relations of mutual influence; d) their resilience or likelihood to change³. Granted, these differences have been alluded to and tangentially exposed in discussions regarding the desirability of securitization and the prospects of democratic politics in light of security concerns⁴. Nonetheless, and particularly in what concerns the two main poles in this uneasy interaction – namely the Copenhagen School's understanding of security as 'ultra-politicization' (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998) and the Welsh School's 'comprehensive engagement' with the 'realities of security' (Booth 2005a) – it can be said that the cards have not been laid on the table.

What are the consequences of this situation and why does it matter? Should the absence of consensus be seen as something bad? After all, CSS never aimed to be a coherent school of thought, and its proponents have been very careful in avoiding the crystallization of their views in any kind of dogma or definitive consensus. Rather, the necessity of a dialogical, dynamic and open-minded approach to the subject has been repeatedly emphasized (c.a.s.e. collective 2006:451, Van Munster 2007). Recent developments such as the 'c.a.s.e. manifesto' should be read, not as an effort of closing debate and achieving a unitary position, but rather as an attempt to systematize critical

² Dillon's influence on Behnke (e.g. 2006) is clear, and Walker's call for a focus on subjectivity has found a sophisticated answer in recent work by Aradau and Van Munster (2007).

³ A detailed analysis of the discrepancies will be undertaken in the next section.

⁴ See, in particular, Aradau (2004 and 2006), Behnke (2000 and 2006) and Floyd (2007).

achievements and provide a theoretical and conceptual ‘toolbox’ with which students can approach and discuss security issues.

Nonetheless, this paper argues that the lack of a systematic and deep engagement with the security-politics nexus has had, and continues to have, detrimental effects in the development of a fruitful dialogue within CSS. The most obvious consequence is the uncomfortable position that the Welsh School holds in the field – a situation that is a mixture of misrepresentation and self-exclusion and that manifests itself in the way in which its contributions have been reduced to ‘normativity’ and an abstract concern with ‘individual security and emancipation’, the result being a somewhat dismissive reception⁵.

Moreover, and most importantly, the failure to engage in a thorough analysis of the assumptions regarding the nature of the political and the value of security have resulted in CSS not being able to fully realize the potential, not only of the various approaches it houses under its umbrella, but also of the interaction between them. Dialogue has been constrained by the failure to engage with basic assumptions. Positions seem to grow more entrenched – Booth (2005c:269-272) demonstrates a reluctance in engaging in a fruitful dialogue, and many critical scholars reveal an almost knee-jerk reaction against calls for emancipation – and a true synergy is yet to be achieved within CSS.

In sum, this paper departs from the following assumptions: a) recent developments in CSS, of which the ‘c.a.s.e. collective’ manifesto is one of the most theoretically interesting and academically significant, have demonstrated the growing importance of dialogue between different theoretical approaches, as a way of integrating critical insights and achievements, as well as allowing for a more comprehensive and informed critique/reevaluation of practices; b) this dialogue has had beneficial results but has been undermined by significant discrepancies regarding the relationship between security and politics and by the often unquestioned acceptance of a particular understanding of this

⁵ For good examples, see c.a.s.e. collective (2006:456), Aradau (2006:397-398) and Van Munster (2007:241-242).

relationship, as will be seen in the next section; c) this silence has led to a widening gap between the Welsh School and other approaches, most notably the Copenhagen School (despite efforts aimed at the establishment of bridges, like Floyd 2007); d) this gap is particularly important given that one of the main thrusts of CSS has been the intention to ‘politicize’ the realm of security, that is, to denaturalize and introduce an element of normative choice and political agency in the process of understanding and dealing with security in practice; e) as a consequence, this silence, besides preventing CSS from engaging in a truly plural debate, has curtailed its critical potential.

II –The problem of security-politics in CSS

This section aims at addressing the gap identified above by undertaking an analysis of the security-politics nexus in CSS. An interpretation of the literature will lead me to make the claim that a particular understanding of security as an undesirable realm of suspension of politics – an idea most eloquently expressed by the Copenhagen School – has achieved a position of significant importance in the field. I will argue that this view is at odds with some of the main tenets of the Welsh School of security studies. This will lead me to corroborate my earlier claim that the current critical debate suffers from a fundamental *malaise*. Following from an analysis of two attempts to bridge this divide, I will identify two key areas of ‘unrest’ – the notion of the political and the problem of the exception – that need to be addressed in order for this problem to be overcome.

At first glance, the differences within CSS seem apparent enough and they are clearly noticeable in the ‘rivalry’ between the Copenhagen School and the Welsh School regarding the desirability of security: whilst the latter has privileged a ‘comprehensive engagement’ with the ‘realities of security’ (Booth 2005a), the former clings to an eminently discursive understanding of it, arguing that ‘security’ is always the result of a performative act. In other words, whereas the Welsh School understands security as a good to be achieved, the Copenhagen School instead prefers to understand security as a particular register of meaning that is obtained through certain actions (‘securitizing

moves’) and that legitimizes undesirable policies – thus, ‘security’ is, in general, something to be avoided.

This paper argues that at the heart of these differences lie fundamentally different understandings about the nature of the political and the concomitant security-politics nexus. Ole Wæver, one of the leading exponents of the Copenhagen School, concluded in an historical analysis of the concept of security that its value fluctuated throughout human history, having become, in the middle of the 20th century, a ‘watchword’ of an eminently statist and Western ‘establishment’ (2004:60)⁶. Wæver’s identification of a performative function of ‘security’ – national or collective – throughout the 20th century led him to argue that security took over the concept of *raison d’état* as a justification of measures that went beyond established political procedures (2004:56).

This insight lies at the heart of the ‘securitization theory’ of the Copenhagen School: what matters for security analysis is not the definition of what security ‘is’, in substantive terms, or the identification of factual situations of insecurity, but rather an investigation of the process that surrounds the construction of an issue as a security problem and, simultaneously, the effects of that construction – what security ‘does’. This means that security cannot be seen as an objective ‘thing’ – threats are not facts that can be observed. However, this does not mean that security is the result of mere perception. Rather, security is seen to be embedded in a process that is intersubjective by nature: securitization⁷. The securitization of a certain issue is not the empirical confirmation of the materiality of a security problem, but rather a ‘speech-act’ in which something is done by being said; in other words, securitization is the identification of a *locus* in which it is possible to ‘talk security’, that is, to talk in terms of security/threat⁸.

⁶ A similar interpretation of the conceptual history of ‘security’ was provided by Rothschild (1995; see in particular pp. 63-64).

⁷ Formulations of the Copenhagen School’s ‘securitization theory’ include Wæver (1995), Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998), and Laustsen and Wæver (2000).

⁸ The focus on speech-acts has shifted recently to an attention towards processes. For a critique of the insufficiency of the concept of ‘speech-act’, see Williams (2003). For an application of the concept of ‘security continuum’, see Huysmans (2006).

Securitization theory identifies the following elements as fundamental in any successful securitization: a) a *specific framing of the issue*: the portrayal of the issue as an existential threat, a threat to the survival or integrity of the audience; b) a *specific way to deal with the issue*: priority of action and emergency measures; c) a *specific consequence*: the breaking free of normal procedural rules and the alteration of the relations between actors.

The question of the effects of securitization is of particular importance to this argument: the Copenhagen School establishes a clear difference between the securitized issue, which entails actions outside the ‘normal bounds of political procedure’, and the ‘politicized issue’, which is ‘part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations or, more rarely, some other form of communal governance’ (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:24). This means that the ‘political effects’ of a successful securitization are, paradoxically, the curtailing of politics: public debate and democratic deliberation are replaced by secrecy, fast and unchecked decisions and extreme measures.

This is the closest that the Copenhagen School ever gets at providing a definition of security, and even here, in order to be faithful to itself, it must place the word between inverted commas: “‘security’ is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issues either as a special kind of politics or as above politics’ (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:23). One can conclude that, for the Copenhagen School, there is a fundamental gap between the realm of security (that is, the sphere of securitized issues) and the realm of ‘normal politics’ (normal procedures of public and democratic deliberation). ‘Security’ is exception and ‘extreme politics’, and this ultra-politicization is, by its very nature, undesirable. Therefore, the objective of security analysis must ultimately be the desecuritization of issues – taking issues out of the realm of security and placing them in the realm of politics.

Granted, the Copenhagen School has recognized that securitization and desecuritization are ‘political processes, not stable formulas’ (Laustsen and Wæver 2000:739); however, this glint is framed within an understanding that identifies ‘an already implicit logic

within security discourse: the claim about existential threats and an ensuing legitimization of extraordinary measures' (Wæver 1999:337). Exceptionality is undesirable because it affects the balance between legality and discretion, thereby endangering democracy. This view is also present in Huysmans' (2004) analysis of the uneasy relationship between liberal democracies and the use of 'security responses' to specific issues. According to Huysmans, security 'mak[es] speed a necessity' (2004:332), thereby tipping the scale in favor of an unchecked 'sovereign leadership' (2004:334). In other words, security is dangerous because it opens the way for unrestrained sovereign power.

This skeptical view of security, based on an understanding of the security-politics nexus that conceives politics as fundamentally threatened whenever security is brought to the fore, has had a deep impact in current critical debates about security. Huysmans can be considered an example of a tendency to equate security with suspension of politics. Granted, he has developed a more sophisticated account of the security-politics nexus than the one put forward by the Copenhagen School: he recognizes that 'assertions of exceptionalism differ according to the nature of the energetic principles of politics upon which support for exceptionalism is based' (2004:338), thereby conceding that the consubstantiation of exceptionalism depends upon understandings of the political⁹. Moreover, he has painstakingly attempted to embed security within specific logics and fields of practice, arguing that one needs a 'political sociology of security' (Huysmans 2002:51) that can reveal the particular historical and social form that security assumes¹⁰. Nonetheless, Huysmans still identifies security responses with the establishment of an environment of 'fear of the enemy' (2004:337) that reveals a rationality of political existence based on the 'logics of war' (2002:57) – in other words, an 'existential modality' in which 'social relations [are] structured on the basis of distrust' (2006:xi).

⁹ In discussing his concept of 'politics of insecurity', Huysmans is even more explicit: 'visions of insecurity imply visions of the nature of politics, i.e. of the political organization of social relations' (2006:11). This is a reformulation of his earlier remarks about the role of security as a signifier, an ordering activity that 'articulate[s] the place of the political' (1998:244). Huysmans' discussion will be picked up again later in this paper.

¹⁰ A good example of an attempt to develop a sociological analysis of the 'functioning' of security is Huysmans (2006).

Therefore, for Huysmans, the formal specificity of security has an inherently violent and exclusionary character. Zedner, an author that engages with the concept of security from the standpoint of criminology and policing, has also described security as possessing a problematic nature: according to her, besides being exclusionary (2000:211), security is also paradoxical, in the sense that it erodes civil liberties, enlarges the penal state, increases anxiety, presumes the persistence of crime and is, in general, inimical to the ‘good society’ (2003:158)¹¹.

Didier Bigo, a leading author of the Paris School of security studies – which has been recognized as one of the main theoretical influences on current critical debates (c.a.s.e. collective 2006) – has also departed from these assumptions. His sociological analysis of the role of bureaucratic networks of security experts in the ‘management of unease’, with detrimental effects on rights and liberties (2005), as well as his critique of the surreptitious erosion of the political sphere of freedom through the workings of the European Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (2006) demonstrate the same understanding of the security-politics nexus: security cancels politics, normal politics can only be imagined by the removal of security.

Even critics of the Copenhagen School have not managed to completely steer clear of this binary opposition. Aradau has provided an interesting challenge to the Copenhagen School’s conception of politics; according to her, this theoretical approach ‘lacks a concept of politics or a clear definition of politicization’ (2004:389). In the wake of Williams (2003), Aradau identifies a contradiction in the accounts of politics provided by the Copenhagen School: on the one hand, it situates the interaction of elites and audiences within the context of a public sphere proper of liberal democracies; on the other hand, securitization is underpinned by an understanding of the securitizing move as constituting a moment of Schmittian affirmation of the transcendental supremacy of the political¹². ‘Politics’ in this sense comes up as an instance of sovereign power, decision

¹¹ The paradoxical nature of security is also noted by Huysmans, who argues that insecurity is a necessary condition for security: ‘security practices cannot eliminate insecurity because they constitute insecurities’ (1998:248).

¹² I will develop this further in the next section.

and constitution of enmity, which necessarily excludes democratic participation and deliberation. Aradau attempts to solve this issue by putting forward an understanding of politics that refuses the liberal/Schmittian ‘false alternative’ (2006:85). However, she still sees security as inherently ‘introduc[ing] a limit to politics’ and ‘turn[ing] politics into police’ (2006:86). In fact, she explicitly equates the Schmittian side of the equation with the ‘politics of security’ (2006:81), a phrase used by Dillon (1996) to describe the ontological foundation of modern politics.

Thus, one can see that Aradau’s critique of the Copenhagen School’s notion of politics does not aim at undermining its account of the balance between politicization and securitization, but rather at investigating the political democratic conditions of desecuritization. To Aradau, democratic emancipatory politics can only come about after and through the removal of security; as a consequence, she too fails to question the assumption that connects security with a decisionist denial of politics. Despite her earlier criticisms, she would agree with Wæver’s remarks:

‘transcending a security problem by politicizing it cannot happen *through* thematization in security terms, only *away* from such terms... the dynamics of securitization and desecuritization can never be captured so long as we proceed along the normal critical track that assumes security to be a positive value to be maximized’ (1995:56-57, emphasis in the original).

This (necessarily brief) reading of some important contributions to recent debates within CSS leads me to conclude that the discussion has, to a large extent, relied upon a set of unproblematized assumptions about the relationship between security and politics. The understanding of security as an instance of suspension and cancellation of politics has remained a significant presence in the field and has found illustration, almost on a daily basis, in post-9/11 debates regarding the supposed ‘balance security/liberty’¹³. As a consequence, one can argue that there is a fairly widespread understanding of security as something that must be avoided. In order to allow for a fully accountable and participated

¹³ For an interesting discussion about the image of ‘balance’ that has informed most of these debates, see Waldron (2003).

resolution of issues, these must be desecuritized and brought back to the sphere of democratic politics. The c.a.s.e. manifesto, which can be described as providing a snapshot of the ‘state of the art’ in the field, is quite clear in this regard: one of the defining features of CSS is the concern with ‘unmaking security’ (2006:454).

Yet, not all of the proponents of CSS would agree that security is something that needs to be ‘unmade’. In fact, one of the theoretical approaches cited by the manifesto as an important inspiration – the Welsh School – has consistently argued that security is something that needs to be achieved, promoted, implemented, and not replaced by something else. The manifesto has solved this contradiction by arguing that, in the Welsh School, security is ‘distinguished from order and power and redefined as inclusive of individuals’ (2006:456). This is a fairly accurate view of the Welsh School’s understanding of the value of security; however, a deeper investigation of the security-politics nexus implicit in this approach is needed, so that the debate is able to conceive viable theoretical alternatives to the predominant views described above.

Security and politics in the Welsh School

Several questions spring to mind when one faces the work of the Welsh School from the standpoint of other critical approaches. One of the most pressing is: why security? Why focus on such a loaded and manifestly dangerous term, a term that has been so often instrumentalized with the objective of justifying highly questionable practices? Can it be that the different critical approaches are talking about the same things, but with different names? Take the focus of the Welsh School on emancipation, for example (Booth 1991 and 1999a, Wyn Jones 2005): can it be placed on the same level of desecuritization, as Aradau (2004) has suggested? To use the words of the c.a.s.e. manifesto, can the politics of normality (desecuritization) and the politics of normativity (emancipation) be seen as two alternative or complementary pathways to ‘unmaking security’?

It is consensual to argue that both of these strands definitely wish to ‘unmake security’, if by security one means an exceptionalist domain of violent and exclusionary practices.

However, there are reasons as to why the Welsh School does not wish to get rid of the term ‘security’ – and that is why desecuritization cannot lead to emancipation. For the Welsh School, security in itself has an important normative value that needs to be maintained. This understanding of the value of security is intrinsically connected with an account of the security-politics nexus that is at odds with the understandings that have achieved particular importance in the field.

It must be said that the Welsh School has not engaged systematically with its own theoretical assumptions regarding the security-politics nexus. This reluctance results from a particularly pragmatic approach to the ‘realities’ of security. Booth defined traditional approaches as a form of self-deception, an ‘escape from the real’ (1995:105), and even a ‘theology’ and a set of ‘rites’ (1999b:45). As a consequence, CSS must aim at ‘engag[ing] comprehensively with the real’ (2004:8), that is, it must take into account the ‘real lives in real places in that real world which academic international relations realists disregard’ (1995:123).

This comprehensive engagement is connected with a normative commitment to confront the materiality of what Booth terms ‘human wrongs’, ‘facts’ that dominate politics on a global scale and that can be said to constitute the ‘subject-matter’ of security studies:

‘The subject-matter consists of flesh (which is fed or famished) and blood (which is wet and messy, and hot or cold), and people living lives comfortably and securely, or enduring them against the wall, like a dog’ (1995:105).

The crude emotion present in this description of what security studies ‘is all about’ must not be mistaken for poetic idealism: Booth has been quite consistent in his efforts to pin down security studies to a particular materiality, thereby eschewing a purely discursive critique of security. Williams (1999) has noted that the version of CSS put forward by Booth claims to be ‘better’ than others because of its improved ‘realism’, that is, its ability to engage with the factuality of human wrongs. This is why Booth, to the obvious disappointment of other critical security theorists who wish to put into question notions

of reality and reason, consistently describes his approach as more realistic and rational than the others¹⁴.

Thus, for the Welsh School, a critical analysis of security is a political and normative activity that is made all the more urgent because of the increasing insufficiencies of the discipline (the subject) when dealing with the multiple realities of insecurity in the world (the subject-matter):

‘the subject is full of wrongs because it does not give an accurate view of the world, it has taken some false turns and it is functioning inadequately; and the subject-matter is full of wrongs in terms of the multitudes tortured or starved, humiliated or hurt, and hated or neglected instead of loved and attended to’ (Booth 1995:124).

Besides departing from this ‘material’ impetus, normativity in the Welsh School is also connected with theoretical insights concerning the socially constructed nature of reality and the genesis and role of knowledge within that reality. The Critical Theory tradition, which can be considered one of the most important influences of the Welsh School, follows Marxist thought in contesting reification, arguing that history and reality are the product of human action. Simultaneously, Critical Theory denies the separation between fact and value: knowledge does not arise from the subject’s neutral engagement with an objective reality, but rather reflects pre-existing social purposes and interests. This means that what is deemed as ‘true’ and ‘real’ is, in fact, the expression of the particular interest of a particular actor (Cox 1981, Linklater 1996). Knowledge is a social activity that reflects existing opportunities and constraints and that contributes to the production and reproduction of reality – in other words, knowledge can be said to be always political in its genesis and effects.

This applies to theories and representations of security. It is no surprise, therefore, that Booth has called for an idea of security studies that ‘goes beyond problem-solving *within*

¹⁴ In his words, the objective of critical approaches to security is ‘to challenge [political] realism’s conceptualizations of the world not by rejecting *the idea of the real* but by claiming access to a more sophisticated realism’ (2005a:10).

the status quo and instead seeks to help engage with the problem *of* the status quo' (2005a:10, emphasis in the original). A utopian frame of mind, connected with a normative engagement with 'real' situations of suffering, becomes one of the most important criteria for evaluating the adequacy of scientific knowledge. The question is not just 'how to describe reality', like a traditional security analyst would put it, or 'how to criticize accounts of reality presented by dominant actors', as other critical approaches would contend, but rather 'what kind of reality is described' and 'how can this reality be described in a way that leads to change'^{15 16}.

One thus comes to see how the Welsh School understands the security-politics nexus. If knowledge is not objective and always dependent upon a political and normative decision, accounts of what security is derive from political ideas: 'contending theories about world politics produce different conceptualizations of what security is all about' (2005a:13). Security is, therefore, a derivative concept, for it depends on a prior understanding of the political – that is, it is connected with a set of desirable political ends.

So far, none of this differs much from the politicization of security envisaged by other critical approaches – although they are far less vehement in their conception of emancipatory possibilities¹⁷. However, another dimension of the nexus can be found in

¹⁵ Krause seems to go in the same way when he describes the purpose of theory for CSS as consisting in '[contextual], practical understanding and practical knowledge' (1998:317). This differentiates CSS from traditional accounts of security that aim at 'explanation and prediction within a framework of transhistorical and generalisable causal claims' and, at the same time, seems to go beyond the mere discursive critique of security knowledge.

¹⁶ It can be argued that there is a tension between Booth's understanding of the status of knowledge and his remarks about the materiality of security, which point towards a particular determination of what security is, thereby constraining the accounts that can be made of them. This is an important point, which denotes under-theorized areas in the Welsh School, particularly in what comes to accounting for the genesis of critique. If we conceive a particular materiality of security – the existence of 'human wrongs' as facts of human life – how can we then see security knowledge as being able to step out of that materiality? It can be said that for Booth the political moment *par excellence* is a normative decision to confront the real; this decision stems from moral outrage at the experience of (observed or directly felt) suffering. In line with the Critical Theory tradition, critique then comes up as something immanent to what can be ascertained in the world. The political moment consists in being able to react to a particular reality of human wrongs and envisage emancipatory possibilities that can help redress it.

¹⁷ Booth is remarkably close to other critical approaches when he states that CSS 'attempts to turn every security issue into a question of political theory (what might be called *politicizing* security)' (2005a:14, emphasis in the original).

the Welsh School. It has not been properly theorized yet but it can help to explain the importance given by the Welsh School to the maintenance of the discussion within the ambit of security. This dimension shows that the relation between security and politics cannot be reduced to the simple unidirectional process of the latter influencing the former; rather, it points to the constitutive effects of (different kinds of) security knowledge within the political realm.

As seen, for Booth and the Welsh School accounts of security contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of the current state of affairs: they cannot be circumscribed to the resolution of 'security problems' but have a deep political impact, in the sense that they contribute to the determination of what is seen as politically possible and desirable – in other words, they contribute to a particular configuration and closure of the political realm. The idea of the state as the ultimate guarantor of security is, for Booth, a good example of the constraining effects of current security practices.

Thus, the political realm, whilst constituting the seedbed for the political theories that will influence representations of security, is simultaneously supported by a set of security rationalities and practices. For Booth, if the definition of security is always the result of the confrontation between political and normative assumptions, the political realm is also the stage where different rationalities of security collide. In one of his formulations, he portrays the situation as a confrontation between two 'cultures of security': 'nuclear rites' and 'human rights' (1999b:44). Nuclearism, on the one hand, is characterized by reification and ritualization of world politics on a number of levels, ranging from the conflictual nature of the state-system to the role of the state and even to the relation between genders. To this statist, militaristic, ethnocentric and masculinist conception of security, implicated in the spread of 'real insecurities', Booth responds with an alternative culture of security, based on a normative commitment to cosmopolitanism and to the human rights discourse.

In other words, if understandings about security are always political in their genesis, they are also deeply political in their effects. Theories and practices of security have a

profound impact on what is seen as the ultimate purpose and character of the political. Cultures of security impact on assumptions about politics and on specific political arrangements. Thus, given that current rationalities and practices of security are, themselves, responsible for the existence of human wrongs, the field of security is a privileged site for the inception of emancipatory politics. It is not possible to address the current closure of the political and the myriad violations of human rights without directly confronting the dominant culture of security. Because current political arrangements are intertwined with security concerns and procedures, in order to change politics we must change the way security is conceived and practiced.

Seen in this light, Booth's conception of security as a derivative concept can perhaps be refined: security is dependent, not of a prior understanding of the political, but of a simultaneous and continuous engagement with the political – in Booth's case, the political can be defined as an instance of the full realization of the 'human'¹⁸. This does not mean that politics is derivative of security, but rather that the sphere of what is envisaged as politically possible and desirable is constrained by the dominant security practices. There is, therefore, a normative and political surplus in critique that can allow for the transformation of security practices and open the way for change in the political realm. In other words, security does not necessarily cancel politics – in fact, in order to have more politics, one needs more security.

Booth and the Welsh School thus intend to recover the positive value of security, which was lost with the identification of the latter with state interest (Wæver 2004). The focus on individual security is an essential part of this move – as Rothschild has noted, visions of security in the early liberal period put the emphasis on the sovereignty of individuals, seeing security as an essential component of human freedom (1995:55). Booth is indebted to this liberal conception of security as something positive¹⁹, and he explicitly

¹⁸ This is my extrapolation, based on the emphasis given by Booth to human rights and cosmopolitanism.

¹⁹ The importance of liberal ideals – and, particularly, Kantianism – in Booth's thought and in the work of the Welsh School in general is beyond the scope of this paper. A good place to start an investigation is Williams and Booth (1996).

defines security as a springboard to ‘human possibilities’ (2005b:22), ‘an instrumental value that enables people(s) some opportunities to choose how to live’ (2005b:23).

It is exactly this positive value of security that, as has been argued, is absent in most of the critical literature on security. Huysmans is a particularly interesting example. Like Booth, he sees security as playing a determinant role in the constitution of the political sphere: in his work, security is seen as a signifier, a ‘wider framework of meaning (symbolic order, culture or discursive formation) within which we organize particular forms of life’ (1998:228). In this sense, not only is security constitutive of the ‘energetic principle’ (2004:324) around which political communities are built and organized, but also the particular ‘substance’ of communities and identities is dependent on the definition and negotiation of security concerns²⁰. Nonetheless, Huysmans has so far eschewed the possibility of security being able to produce an ‘energetic principle’ that avoids the realm of unchecked power – rather, he has argued that in order for such an energetic principle to be generated security must be put aside.

In contrast, the Welsh School has a clearer conception of security as a site of permanent negotiation and normative struggle (see in particular Wyn Jones 1999). Insofar as what happens at the level of security understandings and practices has profound political effects, a different understanding of security can be the key to opening up the political and disturbing the dominant state of affairs. In other words, security theory and security practices are privileged agents of political change.

Bridging the divide between critical approaches

One can conclude from the preceding discussion that there are significant differences between the Welsh School and other critical approaches to security that rely on an eminently discursive/performative understanding of security and thus conceive security

²⁰ Huysmans (2006) provides an example of how the definition of migration and asylum as security threats are ‘embedded in contests of the formation and transformation of political space, the allocation of rights and duties, and the political value of nationality’ (2006:122).

as a suspension of politics. This has not gone unnoticed and there have been attempts to bridge the divide.

Although it recognizes that the emancipatory function of security has not been properly developed, the c.a.s.e. manifesto argues for the necessity of connecting security with questions about normativity and the constitution of political ‘normality’. This is particularly clear in its discussion of the problem of the exception (2006:464-467). In this context, the c.a.s.e. collective aptly describes the Welsh School as establishing a separation between security and the exercise of sovereign power (2006:456) and goes on to establish a distinction between the ‘exception’ – a particular situation in which normal politics is disturbed and faced with its own limitations – and ‘exceptionalism’, which is ‘from the outset fiendishly entangled in an authoritarian, decisionist politics’ (2006:465). In this way, the collective argues for the necessity of breaking away from the ‘Schmittian overdetermination’ (2006:467) that connects responses to the ‘exception’ with the discretionary and authoritarian exercise of sovereign power.

However, for the collective this divorce from Schmitt can only be achieved by breaking away from ‘security’ as well. The conception of security as the late-20th century refuge of Schmittian power is very much present in an elucidating note that discusses ‘the possibility of eradicating exceptionalism’: in this note, Alain Badiou’s theory of the event is presented as a way to differentiate ‘between *what we can still call desecuritization* and the conservative revolutionary legitimation of order à la Schmitt’ (c.a.s.e. collective 2006:467, note 15, emphasis added). This means that for the collective a ‘progressive’ event (à la Badiou) can only occur by parting with security, because security is something inherently connected to ‘conservative revolutionary’ principles. The Welsh School’s insight that security can open possibilities for progressive emancipatory change is therefore lost.

Another attempt to bridge the divide in the critical debate was recently put forward by Floyd (2007). Floyd makes the case for a consequentialist evaluation of security claims: ‘securitization is neither mainly “negative” nor necessarily “positive”, but rather issue-

dependent' (2007:328). Departing from the assumption that every securitization is unique, Floyd argues that its value 'can only be derived by considering what would have been the alternative solution' (2007:337). Floyd asks us to analyze each situation and to decide on the 'moral rightness' (2007:339) of a particular securitization, depending on its 'better results' (2007:337) and 'preferable' consequences (2007:338).

Floyd's attempt is interestingly nuanced. Even though she explicitly follows the Copenhagen School in defining securitization as an extreme form of politicization (2007:337), she goes on to describe a 'positive securitization' as

'an intense political solution that within the margins of moral rightness, and preferably based upon the political interest of the majority, benefits a security problem... and deals with it faster, better and more efficiently than a normal politicization does, offering a just and useful alternative' (2007:342).

Thus, for Floyd, securitization does not necessarily mean the suspension of deliberative politics. This is an interesting development; however, it is not without some insufficiencies. In particular, Floyd does not provide any grounding with which to evaluate the 'moral rightness' of a particular securitization; simultaneously, and with the exception of some ambiguous remarks about process ('majority consensus' and 'just ethical conduct', 2007:342) and outcome ('just and useful alternative'), she remains silent as to what 'better' and 'preferable' results might mean. Moreover, it is unclear what Floyd's exhortation for the security analysts to '[be] political' (2007:337) actually entails. Floyd lacks a standpoint that can support her consequentialist judgments and provide guidelines as to what constitutes a 'good' result. In other words, she lacks a normative grounding for critique and a concept of the political that can anchor her definition of 'positive securitization'.

As these two attempts demonstrate, the divide within critical approaches to security is connected with two issues that still await a thorough investigation: the nature of the political and the problem of the exception. These issues have a deep impact in the understanding of the security-politics nexus put forward by different critical approaches

and, as was argued, impair the potential of the critical debate. The next section will attempt to tackle this problem by approaching it at a deeper level: an analysis of the Frankfurt School's critique of Schmitt will open the way for an alternative understanding of the relationship between the political and the exception.

III – Towards an alternative understanding of the political: the Frankfurt School's critique of Schmitt

This section provides a first stab towards an alternative understanding of the political; it aims at contributing to the debate about the problem of the exception, highlighting the possibility of an alternative understanding of the security-politics nexus and, consequently, of the normative value of securitization. The fulcrum of the argument will be the Frankfurt School's critique of Schmitt's conception of sovereign power as a necessary response to the exception. It will be shown that interesting insights can be found in the works of Walter Benjamin and Franz Neumann that point to the possibility of addressing exceptional circumstances, not with an 'excess of power', but taking into account the ultimate undecidability of politics and the normative surplus provided by political freedom.

The connection between the Copenhagen School and the thought of Carl Schmitt has been demonstrated and discussed (Behnke 2000, Williams 2003 and Aradau 2004). For these authors, the influence of the German political theorist is evident in the Copenhagen School's conception of securitization, which, in typical Schmittian fashion, appears both as a manifestation of irreducible sovereign power and as framed within a particular situation of exception – the urgency of the existential threat. For Williams, the Copenhagen School's understanding of securitization is 'underpinned by an understanding of the politics of enmity, decision and emergency which has deep roots in Schmitt's understanding of political order' (2003:515). Similarly to the Schmittian sovereign power, the security speech-act is 'radically "unfounded"' (Williams 2003:518)

in the sense that it finds no grounding or justification within the existent political order, rather deriving exclusively from a transcendental political will.

As was shown in the last section, this conception of ‘security’ as a realm of discretionary power – a true mirror-image of sovereignty – is at the root of the Copenhagen School’s understanding of the security-politics nexus. Because this understanding has acquired a particular importance within critical debates on security, leading to a situation of impasse, it is important that its theoretical bases are analyzed and subject to critique.

Kelly has argued that the fulcrum of Schmitt’s thought was ‘the specificity of, and the conditions necessary for, the *production* of “political” order’ (2003:256, emphasis in the original)²¹. Writing during a time of political turmoil and uncertainty, Schmitt was concerned with the maintenance of an effective political realm that could deal with issues as they arose, without being constrained in any way by contingencies such as parliamentary stalemate or fluctuating alliances between parties and factions. Schmitt thus came to conceptualize the ‘political’ as a ‘final instance’ (Scheuerman 1994:17), a principle that formed the existential foundation of any political order whilst always remaining transcendent to it (Kelly 2003:264).

Thus, for Schmitt, the ‘political’ cannot be subsumed within the ambit of ‘politics’. The latter – that is, the legal sphere of continuity that constitutes order – had to be ‘produced’ through the workings of an external instance. This happened not just in the original constitutive moment, but also whenever a particular contingency or event threatened to disrupt the order. Order was ultimately dependent on the possibility of it being interrupted by a ‘corrective’ intervention of the transcendental political principle (Prozorov 2005:83). The realm of the exception was thus conceived as the suspension of the norm by the intervention of this principle, in response to an event that threatened the fundamental unity and efficacy of political life.

²¹ A detailed analysis of Schmitt’s views is beyond the scope of this paper. The brief account here provided is based on Scheuerman (1994:13-38), Kelly (2003), Williams (2003), Prozorov (2005) and Kochi (2006).

The political as instance of intervention is materialized in the figure of the sovereign. For Schmitt, the sovereign decides on the exception and responds in an unrestrained and unchecked manner because it possesses no other metaphysical foundation (Behnke 2007:108). For Schmitt, this entails that sovereignty comes to be defined as ‘an excess of positive power relations’ (Prozorov 2005:88) that is both foundational to the order and transgressive of its normativity, so that the norm is ultimately an instrument of the political will materialized in sovereign power. This power, which finds its specificity ‘in the particular degree of intensity it involves’ (Kelly 2003:265) – that is, in the fact that it can be deemed the ‘avatar’ of a unified will expressed through particular formulas – is for Schmitt the most important political category:

‘because the possibility of arbitrary and unrestrained force can never be eliminated from the political universe, sovereignty must be redefined in terms of that political agent who monopolizes “the last decision”’ (Scheuerman 1994:22).

The absolute character of sovereign power as the ultimate answer to the problem of the exception is, in this way, legitimized.

The idea of the political – as materialized in sovereign power – that deals with the exception in an inherently authoritarian and violent way can be said to constitute the core of the intellectual legacy of Schmitt in the Copenhagen School. The exception is relegated to the realm of ‘security’ and conceived as something alien to (although ultimately constitutive of) normal politics: a securitization move is the exercise of the discretionary power of the sovereign in response to an event that is seen as constituting an existential threat, that is, as posing a challenge to the fundamental unity of the political community/will. Security is the realm of the exception, where normal procedures and rules do not apply and where sovereign power shows its brutal face. As Huysmans has noted, ‘the relation between life and death is the core of security relations’ (1998:236), so that security implies ‘a specific metaphysics of life’ (1998:231), an ordering of relations around the concern with survival. As a consequence, security becomes a privileged arena in which conflictual and power-oriented understandings of the political can be developed.

A good example of these views is the work of Dillon. Dillon's historical-philosophical account of the modern 'politics of security' argues for the inevitability of a connection between the realm of security and a violent conception of the political. For Dillon, modern politics has its foundations in a historical process that has security at its core. The constitution of the modern political landscape is rooted in a metaphysical 'will to security' (Dillon 1996:25), that is, a desire of stability and predictability that cannot be separated from the containment of violence and unexpected events. However, this does not mean that the political result is not violent; quite the contrary: the historical genealogy of modernity leads to the constitution of a disciplinary understanding of politics based on control, surveillance, exclusion, desire for certainty and attempts at achieving totality.

Thus, for Dillon security is also a signifier, a 'principle of formation that does things':

'we are not simply the people who employ discourses of security, we are the people who are ensnared in and used by them' (1996:16).

The politics of security is a metaphysical/civilizational principle that pervades the political horizon and frames political action along inherently violent and exclusionary lines. Behnke, who follows Dillon in conceiving security as fundamental to the 'ontotheology of politics' (2006:63), is much more explicit in this regard: there is an intrinsic 'logic of the Political', in which 'issues of exclusion and power re-emerge as integral and necessary parts'. These issues 'cannot be wished away' because they are connected with 'our way of doing politics' (2006:68). Responding to Aradau's (2004) emancipation-oriented account of desecuritization, Behnke argued for the ineluctable presence of the modern 'politics of security' – the ontological *archê* of politics (see Aradau 2006:86) –, which permanently raises the specter of exclusion, power and violence. Thus, Behnke, whilst retaining the Schmittian understanding of sovereign power (the 'excess of power', 2007:108) as the foundation of politics, explicitly connects this understanding of the political with security:

‘the political is *always about security*. The normality of any order is *always* a product of dramatic decisions about its limits and borders, defined by a *sovereign decision on the enemy*’ (2007:110, emphasis added)²².

Is Behnke right when he argues that there is ‘no way out’ (2006:62) of this understanding of the political and its concomitant account of the security-politics nexus? Can we conceptualize the political in a way that escapes this ontological compulsion for totality, control and violence? Can we, as a consequence, come to see security as something that does not entail the unrestrained use of sovereign power, as Behnke himself has urged (2000:96-100)? The remainder of this paper will answer affirmatively to these questions. It will start by analyzing the Frankfurt School’s critique of Schmitt, with the aim of opening the way for an alternative account of the political. This analysis will focus on the work of Walter Benjamin and Franz Neumann, and will demonstrate that it is possible to address the problem of the exception in a way that avoids the unchecked use of power and instead focuses on the ultimate undecidability of politics and on the normative surplus provided by political freedom.

In a recent reflection on sovereignty and humanitarian intervention, Devetak used insights from critical theory and Kantianism to wage an attack on what he termed ‘the dogmatic prioritization of the political over the moral’ (2007:168) present in the works of statist anti-cosmopolitans like Schmitt. For Devetak, authors like Schmitt undertake a strict separation between politics and normativity: politics is seen as a sphere of human activity with specific underlying criteria – in Schmitt’s case, the distinction between ‘friend’ and ‘foe’ – that distinguish it from other spheres such as the legal, the economic, the aesthetic and the moral²³. For Schmitt, the ‘sovereign decision’, as the expression of a unified political will, is above and beyond any normative principle.

²² It is interesting to note that these remarks are made in a response to the c.a.s.e. manifesto, in which Behnke expresses his disappointment at ‘the dismissal of Carl Schmitt’s work on the political and the exception’ (2007:108).

²³ Similarly, as Scheuerman has demonstrated, Schmitt engages in a radicalization of Weber’s decisionism, according to which ‘intensity’, and not content or moral consensus, is central for the determination of the ‘authenticity’ of political action (1994:20).

However, as Devetak compellingly argues, it is not possible to ‘quarantine’ politics from morality’:

‘even in extreme and intense political moments, like “states of exception” when the state feels under existential threat, the political cannot break entirely free of the normative, it is still in contact with moral claims and legal norms’ (2007:169).

Devetak’s denaturalization of the moral neutrality of ‘sovereignty’ is a good entry-point for an analysis of the Frankfurt School’s critique of Schmitt. In particular, his problematization of the ‘purity’ of sovereign will and his concern with ‘maintaining the close proximity of politics to law and law to morality’ (2007:172) can be said to echo the rationale behind the work of Walter Benjamin and Franz Neumann. These two authors, although undeniably inspired and influenced by Schmitt²⁴, nonetheless engaged in a fierce debate with him, providing interesting grounds for an alternative understanding of the political.

Benjamin’s critique of Schmitt

The fulcrum of Benjamin’s philosophical critique may be said to be the problematization of the autonomous and transcendental figure of the ‘sovereign’ and of the pure character of political decision. As Samuel Weber has noted, Benjamin’s concerns and mode of investigation were remarkably close to Schmitt’s, in the sense that he too was interested in accounting for the relation of dependency between the formation of a concept and the exception or ‘singularity that exceeds or eludes the concept’ (Weber 1992:7). This theoretical proximity with Schmitt is mostly evident in Benjamin’s reflection about the German *Trauerspiel*, which is centered on the figure of the sovereign who has to deal with the contingencies of time and history.

For Schmitt, the sovereign appears as something transcendental to the vicissitudes of history. The location of sovereignty in a place beyond the sphere of normality leads

²⁴ See S. Weber (1992) for an account of Benjamin’s indebtedness to Schmitt. Kelly goes so far as following Thornhill in a description of Neumann as an ‘anti-Schmittian Schmittian’ (2003:295).

Schmitt to establish a connection between political theory and political theology: sovereign decision appears as ‘radically heterogeneous’ to the norm, as ‘a pure act, somewhat akin to the act of creation’ (Weber 1992:10). The decision is radically independent in the sense that it is able to suspend and interrupt the norm, relying exclusively on the intensity of the ‘political total will’ (Kelly 2003:242).

Benjamin questions this radical separation between decision/exception and norm. For him, the justification of the decision of the state to suspend its laws always involves the appeal to a norm. Sovereign decision is not part of an ‘abnormal time’ (Bredekamp 1999:252), but is rather inscribed in a ‘temporality of repetition and reproduction’ (Weber 1992:10, see also Benjamin 1996:59-61): the decision may interrupt or suspend the norm, but it does not amount to the simple negation of the order provided by norms. Therefore, decision always possesses a ‘legal status’ (Weber 1992:10) – that is, an embeddedness within a particular temporality that is framed by norms – and its justification and evaluation are also undertaken from the point of view of a system of norms.

Thus, for Benjamin, Schmitt’s theological-political analogy is misplaced: the former’s analysis of the sovereign in the German baroque points precisely to the essential difference between sovereign and God. For Schmitt, just as God can be said to transcend the creation, the power of the sovereign is based on the ultimate prerogative of suspending and interrupting the order in the name of the exception; in contrast, the baroque sovereign in Benjamin’s analysis is always immanent in the sense that the purpose of sovereignty is that of ‘transcending transcendence’ (Weber 1992:12), that is, of excluding and avoiding the state of exception altogether. The power of the sovereign is eminently worldly, and not divine; it is located within a particular ‘state of creation’ instead of assuming the role of ‘creator’:

‘However highly he is enthroned over subject and state, his status is confined to the world of creation; he is the lord of creatures, but he remains a creature’ (Benjamin cited in Weber 1992:14).

Benjamin's objective is to problematize the figure of the sovereign and, consequently, of the decision that establishes an abrupt relation between norm and exception and between morality and politics-as-power. Whilst Schmitt views the sovereign as both necessary and possible, Benjamin's account of the baroque sovereign ultimately reveals the absence of such a transcendental ideal. Moreover, it signals a fundamental dilemma of political will that is also the dilemma of the subject as such: for Benjamin, the sphere of politics cannot be said to be determined by its 'head', the sovereign who personifies consciousness and intentions; rather, it is constrained and conditioned by forces that are independent of it.

One can find here traces of a messianic understanding of history; however, the crucial point to retain is Benjamin's effort to undermine the relation of dependence of the political order on the determining influence of the sovereign. Bredekamp aptly describes Benjamin's study of the *Trauerspiel* as conveying an epoch characterized, not by 'the permanence of laws nor the moment of the sovereign's decision', but rather by the 'inability to decide' and the 'torsion of hesitation' (1999:260)²⁵. Therefore, what is crucial in Benjamin's critique – at least for the purposes of this argument – is the effort of 'taking exception to the decision', in Weber's words. Benjamin wields a powerful attack on the Schmittian theory of sovereignty exactly because he provides a glimpse into a political *locus* in which there is 'no place for anything resembling a *definitive decision*' (Weber 1992:18, emphasis in the original). Schmitt's sovereign is dismantled by the epoch's impossibility of decision.

Thus, for Benjamin, sovereign decision cannot constitute an unequivocal 'point of ascription' of the norm, as in Schmitt. Rather, politics is characterized by a fundamental undecidability, which means that it is never determined by the intervention of a 'unified will', but always remains open. Similarly, Prozorov's analysis of the problem of the exception leads him to connect the decision with a moment of closure and depoliticization: following Edkins, he sees the institution of the new order as a moment of 'forgetting of the political that installs politics' (Edkins cited in Prozorov 2005:95).

²⁵ Similarly, the structural determinism – and, hence, the impossibility of agency – that seems to be present in Benjamin's account must be downplayed; one has only to recall that Benjamin believed in the possibility of groups and movements personifying transformative movements of history.

For Edkins, the political is inherently ‘openness and undecidability’ (cited in Prozorov 2005:95); it constitutes the moment when the limits and character of the political order are still being contested and negotiated. Departing from this, one can argue that Benjamin’s attack on the transcendental figure of the sovereign is aimed at maintaining a sphere of political indeterminacy, ontological incompleteness and, ultimately, freedom.

In sum, if for Schmitt the transcendent character of political unity and will function as both foundational and transgressive principles that legitimize the exercise of discretionary power in the face of exception, for Benjamin political ‘will’ is problematized and inscribed within the ambit of incompleteness and, thus, normative choice. This entails two consequences: on the one hand, the sovereign ‘excess of power’ is embedded within normativity and denaturalized; on the other hand, political agency – as permanent negotiation of meaning – is re-inscribed into the problem of the exception.

Neumann’s critique of Schmitt

The emphasis on freedom as restoration of political agency is also present in another critique of Schmitt that can be said to fall within the ambit of the Frankfurt School’s wider concern with the denaturalization of the political. Franz Neumann’s engagement with the work of Schmitt provides an interesting perspective on the legal and political debate that surrounded the demise of the Weimar Republic and the subsequent rise of the National Socialist state in Germany. Although complex and multifaceted, this engagement will be interpreted along the following themes: a) a critical political sociology of the exception, leading to the problematization of sovereignty and to a socio-economic contextualization of decisionism; b) a social-functional understanding of law and, c) a democratic theory based on the normative surplus of both law and freedom.

Like Schmitt, Neumann was concerned with the ‘decisionless’ features of the Weimar Republic. However, this concern did not lead him to locate the root of the problem in the supposedly ‘stalemate-prone’ character of parliamentary discussion and liberal politics in general (as Schmitt had done), but rather to an investigation of the social embeddedness

of the rule of law. This allowed him to locate the ‘Weimar *malaise*’ in the historical tension between liberal legal principles and the concrete socio-economic situation of monopolistic capitalism. Thus, for Neumann, the problem with the Weimar Republic was not the absence of a strong sovereign power, but rather a fundamental disjuncture between legal precepts – which promised equality before the law – and actual social and economic conditions, which undermined the potential of liberal principles and opened the way to authoritarian, decisionist tendencies (Scheuerman 1994).

The difference between Schmitt and Neumann had its roots in a fundamental disagreement as to what regards the nature of the legal norm: whereas for Schmitt the norm was legitimized by the political will and became an instrument of it, Neumann conceived an understanding of law as both political – based on *voluntas* or sovereign will – and rational – based on general principles and thus containing an important ethical side to it, namely the postulate of equality before the law (Neumann 1957a:26). Neumann saw liberal legal thought as an important step in the process of legal rationalization, that is, of the submission of the decisionist and discretionary tendencies of law to general principles. For Neumann, the crisis of the Weimar Republic was a symptom of a more general crisis within the development of the rule of law: faced with an historical situation in which the complexity of the social and economic world both undermined the equality before the law and rendered problematic the capacity of the legal order to manage and deal with multiple and ever-increasing demands, the rational element in law was being slowly eroded whilst the decisionist element gained importance.

Nowhere was this more visible than in Schmitt’s thought and in the National-Socialist state – a political system that could not, in Neumann’s thought, be considered as being ruled by law, but rather by the discretionary influence of dominant political actors:

‘if the general law is the fundamental form of law and if law is not only *voluntas* but also *ratio*, then one must state that the law of the authoritarian state has no legal character’ (Neumann 1957a:66).

The preponderance of the decisionist element (*voluntas*) in authoritarian thought and practice meant that the legal order was subordinated to the dictates of a political elite; in other words, law was a mere ‘technique for transforming the political will into legal form’ (Neumann 1986:285). Decisionist and discretionary law, as advocated by Schmitt and put into practice in the National-Socialist state, became ‘an *arcanum* for the maintenance of power’ and an instrument of domination²⁶.

For Neumann, Schmitt’s diagnosis of the problem and his solution to it – a political system where a direct link would be established between the will of the sovereign and the exercise of law-making – were both part of the same socio-economic problem. Neumann claimed to be able to identify the ‘social base’ (Scheuerman 1994:131) of decisionist thought in the socio-economic conditions of monopolistic capitalism. In other words, Schmitt’s take on the Weimar problem and his decisionist solutions were interpreted as historically framed within current forms of social and economic organization.

This critical political sociology of the exception undertaken by Neumann was essentially two-pronged: on the one hand, as was seen, the decisionist tendencies were inscribed into an historical continuum and connected with a particular situation of crisis in the evolution of the rule of law; on the other hand, and following from the problematization of the ‘unity of the sovereign’, the idea of state sovereignty was subject to criticism, in the context of a social-functional understanding of law. *Contra* Schmitt, Neumann argued that the modern state could not be seen as being based on some ‘ideal’ conception of what the legal order was or should be; rather, as Kelly has shown, Neumann understood the state in the light of its ‘empirical and historical development’ (Kelly 2003:263).

This means that, for Neumann, the sovereign position was not a transcendental *archê* of politics, but rather the result of a historically situated political process. In particular, the sovereign position always involved a process of negotiation of legitimacy between the legal-political order framed by the rule of law and those that were ruled by that law.

²⁶ On Neumann’s conception of decisionist legal thought as an *arcanum dominationis*, see also Neumann (1957a:57-66 and 1986:293-298).

Sovereignty was thus both legal-political and sociological: the exercise of political power through law was shaped by processes of struggle and negotiation and constrained by social expectations and demands – among those, special importance was given to demands for the generality of norms, which guaranteed predictability and restraint over the exercise of political power, and to the promotion of effective equality before the law.

With this, as Kelly has noted, Neumann actually ends up refining and expanding Schmitt's conception of the political: the political goes beyond the unified will that establishes an existential friend-enemy opposition, and includes also the permanent situation of contestation and struggle (Kelly 2003:280). *Contra* Schmitt, who perceived all inhibitions and controls on state power as necessarily 'un-political', Neumann identified the crux of the political in the permanent efforts of negotiation and democratic struggle over the character and reach of the legal-order. According to Scheuerman, Neumann saw truth as emerging through the democratic competition of opinions; minority positions should not only be tolerated but they should be seen as 'belong[ing] constitutively to the concept of right political action' (1994:199). Only in this way could democracy make the exercise of state power rational, legitimate and 'right'.

Thus, for Neumann, law was 'not a substance in itself, but a function of society' (1986:285). The rationality of law was conceived as connected with a specific social function: to introduce social reforms and advance the cause of human equality and freedom. For law to be progressive, however, it had to be disconnected from the command of the sovereign; in other words, it had to be general and result from a process of law-making shaped by social expectations and struggles. As Scheuerman (1999:39-63) has recognized, Neumann's conception of the 'social rule of law' was based on three interconnected insights: firstly, human activity is meaning-constitutive and thus has the ability to shape and structure the world; secondly, social and political life is both dynamic and static, always intersecting being and becoming; thirdly, this feature of political life is expressed in a fundamental tension at the level of the legal order, a tension that could be described as a gap between 'is' and 'ought', between facticity and normativity.

For Neumann, the role of the process of rationalization of law went beyond its services to classical capitalism and included an important ‘normative surplus’. In typical Frankfurt School fashion, the rise of liberal ideas was seen as bringing forth a set of demands and expectations that, even if denied by the actual political and legal arrangements, always referred back to a particular understanding of human potential. The task of a critical approach to legality was exactly to release the immanent potential of current legal precepts and contribute to their realization in practice. Thus, in clear contrast with Schmitt, Neumann conceived the historical ideal of the rule of law as having a transcendental ‘ethical’ function over politics (Scheuerman 1996:13). The social rule of law meant that rational legal principles could be used as instruments to go beyond the *status quo* and realize principles of equality and freedom (Neumann 1957a:42).

Neumann recognized that the legal order often lagged behind the demands of actors (Scheuerman 1994:198). Thus, positive law could not always be conceived as the model of social relations to be applied in practice, and the normative impetus of critique and transformation could not always be found in actual legal texts and determinations. Neumann developed two interconnected answers to this problem. The first one focused on the social-economic context of the inception of decisionism. The rule of law could only be achieved in practice if ‘the causes of unchecked sovereignty’ (Scheuerman 1994:98) were eliminated. Because there was a tension between the unfulfilled idea of legal equality and the deep social and economic inequalities generated by capitalism, the restoration of the rule of law had to be linked to a project of radical social and economic reconstruction²⁷. With this, Neumann hoped to supplement his analysis of the social function of law with an emphasis on the redefinition of democratic politics. In particular, he addressed the problems of the liberal regime, not by resorting to notions of ‘decision’ and ‘sovereign power’, but rather by making the case for an economic constitution that could promote compromise and pluralism, thus helping to develop the Weimar Republic (Kelly 2003:271).

²⁷ Neumann’s views on this regard stem from his analysis of the authoritarian state in his most famous work, *Behemoth: The Structure and Function of National Socialism*, in which he argued – *contra* the ‘mainstream’ Frankfurt School interpretation of Pollock and Horkheimer – that the absence of the rule of law and the situation of ‘legal chaos’ in authoritarian regimes was the result of the destructive impact of capitalist monopolies. See also Scheuerman (1994:149-155).

The second part of the answer focused on the critical and normative character of political freedom. For Neumann, the ultimate goal – indeed, the ‘truth’ (1996:196) – of political theory was the realization of political freedom, which functioned as the normative yardstick against which different claims and interests could be judged. Neumann’s understanding of political freedom was multi-faceted in the sense that it aimed at going beyond the liberal view of juridical liberty (that is, the absence of restraints):

‘freedom is more than the defense of rights against power; it involves as well the possibility of developing man’s potentialities to the fullest. Only because we do not trust any power, however well meaning, to decide what is good or bad for us, do we insist on a realm of freedom from coercion’ (Neumann 1996:206).

For Neumann, the negative, juristic conception of freedom put forward by liberal thought was necessary but insufficient. It led to the establishment of a rigid distinction between citizen and state, which resulted in the view that the individual was independent from the political system within which s/he lived. In Neumann’s thought, the hierarchic dichotomization citizen/state and liberty/government was inadequate because it obscured: a) the multiple (public and private) sources of power that could affect freedom; b) the potentially beneficial role of state intervention in securing freedom; c) the inherent connection between individuals and the political system; and d) the existence of ‘escape clauses like the clear and present danger formula [that] permit political power to prevail over individual rights’ (1996:210).

Therefore, if political freedom was to constitute the normative foundation of the social rule of law, a more developed account was necessary. Neumann put forward two further elements of freedom that, in his view, had to be present if the political compulsion towards sovereign power was to be averted: a cognitive and a volitional element. The former aimed at ‘expos[ing] the possibilities for realizing the human potentialities latent in different social situations’ (1996:212) *via* a better knowledge and understanding of the historical situation. The latter, in turn, included an element of political action, capability and possibility of choice between equal alternatives.

Neumann's comprehensive conception of political freedom points, therefore, to a democratic understanding of the political in which the problem of the exception is addressed through an engagement with a 'normative surplus' present in the idea of political freedom. In contrast to Schmitt's normless will, Neumann offers a kind of 'normed will' (Scheuerman 1994:179), with sovereignty being reconceptualized and framed by the social rule of law.

From 'excessive power' to 'excessive freedom'

Prozorov goes much in the same way when he sees the idea of freedom as providing an answer to the problematic connection between exception and sovereign power. Granted, he sees sovereignty – the 'constitutive decision' (2005:103) – as a permanent reminder of the irreducibly violent foundations of political order; however, he also focuses on the 'critical functions' (2005:104) of sovereignty to put forward an understanding of freedom 'of a particular kind', as being 'the condition of existence of order, implicated in its very foundational moment' (2005:105). Thus, for Prozorov, if the possibility of transcendental/foundational power cannot be wished away, freedom is also present in the constitution of order – not the liberal freedom of dispensing with order and achieving autonomy from it, but rather the freedom 'from order within order' (2006:106). This means that Prozorov's concept of freedom – which owes much to Foucault's formulation of freedom as an 'art of not being governed quite so much' – always retains a critical normative surplus over the political order, allowing for a reconfiguration of its relationship with power.

This paper does not wish to take a stand on a complex issue such as political freedom. It is clear that a deeper discussion would be needed for such a position to be grounded satisfactorily. Rather, the objective of this discussion was to demonstrate that a critical engagement with Schmitt's thought can open the way for an alternative understanding of the nature of the political *vis à vis* the problem of the exception, that is, the relationship between political order, the transcendental principle that is both foundational and

transgressive of that order and the contingent situations that allow for this principle to reappear in the political arena. Benjamin's and Neumann's critique, with their denaturalization of sovereign power and their rejection of a moment of closure and definitive decision, point to the fundamental openness of the political and to the possibility of a 'moral critique of politics' (Devetak 2007:172), based on the power of norms and on the normative 'excess' of aspirations towards human freedom.

IV – The democratic and integrative role of security

This section draws from the insight, discussed above, that the political response to the exception need not necessarily install the fear of the enemy and the exercise of unrestrained sovereign power as 'energetic principles' of politics. Simultaneously, the reflection here presented is indebted to the Welsh School's insight that security plays a central role in social and political transformation. It will be argued that security, when freed from decisionist understandings, possesses an integrative value and can be considered a 'necessary virtue'. The argument will show that it is possible and desirable to retain the security signifier and that recent work on the governance of security offers promising insights in the definition of 'democratic virtues' within security practices.

The argument presented in this paper has demonstrated that security has been (implicitly or explicitly) interpreted as a signifier, a register of meaning that orders social and political relations in a specific way – that is, as allowing for the rise of a discretionary and unchecked understanding of power. Huysmans has been particularly eloquent in arguing that 'security has a history and implies a meaning, a particular signification of social relations' (1998:228). His work has shown how 'security' can be seen as having a performative – and not merely descriptive – function: through the use of this signifier, social relations are transformed into security relations (1998:232). Huysmans' work is a sophisticated example of how the inscription of issues into the security signifier – what he terms 'security framing' – has been used to legitimize undemocratic practices; moreover, his analysis of the spill-over effects of securitization processes (2006) has

shown that the security logic can be discursively transposed and end up ‘contaminating’ other areas (e.g. migration and asylum).

This section wishes to draw from Huysmans’ work on security as a signifier, particularly from his conception of the signifier as eminently historical. It argues that we must radicalize this historicity and come to see the meaning of security as the result of a contingent crystallization, and not an ineluctable condition. In other words, there is no fixed ‘politics of the signifier’ of security (1998:232); as Rothschild (1995) and Wæver (2004) have shown, the meaning of security – and the set of understandings and practices that this wide order of meaning entails – have changed through time.

This section argues that the critique of the current meaning of security must be complemented with the definition of alternative meanings. In other words, the aim is to go beyond current understandings of security as the suspension of politics, not by arguing for the substitution of security with other supposedly autonomous signifier (i.e. politics), but rather by working *within* the signifier and attempting to release its transformative potential.

The theoretical reflection undertaken in the previous section can be seen as the first step of this departure from reified assumptions about the ‘politics of the signifier’ of security. By showing that Schmitt’s transcendental conception of sovereign power is problematic and can be criticized at both the philosophical (Benjamin) and the social-economic-legal level (Neumann), it opened the way for the definition of alternative normative principles of politics. In other words, it demonstrated the possibility of conceiving different modalities for dealing with the problem of the exception, thereby allowing for a denaturalization of the connection between security and an extreme conception of politics based on the ‘fear of the enemy’ and on unrestrained sovereign power. It is interesting to note that Huysmans’ himself engaged with the work of Neumann and argued that it is possible to conceive exceptionalism in different ways, according to ‘the energetic principles of politics upon which support for exceptionalism is based’ (2004:338). This

section argues that it is possible to follow from this insight whilst retaining the signifier of security.

But why work within the signifier of security? Why not recognize the loaded and controversial meaning that security has come to convey, and rather opt for some other register of meaning, like politics? It can be argued, on the one hand, that this ‘strategy of replacement’ – which finds its most concrete materialization in calls for desecuritization – overlooks the interconnection and mutual dependency between these two signifiers (as Behnke 2006 persuasively argued in a response to Aradau). This part of the answer has been dealt with satisfactorily and will be left aside. Instead, this reflection will focus on another issue that is overlooked by calls for dispensing with security altogether: the positive value of security in the context of emancipatory change in the political realm, an insight that has been brought to critical debates by the Welsh School.

In this context, this reflection rejects an arguably dominant conception of security as something that is inherently inimical to ‘good’ social relations (a good example is Zedner 2003) and sides with a growing literature – located mainly in the field of criminology – that recognizes the positive and ‘civilizing’ role that security can play. Ian Loader and Neil Walker’s recent work is particularly significant here, and offers extremely interesting insights for a reevaluation of security and a reconfiguration of security practices along more democratic lines.

Loader and Walker defend the idea that security is ‘an indispensable constituent of any good society’ (2007:4). When understood as a ‘public good’, security can play an important role in the reinvention of social democratic politics. It is noteworthy that Loader and Walker directly challenge Schmittian understandings of friend/foe politics when they conceive security as a realm that deals with the relationship individuals have ‘to the intimates and strangers’ (2007:18). It is their contention that, when conceived along more democratic lines, security becomes

‘the producer and product of forms of trust and abstract solidarity between intimates and strangers that are prerequisite to democratic political communities’ (2007:8).

Engaging explicitly with Neumann’s work on the detrimental effects of a culture of fear to democratic politics²⁸, Loader and Walker argue that ‘a democratic, egalitarian and solidaristic security culture’ (2007:4) can constitute a powerful antidote to the lack of cohesiveness and integration of modern societies.

A connection can be established between the positive, emancipatory value of security put forward by the Welsh School and Loader and Walker’s understanding of security as a ‘thick’ public good, with an integrative and civilizing role in democratic societies²⁹. Loader and Walker’s exploration of the meaning of security as a public good (2007:143-169) focuses on three layers: the instrumental, the social and the constitutive. According to the first level, a social or public element is indispensable to the very process of producing or providing the good in question – in this sense, security is a public good because it cannot be produced or provided in the private sphere, always requiring a social interaction.

The second dimension sees security as an eminently social phenomenon, an intersubjective experience that is ‘based upon the fulfillment of certain social preconditions’ (Loader and Walker 2007:155). Given that the problem of insecurity is itself socially generated, the security of one is dependent upon the actions and attitudes of others. Thus, for Loader and Walker, the social dimension of security as a public good goes beyond security as an objective situation and points at ‘an internal relationship between the experience of security and the existence of stable social expectations’ (2007:157). Rather than functioning merely as a strategic prerequisite (as pertains the

²⁸ In an essay titled ‘Anxiety and Politics’, and following similar work by other Frankfurt School authors, Neumann argues that the rise of authoritarian regimes in the 20th century can be in part explained by the psychological effects of the instrumentalization of a culture of fear (Neumann 1957b). See Robin (2004) for a historical-theoretical analysis of the political uses of fear.

²⁹ In fact, a closer interaction between these two bodies of work would be extremely beneficial, and this reflection is but a first step in that direction.

instrumental dimension), the enjoyment of security by others has an effect in the social context in which our own security can be enjoyed.

Finally, the constitutive level of security as a public good aims at investigating ‘how security is implicated in the very process of constituting the “social” or the “public”’ (Loader and Walker 2007:162). This is arguably the most relevant dimension for the purposes of this argument, as it gives theoretical substance to the contention that security has an impact in social and political relations. According to Loader and Walker, the actualization of the good of security

‘is so pivotal to the very purpose of community that at the level of self-identification is helps to construct and sustain our “we-feeling” – our very felt sense of “common publicness”’ (2007:162).

The public-constitutive character of security can be divided along three elements: firstly, security functions as a motivating factor in the formation and sustenance of reflexive publics; secondly, it constitutes a ‘way of social being or common sensibility of such a public’ (Loader and Walker 2007:165); thirdly, it possesses an important instrumental capacity, in the sense that it can become a ‘platform of public power’ (idem) for the provision of objective security.

At this point, Loader and Walker introduce an important element in their discussion, when they conceive the public good of security as ‘an axiomatic element of lived social relations’ (2007:167). According to this view, security is a necessary platform for any kind of society, a true ‘education in society’; it is precisely when security is absent in this axiomatic sense that it acquires the detrimental features examined earlier in this paper. When it cannot serve its constitutive function in the social realm, security becomes pervasive in its more unreflexive, parochial and dogmatic forms.

In sum, Loader and Walker’s conception of security as a ‘civilizing agent’ nicely complements the Welsh School’s insistence on the centrality of security understandings and practices in the re/production of human wrongs and, concomitantly, in any attempt to

redress those wrongs. However, in order for this to be possible security practices need to be democratized and ‘civilized’. It is therefore surprising that a systematic engagement with the democratization of security practices has been lacking in the Welsh School – if one leaves aside Wyn Jones’ (1999) call for the creation of counter-hegemonic blocs based on critical social movements and Booth’s remarks about the growing political importance of NGO’s and civil society groups.

This theoretical weakness needs to be addressed. Given the growing critical literature devoted to deconstructing and exposing the undemocratic character of security practices, a knee-jerk suspicion towards calls for ‘more security’ has led to attacks concerning the supposed ‘political irresponsibility’ or ‘violent/exclusionary/undemocratic leanings’ implicit in the Welsh School’s understanding of ‘security as emancipation’. Therefore, if it is to constitute a credible and fruitful element in the critical debate, any ‘emancipatory’ or ‘civilizing’ account of security must engage with a growing body of work devoted to the democratic governance of security³⁰. The focus on the notion of governance allows this literature to approach the heterogeneity and multiplicity of security practices in a systematic fashion: drawing inspiration from the work of Foucault on governmentality, security practices are seen as strategies of constitution of subjects, that is, as ‘conscious attempts to shape and influence the conduct of individuals, groups and wide populations in furtherance of a particular objective’ (Wood and Dupont 2006:2). This systematic approach allows for attention to be drawn to the impact and relative weight of different actors, as well as to the interaction and mutual influence between different sites of governance, thereby allowing for a much more precise and normatively grounded account of the otherwise vague realm of ‘security practice’.

This is particularly important in a situation in which policies of security cannot be reduced to the unilateral intervention of the state apparatus upon the civil society, a rather traditional view of the practice of security that has been challenged by the emergence of an intricate web of (public and private) security actors and mentalities. As a consequence,

³⁰ Important contributions to this body of work include Johnston (2000), Loader (2002), Shearing and Wood (2003), Wood and Dupont (2006), Wood and Shearing (2007) and Loader and Walker (2007).

the literature on the governance of security has come to accept the growing heterogeneity and dispersion of security practices, ranging from a purely 'nodal' understanding of governance to a form of pluralism 'anchored' on state intervention. The former vision (put forward in Shearing and Wood 2003, Wood and Shearing 2007, Johnston 2006 and Wood 2006) sees security as the result of the constant interaction of multiple 'nodes' in a network, each node constituting a site of governance that exhibits a set of particular characteristics (an institutional structure, resources, methodologies and ways of thinking). For these authors, no set of nodes is given conceptual priority; rather, the exact character and structure of governance and the interaction and contribution of various nodes is regarded as an empirically open question (Shearing and Wood 2003). This means that the specific content of security practice is always the result of the struggle between different actors (Dupont 2006), a situation that opens the way for the problematization of the normative value of actual policies and thus allows for democratizing influences.

In contrast, other authors recognize the desirability of anchoring the pluralism of security practices in state policies (Marks and Goldsmith 2006 and, most importantly, Loader and Walker 2007). According to these views, the state is seen as a 'necessary virtue' in that it plays an important normative role in the definition of the public good of security. For Loader and Walker, the 'publicness' of security demands 'a certain amount of cultural and ordering work that must necessarily and routinely be accomplished' (2007:170) and that can only be guaranteed by the state or its functional equivalent. Loader and Walker's conception of 'anchored pluralism' recognizes that there should be as much pluralism as possible: both internally – in what comes to inclusiveness, representativeness and individual and minority protection mechanisms – and externally – in what regards the recognition of the appropriate place of multiple 'sites of cultural and regulatory production' (2007:193). However, the state is seen as the anchor of collective security provision, a 'meta-regulator' and a 'wide boundary of social and security identity within which other identities may be encouraged' (Loader and Walker 2007:193).

This paper does not intent to draw any definitive conclusions from this debate. It recognizes that it is not possible to say, in abstract terms, what an adequate democratic

governance of security will look like. The definition of general democratic criteria must be replaced by practical, situation-specific normative concerns aimed at realizing a set of basic principles of security practice that, following Loader (2002), can be summarized along three dimensions: a) a politics of recognition, aimed at ensuring that security practices are determined by processes of public will-formation that take into account the views of individuals and groups that are likely to be affected by them; b) an attention towards the rights, legitimate aspirations and interests of individuals and groups, be they in a minority or majority position; and c) a politics of resources aimed at ensuring that all citizens are provided with a 'fair share' of security.

This is not to say that attempts at democratizing the governance of security are without its problems. In particular, it is important to avoid a naïf approach to democratic governance that assumes that security practices must always result from a participated process of discussion and democratic deliberation. It is important to bear in mind that the current debates on the governance of security are still very much connected with an understanding of the provision of security as policing within a bounded polity, which means that there are many security issues – such as terrorism or nuclear proliferation, for example – that have not been taken into account in the formulation of democratic principles. More importantly, this debate has not yet engaged with the problem of the exception – in particular, with the challenge posed by extraordinary circumstances that disrupt the normal temporality of politics and require urgent measures or a certain degree of secrecy.

Clearly, the extension of the democratic governance debate to CSS needs to be aware of these limitations. However, it is argued here that the basic principles put forward by this debate – individual and group rights, plurality and interconnection of security 'providers', accountability of security actors – can be important standpoints to a much needed work.

Concluding remarks

This paper has attempted to contribute to current critical debates on security by showing that, when freed from decisionist understandings of the political and connected with an explicit normative standpoint, security can be conceived as having a positive value and, consequently, securitization can be considered a necessary step towards – and not a threat to – democratic politics. Given that the fulcrum of the argument has been the necessity of engaging in an in-depth problematization and reconfiguration of assumptions regarding the nature of the political and the concomitant security-politics nexus, one must be aware of Walker's *caveat*, expressed in a comment on the 'c.a.s.e. collective' manifesto:

'There is always the danger that clichéd accounts of what the political must be will stimulate attempts to run from politics to ethics or to sociology rather than to try to understand the political stakes of novel ethical claims, social practices or understandings of security' (2007:99).

Walker alerts us to the necessity of avoiding any *a priori* understandings about the 'proper relationship between ethics, social process and political practice' (2007:99). This is an important warning to bear in mind, particularly taking into account the strong normative component of the views expressed here. *Contra* deterministic views that see the political realm as being founded upon and always framed by a sovereign decision, this paper argued for the ultimate openness and undecidability of politics. In his account of political freedom, Franz Neumann was aware of the dangers of a violent closure of politics, when he stated that 'since no political system can realize political freedom fully, political theory must by necessity be critical' (1996:196).

It is obvious that this leaves many questions unanswered. If one departs from the incompleteness of politics, are there any normative criteria for determining a 'satisfactory' resolution, a 'progressive' measure or a step in the 'right' direction? Any discussion about security that includes 'slippery' concepts such as freedom, rights, or democracy cannot but engage in a detailed analysis of its own normative assumptions. In other words, even though the debate about 'security as emancipation' has not been

directly addressed here, its shadow has definitely been lurking. In fact, its centrality to the theoretical work of critical security studies must be reaffirmed.

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