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Re-thinking (in)security discourses from a critical perspective

*Re-pensando os discursos da (in)segurança
desde unha perspectiva crítica*

Resumo: Este artigo explora unha visión desafiadora sobre os discursos de (in)segurança e como estes modelan a construción de identidades políticas e, en última estancia, están relacionados ás comprensións da paz. Despois de perfilar os entendementos convencionais da seguraza no campo das relacións internacionais, resaltando as lacunas conceptuais que esta abordaxe deixa inquestionadas, tráense á tona os estudos críticos de seguraza. Convidase ao cuestionamento do carácter natural do estado, das nocións de soberanía e subxectividade mutuamente construídas, do modo en que a identificación de perigos xoga un papel fundamental na economía de identidade/diferenza, así como da imposibilidade da (in)seguraza. Trátase dunha contribución á actual discusión sobre discursos securitarios, resaltando como a escrita da (in)seguraza implica a escrita da paz (e da guerra).

Palabras-clave: estudos da paz, discursos de seguraza, estudos críticos de seguraza, políticas identitarias, relacións internacionais, identidade/diferenza.

Abstract: *This paper explores a challenging view on (in)security discourses and how these shape the construction of political identities and ultimately are closely related to understandings of peace. After outlining the conventional understanding of security in the field of international relations and pointing at the conceptual gaps this perspective leaves unquestioned, critical security studies are brought into the theoretical conversation. This move invites a questioning of the natural character of the state, the mutually constructed notions of sovereignty and subjectivity, the way in which naming dangers plays a fundamental role in the economy of identity/difference as well as the impossibility of (in)security. This piece is a contribution to the current discussion on security discourses via highlighting how writing (in)security implies the writing of peace (and war).*

Keywords: *peace research, security discourses, critical security studies, identity politics, international relations, identity/difference.*

Much of peace research today is focused, provoked and originated on security discourses. The current “war on terrorism” might be the clearest example of the intertwined relationship between peace and security and of many of the contemporary debates in the field of peace studies. By analyzing the construction of political identities, in this paper I attempt at contributing to the contemporary discussion by bringing together theoretical insights from multiple disciplines in order to make visible the complex relationship between these two concepts and practices.

WHAT IS SECURITY?

The first question which arises when addressing security discourses is the meaning of security itself. Even though security seems to be regarded today as one of the basic needs, what stands under this label of *security* is quite wide, ranging from traditional understandings in military terms, the classical national security idea, until the most contemporary ideas on comprehensive security. Security apparently incorporates almost any aspect of the political, social, environmental and cultural dimensions. Security might be seen as an all-you-can-fit-in term and even as a *plastic word* (Poerksen, 1995).

At the same time, security has turned into a powerful political construct. To paraphrase Spivak (1996:158), security has turned into something *one cannot not want*, a concept we cannot do without but which needs to be questioned. Yet, how do we deal with this ever expanding signifier which seems to absorb any criticism and turn it into a security issue? It is pertinent to start this endeavor by tracing some of the different meanings *security* has been invested with in order to outline its implications for peace research.

1.1. Security defined by “classical” IR

Security discourses emanate mainly from the state, which is the focus of attention of the field of International Relations (IR) and, therefore, most of the works on the concept of security as such and on security policies are carried out in this field of study. A very well known work in IR about the theory of security is Barry Buzan’s *People, States and Fear* (1983) and from which the delineation of security discourses has been mainly drawn, whether as criticism or as reconstitution of Buzan’s arguments.

This work changed the focus of attention in IR to stop conceiving security only in military terms, and it expanded security to be understood as a confluence of contradictions among sectors and levels. The state remained central in this account and it is important to highlight the main arguments of Buzan to delineate a paradigmatic understanding of “classical” security in IR.

1.2. Defining security

Buzan presents us with the two classical notions of security in IR. On the one hand, the realist school used to “see security as a derivative of power: an actor with enough power to reach a dominating position would acquire security as a result”. On the other hand, the idealist school “tended to see security as a consequence of peace: a lasting peace would provide security for all” (Buzan, 1991:2).

However, Buzan (1991:18) argues that security is, above all, an essentially contested concept for which all security definitions are temptations and they do a disservice “by giving the concept an appearance of firmness which it does not merit”. Nevertheless, Buzan gives his own definition of security as “the pursuit of freedom from threat” (19) and with it he established the frame within which, for the decades to come, the main discussion about security has taken place in IR.

In his attempt to clarify and develop the concept of security, Buzan (1991:19) categorizes some of its attributes. First, the author conceptualizes security as “the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity”. Secondly, security is circumscribed with primarily “the fate of human collectivities, and only secondarily about the personal security of individual human beings”, which means that “the standard unit of security is thus the sovereign territorial state”. And even though the ideal type of the state is problematized, Buzan insists in conceiving the Nation-State as the main referent of security. In other words, the Nation-State is the main *object* to be secured and it is, simultaneously, the main *provider* of security.

1.3. International anarchy

Buzan’s main contributions to the conceptualization of security rest on the idea of an anarchic international system, where there is no central government but many units which govern themselves, the so-called sovereign Nation-States. This anarchic system is fuelled by state’s actions to preserve their sovereignty which imposes three conditions on the concept

of security. First, "states are the principal referent object of security because they are both the framework of order and the highest source of governing authority. This explains the dominating policy concern with 'national' security". Secondly, national security is relational and interdependent with the security of other states. "Domestic insecurities may or may not dominate the national security agenda, but external threats will almost always comprise a major element of the national security problem". And, thirdly, "under anarchy, security can only be relative, never absolute" (Buzan, 1991:22-23).

Following the last line of thought, Buzan (1991:35) argues that "the state is a major source of both threats to and security for individuals. Individuals provide much of the reason for, and some of the limits to, the security-seeking activities of the state". This way, individual security is placed as relational and always in dispute to state security, making security an ever-incomplete project for both individuals and states.

1.4. The State of Nature

For Buzan (1991:37) the state of nature image serves as the explanation for the impossibility of total security. Since there is a primary anarchy in which the living conditions for the individuals involved are marked by unacceptable high levels of societal threat, unbearable chaos becomes the motive for sacrificing some freedom in order to improve levels of security, and in this process, government and the state are born.

In the words of Hobbes, people found states in order to 'defend them from the invasion of foreigners and the injuries of one another [...]'. The state becomes the mechanism by which people seek to achieve adequate levels of security against social threats [...] 'the most important distinguishing mark of our modern Western civilization' (Buzan, 1991:38).

One of the most common validations for state actions in contemporary politics is precisely this correlation and explanatory interpretation of the state of nature and of Hobbes' works. This argument serves as justification for the rise of the modern State and as the perpetual threat to which peoples would be led if they do not comply with security policies, measures or restrictions. The image of the state of nature, its violence and the fear that just picturing it inflicts is a frequent metaphor which supports the sacrifices made by individuals and legitimizes state violence. Only by having assumed an anarchical previous stage for human collectivities can the state be seen as the *necessary evil* that Buzan projects in his work.

Once the foundations for the modern state are put into place according to this view on the state of nature, the balance between state security and individual security is found. There is no more paradox when the state seems to threaten individuals with its actions, for the Nation-State “sacrifices the interests of some [individuals] for what is seen to be a higher collective interest” (Buzan, 1991:45).

1.5. The sovereign State:

Sovereignty is the condition that allows the state to perform its security tasks; however, the sovereignty of the state rests on a higher assumption, that of the state itself:

The state exists, or has its essence, primarily on the socio-political rather than on the physical plane. In some important senses, the state is more an idea held in common by a group of people, than it is a physical organism. [...] If the heart of the state resides in the idea of it held in the minds of the population, then that idea itself becomes a major object of national security (Buzan, 1991:63-64).

Since the state is mainly an idea, the primary security task of the state has to be securing this idea in itself. In this sense, the state as a natural entity, born out of an anarchic international system seems to start losing validity, and turns into a *fabrication*.

1.6. Threats and vulnerabilities:

It is important to note that in the predominant view in IR threats and vulnerabilities are objective factors which have to be measured by the state in order for it to react against them:

Insecurity reflects a combination of threats and vulnerabilities, and the two cannot meaningfully be separated. [...] national security policy can either focus inward, seeking to reduce the vulnerabilities of the state itself, or outward, seeking to reduce external threat by addressing its sources (Buzan, 1991:112).

The state, even though it had been problematized as an *idea* in need of constant reinforcement, is assumed again to be a *natural* entity, with a *body* that separates its inside from the outside in a clear manner. The state, as a coherent entity, evaluates the threats on the dangerous outside and

has the ability to implement measures to reduce its vulnerabilities on the inside. This security task has to be performed constantly by state officials.

The question of when a threat becomes a national security issue depends not just on what type of threat it is, and how the recipient state perceives it, but also on the intensity with which the threat operates. The main factors affecting the intensity of a threat are the specificity of its identity, its nearness in space and time, the probability of its occurring, the weight of its consequences and whether or not perceptions of the threat are amplified by historical circumstances (Buzan, 1991:134).

This way, the measurement of threats has to be carried out by *experts*, who are able to evaluate “a host of complex factors” in the international arena. These national security experts might be eager to identify threats since

one might even argue that states need to be threatened. If no threats existed, part of the state’s basic Hobbesian function would disappear. Given the mutually constituting character of states and the international system, this logic points either to an anarchic utopia, or to the collapse of government and the rise of civil disorder (Buzan, 1991:141).

And exactly at this point, the circular logic of security closes itself and the point at which we arrive is the same point of departure: the state of nature. The state of nature is the reason for being of the state, it is the foundation of the modern Nation-State; the state is the *lesser evil* for which individuals sacrifice their freedoms in order to feel safe. The state is, then, this particular idea, this notion of a superior order which can provide security in the inside of its territory and protect it from the outside dangerous world. To perform this security task, governmental officials have to measure both threats and vulnerabilities, outside and inside of its borders, respectively. If state security enters in contradiction with individual security, the state solves it by inclining its decisions and actions towards defending the higher good, meaning, towards prioritizing national security over individual security. To accomplish this function, security experts (generally state officials) have to be alert in identifying dangers, for if dangers take over the state, civil disorder will reign and the modern state will end.

And this line of thinking takes us back to the state of nature, because if there are no threats there is no justification for state security, for the sacri-

face of individuals in the name of the modern state. Therefore we are faced with a contradiction which Buzan does not address directly but points to timidly: without threats there is no security, insecurity is the condition for the state to be born according to Buzan's reading of Hobbes and, contrary to the common explanation of security policies, it is insecurity, threats and vulnerabilities which form the constituting element of security itself. Without insecurity, security cannot exist. Security, therefore, has to remain a promise or, in Buzan's words, "total security is not possible", but not because threats are endless but, quite on the contrary, because achieving security would imply the termination of the state.

SECURITY SEEN FROM CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

The conceptual difficulties posed by the traditional view on security have been studied in depth by alternative IR schools. Critical security perspectives trace back the idea of security to its beginning, to the state of nature, and make visible the mutually constituted character of in/security and identity, problematizing most of the assumptions that traditional views entail. In the following pages we will concentrate on this different interpretation of what security is, which relations make security and insecurity mutually constitutive, and how the idea of the state is created as natural. This leads us to question the self-evidence of the meaning of security as the economy of identity/difference seems to be at the core of its policies. We will follow the conclusions of the classical view on security and question them one by one under a different and challenging perspective.

2.1. State sovereignty

According to classical IR, the foundational principle of the international security system is its primary anarchical character, which *naturally* gives birth to Nation-States. The state is assumed to be a prearranged entity, whose constitution is taken for granted as the result of fear and consensus born out of the *state of nature*. IR presumes that the state conceals this anarchy by being a sovereign actor, which resembles a coherent body whose main attribute is its self-government.

Well, what if this particular reading of *reality* was challenged? What if the state of nature, as conceptualized by Hobbes and then constantly invoked as the reason for the existence of the modern state and as justifica-

tion for security, was interpreted in another way? What if there were other options for conceptualizing the *world*, the *state* and the *individual*? What if these *entities* could not be clearly separated anymore? What if the process of constitution of threats and the identities of the state and the individual were mutual?

RBJ Walker (1999) underscores the relationship between the hegemonic understanding of Hobbes' state of nature, the legitimization of state power and the constitution of sovereignty as one multifaceted process: Hobbes articulated the necessities of the sovereign authority with the "stunningly simple assertion that the proper subject of politics, and the most basic component of the 'state of nature', was the free and equal individual". This individual, like the sovereign state, is the new modern subject "framed in a language of spatial separations, of self and other, self and world", who "has come to seem entirely natural, inevitable, even as the apogee of all modern desires and possibilities" (Walker, 1999:x).

Only via assuming that the state of nature is full of violence and fear, the authority of the state over the individual can be legitimized in IR. In the words of Buzan, it would be this image of unaccepted levels of societal threat, which haunts individuals like a ghost and keeps the free subject under the authority of the modern state. According to Walker this specific explanation is our conventional story to reconcile the subject with the sovereign authority of the state.¹ But this reconciliation is not free from dilemmas. Internationalizers and globalizers, among others, have insisted that "claims of modern sovereignty are insufficient to answer all questions about the character and location of political authority in contemporary circumstances" (Walker, 1999:xii).

Jenny Edkins and Véronique Pin-Fat (1999) have carried out a profound work about this particular relationship between sovereignty and subjectivity, pointing out its complexity because both concepts "overlap and are intertwined, returning to embrace and include each other" in an "intensely political relationship" (2). In this tangle the sovereign state is legitimized and the coherent unitary selfhood of the individual is con-

¹ "Stories about the social contract; about nationalism, liberalism, and socialism; about public and private, state and civil society; about rights, representations, and democratizations [are] the ways in which we have managed to reconcile our claims to be both free autonomous individual/collective subjects and yet also subject to the ultimate authority of that sovereign that expresses our true subjectivity" (Walker, 1999:x).

structed, and here lies one of the most difficult tasks for problematizing security discourses *as we know them* according to IR.

The particular form of subjectivity [of the modern individual] produces and legitimizes the political arrangements of sovereignty. What is more important, the residues of this process of writing are erased, giving the appearance of already existing entities or objects and obliterating the production and operation of power (Edkins and Pin-Fat, 1999:2).

This might be one of the entrenched reasons for IR scholars not to deal with the mutual constitution of subjectivity and sovereignty. Subjectivity is “bound up with the social or symbolic order. The constitution of the subject and the constitution of social order seem to implicate each other” (4). Therefore, questioning subjectivity implies questioning its intertwined relation with sovereignty, which is the founding stone of the state itself.

Once the Christian God lost its ascendancy in the western thought of being, and the thought of politics began to escape from the onto-theological determinations of the church, the sovereign political subject of the modern state began to make its appearance, moving quickly to the center of political theory, especially that of international political thought (Dillon, 1999:117).

In this vein, sovereignty has played a chief function in modernity, that of being one of the master signifiers, which “covers the hole or lack in the social symbolic order and provides a nodal point around which meaning is articulated” (Edkins and Pin-Fat, 1996). In other words, the concept of sovereignty “is central to discourses of politics and the international”. The notion of the state originates the right of “a government over the lives of its citizens in the modern nation-state”, and it “plays a foundational role in discussions of international autonomy” as “the sovereign state is a bounded unit in the international system”. Sovereignty inscribes itself as central to modern politics and co-constitutes the free and modern individual’s subjectivity, providing a *ground or a foundation* through the erasure of its artificial imposition, which explains in part why sovereignty is mostly regarded as natural, right, and “beyond challenge” (10).

This claim takes us to a different dimension of the discussion on security. Contrary to the received view on sovereignty and subjectivity in IR, which reduces its examination to locating and naming ontologically prior

objects, alternative perspectives attempt to illustrate the ways in which sovereignty and subjectivity are *constituted, applied, and reinforced*. The questions that critical security studies pose deal with the assumptions that IR take for granted, to the effect that the logic exemplified in Buzan's argument is disrupted. The premises which sustain this hegemonic way of thinking security are put into question. These new insights give us the possibility to transcend the common appreciation in IR whether sovereignty and subjectivity "are accurate representations (true)" of the world (Edkins and Pin-Fat, 1999:12) towards questioning the representation of the world in itself.

2.2. Representing the world

If we re-think the relationship between sovereignty and subjectivity via problematizing the representations through which they legitimize themselves, we find ourselves questioning how the world is depicted in security theories and discourses. This questioning is not directed at unveiling the *true* representation of what security discourses portray as reality, but towards how those representations of the world, the (in-)national system, man and state, inside and outside, are embedded in a matrix of power which legitimizes certain political arrangements.

[Any] representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth', which is itself a representation. What this must lead us to methodologically is to view representations (or misrepresentations - the distinction is at best a matter of degree) as inhabiting a common field of play defined for them, not by some inherent common subject matter alone, but by some common history, tradition, universe of discourse (Said, 2003a:272-273).

In the realm of critical security studies, social insecurities are assumed to be culturally produced, "in the sense that they are produced in and out of the 'context within which people give meanings to their actions and experiences and make sense of their lives'" (Tomlinson quoted in Weldes and others, 1999:1).

On this view, identities (both of self and of others) and insecurities, rather than being given, emerge out of a process of representation through which individuals [...] describe to themselves and others the world in which they live. These representations - narratives, collective memories, and the imaginaries that make them possible - define, and so

constitute, the world. They populate it with objects and subjects, endow those subjects with interests, and define the relations among those objects and subjects (Weldes and others, 1999:14).

In this interpretation of *the world* there are no more subjects whose identity is independent from the objects which they deal with. The borders between the inside and the outside start blurring and the world seems to resemble more what we make out of it than what it *is*. The identity of the state, which in the traditional view is the natural result of an anarchic international system and the natural provider of security, is seen as a cultural production, as an effect of a set of statist discourses which “produce the state, and produce it as a particular kind of subject”, as an actor with “particular kinds of interests”. Simultaneously, the state produces “citizens as a particular kind of subject, often as consumers of statist representations of insecurity and danger and as a unified population with shared interests” (Weldes and others, 1999:14-15).

These last thoughts propose a different understanding of reality, state, and individuals. Taking seriously the cultural construction of reality implies embarking in a contest for meaning because, if the entities which serve as the foundation for the traditional view on security are *produced* (which is not to say that they are artificial but that they are manufactured) then any discourse about *what the world* is about faces contestation.

In this specific point of the discussion, it is of extreme relevance to underscore that discourse does not just imply the merely linguistic but also the material practices since “discourses and their codes of intelligibility have concrete, and significant, material effects [by allocating] social capacities and resources and mak[ing] practices possible” (Weldes and others, 1999:16-17). In this sense,

[d]iscourse is not merely spoken words, but a notion of signification which concerns not merely how it is that certain signifiers come to mean what they mean, but how certain discursive forms articulate objects and subjects in their intelligibility. [...] Discourse not merely represents or reports on pregiven practices and relations, but it enters into their articulation and is, in that sense, productive (Butler, 1995b:138).

Once there is a consensus about the correspondence between a discourse and reality, when any discourse becomes hegemonic and it is assumed that it is a transparent and an accurate description of the state of things, it defines the “horizon of the taken-for-granted that marks the

boundaries of common sense and accepted knowledge" (Weldes and others, 1999:17). And security has been installed within this realm of common sense as the negation of insecurity, as the pursuit of freedom from threat, as a positive goal in itself, as the primary function of the modern Nation-State and as the legitimizing promise of political order.

2.3. State discourses on security

As it was sketched in the first part of this paper, the traditional view on security conceptualizes national security policies and state discourses about security problems as "choices about both the objectives of policy (ends), and the techniques, resources, instruments and actions which will be used to implement it (means)" (Buzan, 1991:330).

In contrast to this view, from a critical perspective state discourses on security are understood as sites of social power in which the construction and the functions of security discourses and policies can be questioned. "Because discourses bring with them the power to define and thus to constitute the world, these representations of insecurity are themselves important sources of power" (Weldes and others, 1999:18). So what state security policies and discourses *do* is not just to identify threats in the outside and vulnerabilities in the inside as part of an imperfect art of security policy-making. The power relations that security policies signify create, recreate and transform the people in whose name they speak. Security policies speak to us and speak Us. They define what a threat is and what is not; who is an insider and who is an outsider. In this process security discourses create identity categories, such as Us and Them, which "are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary" (Butler, 1995a:50). By defining which actions can be carried out *in the name of the state* and which others *defy* the very idea of the state, security policies recreate the interests and the attributes of the state itself.

2.4. From state security to in/security and identities

If the focus of attention shifts from the instrumental concerns of security to questioning its assumptions we open spaces for other interpretations of security. In this subject the writings of David Campbell (1998) might provide us with a refreshing and inspiring view on the significance that security discourses have on the construction of political identities. Campbell declines rethinking security towards expanding "the old register of hazards to incorporate what are perceived as the newly emergent dangers" (ix). Instead, he argues for questioning the "acceptance of the

supposedly determinate identities [security] ministers”, focusing on how state representations of danger shape political identities.

It is pertinent to make more explicit to which concept of identity we are referring to here. Using Aletta Norval’s terminology, in contrast to a *sacred* understanding of cultural identity, this particular reading of security adopts a *profane* view on identity. If the first term describes an idea of identity as monolithic, noncontradictory and nonantagonistic; in contrast, a profane understanding of identity accentuates its historicity and insists on the “‘madness’ of culture and, therefore, in the inventedness of every identity” (Norval, 1999:99-100). This concept of identity:

[D]oes not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-ready ‘the same’, identical to itself across time. [...] It accepts that identities are never unified and [...] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation (Hall, 1996:3).

In the same vein as Campbell, Stuart Hall (1996:3-4) calls for paying attention to the specific historical, linguistic and cultural processes of *becoming rather than being*. He says, “not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation”. And the specific representation that security policies construct for identity categories is now the focus of our attention since they have a great share of participation in those discourses which hail subjects into place and enter into the constitution of identity, understood as:

the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’ (Hall, 1996:5-6).

As it is proposed by Hall (1996:6-10), discourses are not sufficient to constitute identity, for it is not just that state discourses produce identities by manufacturing categories and not any subject fits into any category or

can be removed or exchanged as a puppet in an *unproblematic fashion*. Identity is always a process, a becoming, never an exhausted and finished project, “there is no point at which, however briefly, the performance is finished” (Edkins and Pin-Fat, 1999:1). In this ambit, the work of Judith Butler (1993:2) is vital for grasping identity as performative, “not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names but rather as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains”. And in this logic how state representations create the ideal of the national (in whose name they operate) and how they recreate the notion of other, otherness and difference (when naming danger) is one of the power effects of security discourses.

2.5. Naming Danger

If we continue taking the premises of security as mainstream IR scholars picture it one by one, we shall resume to the fourth condition explicitly made above: security policies are born out of the categorization and classification of threats and vulnerabilities by security experts according to the measurement of objective dangers. Nevertheless, resuming to Campbell’s arguments, the first function of any security discourse is to name dangers which have a non-objective condition.

Danger is not a thing that exists independently of those to whom it may become a threat [...] [It is] an effect of interpretation. [...] Danger bears no essential, necessary, or unproblematic relation to the action or event from which it is said to derive (Campbell, 1998:1-2).

In any society, the amount of dangers that exists is infinite; Campbell argues that “indeed, there is such an abundance of risk that it is impossible to objectively know all that threatens us” (1998:2). So, for any security policy to describe the dangers that actually *threaten Us* there has to be a necessary interpretative task involved. The naming of danger will then be a matter of interpretation, meaning that there is no other way of understanding and perceiving something or someone as dangerous unless it is interpreted as such within the discursive realm which gives meaning to it.

This interpretative aspect in the elaboration of security discourses is vital to comprehend which of the infinite range of dangers is selected and constituted as threat. For state officials to actually incorporate some dangers into the security agenda and leave other dangers aside is a political decision. This way, security discourses do not just designate or identify a

pre-existing threat against which the state protects us, for that list would be endless. By naming danger security discourses co-constitute the threat in itself, implying that the presumption that security discourses only materialize in a text the description of a danger to society is inaccurate. By naming danger security discourse re-creates it and, especially when dealing with official discourses, they inform governmental practices and actions accordingly.

If the first purpose of a security discourse is to represent dangers, then what is achieved through this representation? Which consequences does the securitization of an issue, group of people, or any other threat, have on the constitution of identity? Discourses of danger are always inextricably related to discourses of the state, they tell us about the uncertainty and ambiguity of the world and the threats that it poses to *man*; however, simultaneously they offer the state as the appropriate solution to deal with this uncertainty. In a way, representations of danger are imbedded in representations of safety. The state presents those dangers to the population and, by means of the state's authorizing role, it offers itself as the solution to deal with them (Campbell, 1998:50-51). This way, representations of danger turn into a necessary tool of the state to maintain its legitimacy and justify its own existence.

This is one of the reasons why security discourses can be considered as integral part of the state's discourse on the construction of its own identity. Security discourses might need to be understood as the state's constant reproduction of danger rather than as the state's response to danger. And here we find again the same picturing of the *state of nature* as the legitimation for state existence and guarding role but now it is put under scrutiny.

The state of nature is shock therapy. It helps subjects to get their priorities straight by teaching them what life would be like without sovereignty. It domesticates by eliciting the vicarious of fear of violent death in those who have not had to confront it directly. [...] The fear of death pulls the self together. It induces subjects to accept civil society and it becomes an instrumentality of sovereign control in a civil society already installed (Connolly quoted in Campbell, 1998:57-58).

In this vein, security discourses provide a significant input to construct the *nation*; that imagined community so clearly conceptualized by Benedict Anderson (1991:6) as "both inherently limited and sovereign [...] to be distinguished, not by [its] falsity/genuineness, but by the style in

which [it is] imagined". In this *style* or mode of representation, security discourses portray certain dangers as threatening the We inside the state borders, telling Us what we are not, what we have to fear, and what the state should defend us from. In this sense, the process of constitution of both identities, of state and people, the inner and outer, or Us and Them might emerge at the same time (Campbell, 1998:57).

This process is, of course not perfected or without problems, hence discourses of danger entail their own lacunae, and not every *man* might fit comfortably in those subject positions reserved for obeying state authority. Hobbes knew this exactly and this is why his metaphor about *accommodating* some men to the rest is set as moulding rough stones into plain ones in order to build the edifice of the state². The state as edifice implies that this territorial "boundary is clear-cut, unambiguous, non-overlapping and defined" (Chilton, 1996:64), and that the membership to the sovereign state must be exclusive. Additionally, this edifice entails *stability and permanence* since it secures the people inside, implying the protection and safety by means of exclusion.

In this sense, the parallel between the state-as-edifice in the discourse of Hobbes and the reconstitution or evocation of his arguments in IR to characterize the sovereign Nation-State are manifest. The discourse of Hobbes as basic text informing realist and neorealist accounts of the world, functions "to project particular concepts of order, or to legitimate existing concepts, and in some degree have contributed to producing the object they have claimed to represent" (Chilton, 1996:116).

Thus, whenever the sovereign state fails to resemble an interior ordered realm, its borders to the outside separating the inside from the chaotic and dangerous world, the state would lose its validity. Without borders, the state cannot function, borders are the very walls of the edifice which separate the inside from the outside and justify the state's exist-

² Paul Chilton (1996) has dedicated great efforts at comprehending the metaphors of security. In regards to Hobbes' Leviathan, Chilton points at this metaphor of the state-edifice as a container concept which was part of Hobbes' demonstration of "the need for a sovereign power that will be permanent" (85). "The sovereign state is a container with a building-like structure, a wall-like bounding (and binding) surface, that keeps people in awe, and not only keeps out invaders but casts out its internal threats" (87). In Hobbes' construction of the notion of the sovereign, "stones and bricks are built into an ordered whole: there is a builder, an architect, an owner, and so forth" but there are some men who "simply do not fit in", who "cannot be easily made plain" and those who "cannot be corrected" are to "be left, or cast out of Society, as cumbersome thereunto" (87).

tence. Yet the edifice of the state is never finished, for the diversity of man is a constant and, therefore, the very building of the edifice is a never-ending project which requires permanent production of discipline inside the same state.

Furthermore, when any security discourse establishes which events and actors, what and whom we should fear it necessarily establishes the Other, the outside and the *to be feared* at the same time that it establishes the domestic, the safe and ordered. Security discourses would be “a specific sort of *boundary producing political performance*”, part of the practices of the state which serve as “an art of domesticating the meaning of man by constructing his problems, his dangers, his fears” (Campbell, 1998:62). And, simultaneously, man’s loves too:

For security is a package which tells you what you are as it tells you what to die for; which tells you what to love as it tells you what to defend (*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*); and which tells you what is right as it tells you what is wrong. Its cognates consequently include [...] certain related understandings of love [...] [which] form and inform the space of our (inter)national politics of security: love of liberty; love of order; love of country; love of church; love of one god; love of the people; love of the leader; love of the party; love of the nation; love of the individual; love of the very cult of the subject. Security always seems to come crenellated in the form of some obligatory, denying and self-denying love masquing the spirit of revenge (Dillon, 1996:33-34).

It is in this sense that security discourses, as part of the official culture, provide definitions of patriotism, loyalty, boundaries and belonging. The state

speaks in the name of the whole, that tries to express the general will, the general ethos and idea which inclusively holds in the official past, the founding fathers and texts, the pantheon of heroes and villains, and so on, and excludes what is foreign or different or undesirable in the past (Said, 2003b:335).

The state then creates those idealized pictures of identity to which the *national* and the *foreign* are hailed. For both are constituted in what William Connolly (1991:64) has named the economy of identity/difference: “An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If

they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity". In this sense, the outside co-constitutes the inside. For the state to erect its boundaries what is left outside of them is indispensable.

Each age and society re-creates its 'Others'. Far from being a static thing then, identity of self or of Other is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies (Said, 2003a:331).

But the relation between the inside and the outside is much more complex than what representations of danger illustrate. For the state to be able to exclude the Other from within and to protect the inside from the outside, the traces of their connectedness have to be erased from representation. This erasure gives the state an appearance of coherence and, at the same time, totalizes the idea of the other.

2.6. The impossibility of in/security:

As indicated by traditional IR, the problem of security is a matter of not having achieved greater levels of it in order to provide human collectivities with safety. Well, what if the problem of security was that it has to remain a promise since, as pointed by Buzan himself, achieving total security would result in the withering of the state? What if security's main condition for possibility would be its own impossibility?

The impossibility of security is one of the reasons why Michael Dillon (1996) has coined the term (in)security. He draws attention to the fact that "we stand too uncritically under the prejudice of the opposition between security and insecurity":

Because we can never think security without insecurity, and vice versa, there is an essential conflict, which the word itself bears within itself, at the heart of security that is overlooked by the traditional study of security. This conflict is a conflict of unequal opposites which are rooted and routed together [...] a unified agonal relationship of mutual definition rather than a dialectical relationship in which one term overcomes the other. It is evident, if we pause to think about security for a moment, that any discourse of security must always already, simultaneously and in a plurality of ways, be a discourse of danger too (Dillon, 1996:120-121).

In this light, the questions about security policy should be posed in an active voice, not taking for granted what security is, but problematizing it and questioning its supposedly foundation:

Security does not reflect what a 'people' are, and seek to protect it. Rather, it discloses how, in tragic denials of the (in)security of mortal life, people – and a 'people' – are actually formed by attempts to extirpate the 'foreign, strange, uncanny [and] outlandish' which inevitable constitute their very own free [(in)secure] mortal existence (Dillon, 1996:35).

Dillon (1996) situates security's attempts at extirpating the other as part of the modern Cartesian subject's striving for certainty, for securing a stable ground for itself. But these attempts fail, for there is no stable ground that security can disclose. Instead, security betrays "its own essence as an insistent demand for such a foundation" (78).

The author partly bases his claim via analysing the word *security*, which "discloses that insecurity is always already folded into security, that it is impossible to have one without the other". The re-presentation of security as *being secured* "proposes that there is a state of affairs – insecurity – and the negation of that state – security – and by doing so thoroughly represses the complexity not only of the act of securing but also of the inextricable relation between security and insecurity". The character of security as a process is erased and, instead, being secured is presented as "a simple dialectical opposition together with the implied promise that insecurity can always be mastered in principle if not in current practice" (Dillon, 1996:122). An assumption that security policies take up entirely when they portray insecurity as the opposite of security without making explicit how both are embedded and intertwined with each other at all times and in all stages.

In contrast to these uses of security, Dillon (1999:124-125) takes us back to the ancient meanings of the word. The Greek word for security, *asphaleia*, always pointed at the present relation between security and insecurity, both at once³. This fundamental duality was also present in the

³ "*Asphaleia* is to avoid falling, error, failure, or mistake. It is to make something stand, steadfastness, assured from danger, safe, steady, fortified, to be furnished with a firm foundation, to be certain, or sure. [...] Moreover, the word itself simultaneously not only refers, of course, to its opposite – to falling and failing – and the need to overcome such conditions, but also and more disturbingly to their very interdependence; to the very duality of security itself and thereby to the struggle

Latin word *sine cura*⁴, from where the English word *security* is derived. The word “security can therefore, only be thought by incorporating the trace of insecurity in the very articulation of security itself [...] in short, security and insecurity are unequally co-determined” (Dillon, 1996:127). Hence Dillon’s coining of the term (in)security is a way of making visible and, therefore, a matter of consideration and contestation, the ambivalence of (in)security in itself which “provides the very dynamic behind the way in which security operates as a generative principle of formation for the production of political order” (Dillon, 1996:127).

Thought this way (in)security is the very impossibility of achieving the promise of security. Security’s impossibility to deliver is actually what makes the promise of security so attractive, for it can never be fulfilled and, therefore, constantly provides the state with its Hobbesian functions. In this line of argument, the impossible promise of (in)security would not be a paradox, but its own dynamic. In the case of state security discourses, it is then the unfeasibility of (in)security which, together with the state’s performative identity, makes possible the state’s own permanent reproduction as sovereign.

Should the state project of security be successful in the terms in which it is articulated, the state would cease to exist. Security as the absence of movement would result in death via stasis. Ironically, then, the inability of the state project of security to succeed is the guarantor of the state’s continued success as an impelling identity (Campbell, 1998:12).

To sum up this last challenging perspective about the impossibility of (in)security, we can say that its impossibility is “not a threat to a state’s identity or existence: it is its condition of possibility [and, therefore] while the objects of concern change over time, the techniques and exclusions by which those objects are constituted as dangers persist” (Campbell, 1998:13).

against the false standing – the pseudos – with which sphallo is intimately associated” (Dillon, 1996:124).

⁴ “*Sine cura* comprises *sine*, meaning without, and *cura* from *curio* meaning troubling; solicitude; carefulness; attention; pains; anxiety; grief and sorrow; diligent as opposed to negligent; guardianship; concern for persons or things; to have a care or be anxious about; later, oversight of certain state offices; task; or duty. Hence *sine cura* (and *sinecure*): without solicitude; careless; free from cares, untroubled; quiet; easy. *Securitas* is consequently defined as freedom from concern; unconcern; composure; freedom from danger; safety; security” (Dillon, 1996:125).

FINAL COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

This reading of security discourses opens several points of entry into the current debate about security and peace. From this perspective, the 'security discussion' is, above all, about the constitution of political order, about how *our* political identities are being constantly produced, reproduced and transformed in discourses which legitimize the deployment of physical and political violence against the *other* and against the traces of the *other* in *us*. This aspect needs to be central in peace research nowadays: security thinking merits political attention, for it is the invisibility, erasure and naturalized assumptions about security and the state, Us and Them which, in modern times, are part of the rhetoric of violence and war.

Taking seriously the criticisms raised in regards to security discourses should arouse our suspicion and help us re-direct academic efforts not towards better and more careful ways of "securing security", but towards actually re-thinking the possibility that since the search for security is a trap, instead we might look into creative and peaceful ways for transforming conflicts.

To acknowledge the legitimization of violence performed in the name of security gives us the chance to think radically about the possibility of bringing politics back into discussion and possible futures we can imagine and act upon: embarking on uncertain routes we want to walk on instead of trying to hold on to the (false)certain roots of the promise of security. Only by giving ourselves the chance to explore these (in)secure routes will we come to terms with living different possible peaces in which freedom is to be exercised here and now and not postponed until security arrives – for those days might never come.

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