Can We Secure Security?

Dominykas Broga

Abstract—Until recently it would have been unusual to consider classifying population movements and refugees as security problem. However, efforts at shaping our world to make ourselves secure have paradoxically led to ever greater insecurity. The feeling of uncertainty, pertinent throughout all discourses of security, has led to the creation of security production into seemingly benign routines of everyday life. Yet, the paper argues, neither of security discourses accounted for, disclosed and challenged the fundamental aporias embedded in Western security narratives. In turn, the paper aims to unpick the conventional security wisdom, which is haunted with strong ontologies, embedded in the politics of Orientalism, and (in)security nexus. The paper concludes that current security affair conceals the integral impossibility of fulfilling its very own promise of assured security. The paper also provides suggestions about alternative security discourse based on mutual dialogue.

Keywords—Identity, (in)security, migration, ontology

I. INTRODUCTION

UNTIL recently it would have been unusual to consider classifying population movements and refugees as security problem. Common perception of humanitarian or economic concerns demanded analogous responses. While Western societies have become relatively insulated from the age-old 'natural' insecurities of famine, premature death and illness, simultaneously, the processes, world-wide in scope, have urged demands for widening and/or deepening of security [1]. Efforts at shaping our world to make ourselves secure have paradoxically led to ever greater insecurity. The feeling of uncertainty, pertinent throughout all discourses of security, has led to the creation of security production into seemingly benign routines of everyday life [2]. However, it will be argued that neither of security discourses accounted for, disclosed and challenged the fundamental aporias embedded in Western security narrative which influences the way we think, construct and act upon the name of security [3]. Haunted with strong ontologies, embedded in the politics of Orientalism, and (in)security nexus, conventional security wisdom prematurely accepts the boundaries of the given, and essentially creates instability, uncertainty, fear and threat, that inevitably leads to widespread insecurity and failed security project itself[4]. Therefore, Alexander Wendt's construction of 'social identity'[5], and David Campbell's theorization of the 'Other' will be particularly useful – in the context of 2011 Searchlight Educational Trust poll on identity, extremism and immigration in Britain, which showed increasingly hostile attitudes towards migrants – to explore how security aporias, embedded in the very nature of our thinking, has created the perceived menace to identity security through securitization of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants discourse. The essay shall conclude that under current state of affairs integral to the promise of an assured security is the concealment of the impossibility of fulfilling this very promise.

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II. IDENTITY AND EXTREMISM IN BRITAIN

In February 2011, Searchlight Educational Trust project has released the most rigorous survey results of British responses to identity, extremism and migration so far. Poll results have shown that some 39% of Asian Britons, 34% of white Britons and 21% of black Britons believed that all immigration into the United Kingdom should be stopped permanently, or at least until economy stabilizes. More than half of the population agreed that 'immigration into Britain has been a bad thing for the country' [6]. Furthermore, some 53% of Britons agreed that 'Muslims create problems in the UK' [7] and 48% of the population would consider supporting a new anti-immigration party committed to challenging Islamic extremism[8]. A sharp contrast with 2009 OECD's report, estimating the economic decline of 0.1-0.125% in economic growth by the fall of around 360,000 in the migrant stock by 2015 [9], and with Britain's previously celebrated politics of multiculturalism, reveal a new, changing political dynamic, which, one may maintain, was, at least in part, implicated by the security discourse of migration[10]. From poll results, one may notice, that securitized migration has become an issue of identity politics from what was previously a concern of public social and economic policy. A changing relation between migrant and perceivably indigenous individual, from that of positive economic concern to erratic concern of extremism, insecurity and threat to identity provides a background for exploring how our modern Western security discourses essentially established the anarchic order of insecurity through externalization of migrant.

III. APORIAS WITHIN SECURITY NEXUS

While it is important to note that security narratives essentially create contestable domains as to whose security, by what means, for what values and for whom is being secured, an analysis of such domains would merely revolve around changing the nature of referent objects, threats, and means. It would show how security practices are always for someone and for some purpose, and may fall into the trap of endangering some while securing others. It might show a correlation between securitization of migration and subsequent anti-immigration attitudes. It would reveal the essential security dilemma that security cannot account for all its subjects and is relational rather than absolute; therefore, exposing insights about the way how securitization of migration has created migrants and indigenous population insecure. However, such exploration would not provide insights into the more meaningful relationships that are embedded within conventional discourses of security. As such, questions which merely approach, but never account for aporias, inescapable metaphysical puzzles of security, that endanger the very possibility of escaping insecurity nexus, will not be discussed. In turn, the first aporia of security is the construction of the very Being that security assumes falsely and, in turn, impregnates with insecurity.

Firstly, it is important to note that identity is a social construct. Antony Giddens has argued that all human beings seek to secure self (identity) which pertains to having a sense of certainty and stability with regard to the social

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order, and ability to pursue one's interests. Furthermore, our identity comprises two elements, namely, pertaining intrinsic, self-organizing qualities that constitute one's individuality and cultural essence, and the social identity, referring to individual's role vis-à-vis other actors [11]. Yet, all dimensions, namely, our interests, social order, and relation to others, are constructed, rather than found in the empirical, unchanging world, and, in turn, are contingent on time and space necessities, necessarily susceptible to change[12]. Furthermore, Bhikhu Parekh has argued that the notion of a single national identity is unattainable. While identity implies a distinct, homogenous, common culture, marked by common values, shared understandings and loyalties, the reality in a society with class, gender, and regional differences is quite contrary[13]. Like individuals, a nation does not have one identity but many. 'An individual is a bearer of multiple, evolving and dialectically related identities', he argues, 'to attribute identity to a community of millions spread over vast expanses of space and time makes even less sense'[14]. In turn, Wendt has argued that our identity is erratic [15].

However, our narratives of security are embedded in, and force us to refocus onto concerns with strong ontologies of certainty about 'self' and creation of stable identities, which, I maintain, creates insecurity. As a heritage from the Cold War isolation and its security narratives, one may argue, we falsely assume as having a secure ahistorical homogenous identity. Baudrillard stated that present security system struggles for perfection, achieved through the absolute identity, the sameness [16]. We tend to assume we used to live in a secure world with secure self. We have created a self-contained 'liberal' world that validates and legitimizes its own self with its own terms, based on the illusion of an objective reality [17]. An increased migration to Britain has, thus, challenged not the core of identity, but the very meaning of falsity of its homogenous nature, to which our Western thought aspires. Once taken through securitization, the factors of economic contribution are forgotten and the emphasis of problematic 'self' is imposed on externalization, through which security aims to secure its stable referent object. Hence, it is essentially what Ken Booth has termed as our assurance of our 'ethnocentrism' [18], namely, our self-confirmation of our truth [19] that is embedded in security discourses and that makes security project create insecurity. Security compels us to look at the world with our own group as the centre, to perceive and interpret other societies within our frames of reference, and invariably to judge them to be inferior [20]. Hence, by encountering essential instability of identity, through engaging with unknown, diminishes our ability to conveniently accept who we are [21].

In turn, the attachments to the securitized migrants have related them to issues of drug trafficking, organized crime, or economic downturn that perceivably destabilized homogeneity or social and economic stability, and externalized our unwanted feelings about ourselves towards others are the creation of the security, whereas, in fact, the truth and coherency that actually constituted a society has been threatened. Thus, Ken Booth has concluded that the creation of enemy images is intrinsic to ethnocentrism, because in this way we affirm our knowledge of who we are and the securitization of migration translates the fear of encountering uncertainty about ourselves to the creation of external enemy [22].

However, such security project of affirming certainty has actually resulted in manifold insecurity. Not only did we not escape our insecurity of identity, but actually created the migrant insecure as well [23]. Therefore, our conventional narratives of security, as the affirmation of certainty, are inherently incapable of achieving security. Moreover, they create conditions which rigidly disallow assimilation, creating inherent division of the threat. Witnessing Muslim community bombarded with demands to assimilate, the absence of a formal set of values defining who the 'self' of assimilation is, makes any attempt to reconcile the core values of competing identities almost impossible[24]. Such fear, doubt of English resilience towards perceived dilution by other cultures, embedded in the self realization of impossibility to achieve stable self, creates uncertainty, which security project imposes to enemy imagery, yet, therein, increasing, rather than decreasing insecurity and multiplying insecurity sources [25].

Furthermore, Western security discourse has been haunted by the politics of the 'threatening Other', which, in contemporary narratives of security, diminishes our very possibility of achieving it. David Campbell has argued that it is the image of 'Other' that creates the sense of insecurity [26]. Didler Bigo has argued that borders began serving to draw boundaries that push into the lives of people who live outside and people who live inside. It brings the border into everyday existence of people living within confines – a physical manifestation of otherness. Maintaining that the identity creation through difference and engagement with the Other is a normal state of affairs by which we differentiate and understand ourselves, security discourse, as Bartelson suggested, not only differentiates the alien, an outside form inside, but attaches the meaning of threat to it[27]. Securitized migration has become the way to mark the ethical boundaries of identity rather than territorial borders of the state, therein distinguishing migrant not only as a policy issue, but an issue that necessarily threatens the very foundation of self [28]. Hence, while British identity is constructed through differentiation, difference taken through politics of security maintains and perpetuates insecure identity [29]. Simon Dalby, therefore, has argued that political structures of security are the sources rather than vulnerable objects of insecurity [30]. Hence, what security aporias make possible is sustained possibility to pretend to universality but insist that 'our' security always rests on the insecurity and suffering of the 'Other'. It invents or overstates threats to its 'body politic' to construct an 'us' and distinguish it from 'them'. Security constructs the 'Other' as an enemy and emphasizes its role as a site for displacing unwanted feelings about the Self. Thus, security acts as a mirroring tool, establishing that migrant's security essentially means our insecurity. In turn, Campbell concludes that our moral interdependence gives circular insight about the reproduction of fear and insecurity in relation to the 'Other', which is embedded in strong ontologies of security. While we aim to feel secure, we protect our identity from the 'Other', but the creation of the threatening 'Other' further endangers our security and increases our securitization practices, which has been observed in recently increased hostility to and need for further securitization of migrant. Therefore, for the security to exist, it needs a sustained threat, continuous threat. As a result, security discourse that linked migration to leaking borders and the loss of national identity tended to mobilize

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emergency measures invested in fear or unease, which furthered identity crisis felt in Britain [31]. What this means for security project is that central conditions of the very existence of security establishes borders of insecurity making it fail in succeeding in the very purpose it was invoked to fulfill. To further the point, such creation of the threatening Other, contrary to Jef Huysmans, who argued that security makes either state with its indigenous people, the migrant, or both secure, actually increases insecurity for all. An initial securitization of asylum seekers and illegal migrants in Britain may have potentially implicated the universalizing tendencies towards the general identity of the migrant, which is reflected in hostility expressed in the Searchlight Educational Trust poll. Thus, our traditional security nexus essentially fails in diminishing insecurity and instead creates a plethora of potentialities for increase of insecurity.

Finally, our traditional discourses of security address questions from premise that security can be achieved [32]. However, one has to realize the inescapable security/insecurity nexus embedded in the very way we think about it. While securing migration, we not only write security, we are also written by it, shaped and consumed. By creating images of threat, we paradoxically create insecurity as a direct result of one's security project. Thus the politics of (in)security and its implications for the production of structural violence are essential part in how we engage with issues of contemporary world politics. The radical ambiguity of security – necessarily not only specifying but also generating danger and fear in the very act of identifying them and mobilizing responses to them in the name of security – creates insecurity. Thus, our traditional philosophical and theoretical resources are inadequate for thinking through such condition of (in)security, since while engaging with uncertainty and politics of Othering, insecurity and security become metaphysicaly inseparable, an indissolutably connected, and security can only be perceived by simultaneously incorporating and inscribing the trace of insecurity in the very articulation of security itself[33]. As a result, by knowing the unknowable, or in our case, constructing the threat to identity, security creates us secure in knowledge, but insecure in practice [34]. Such exercise happens in relation between securitization of migrant as threat and increased insecurity within our ethical boundaries. It is less because of the way contemporary forms of life have amplified, extended and intensified the insecurity of life – although they have – but more because everything 'anti' in security discourse thinks in the spirit that against which it is 'anti'[35]. Hence, such thinking does not come equipped with the promise that we can secure an escape from insecurity and danger. Such radical ambivalence is neither a paradox, nor contradiction to be resolved through more careful securing, since, as showed above, engaging on the same terms, securing external threats sustains the expectation of uncertainty on which identity depends. Therefore, it provides the very dynamic behind the way in which security operates as a generative tool for the production of insecurity [36]. Relating back to the issue at hand, structurally violent British attitudes could be explained by the very nature of insecurity that securitization practice creates. Expanding security field to encompass wider range of issues and externalizing threats to secure identity, does make us secure in knowledge, but the very same knowledge makes us simultaneously insecure. Hence,

in order to feel secure we have to be completely insecure, or unable to contemplate what security would feel [37]. It is only because it insecures that security can secure. Such essentially tragic ambiguity is the product of security.Therefore, intensified identity politics as politics against insecurity is the direct result of the very same security project.

On the other hand, while conventional security narratives obstruct us from making security meaningful, its inherent aporias open up spaces for consideration of alternative security futures. Rosalyn Diprose, William Connolly and Moira Gatens have argued that we can secure security only by imagining a new ethical relationship that thinks difference not only on the basis of the same, but on the basis of a dialogue with the other, that might allow space for the unknown and unfamiliar, for a debate and engagement with the 'Other's' ethics – an encounter that involves a transformation of the self rather than the other[38]. While the sweep and power of security must be acknowledged, it must be refused. At the simultaneous levels of individual identity, social ordering and macrocosmic possibility, it would entail another kind of work on ourselves - a political refusal of the 'One' possible possibility inscribed into our nature by the power of conventional security. It would entail imagination of another that never returns to the same, asking if there is a world after security. Hence, re-securing security in the context of identity would require adhering to anti-foundationalism rather than intensified securtization practices [39]. As Connolly argued, while traditionally in the name of stability we engaged in the realpolitik on the outside and claimed universal identity on the inside that essentially made both – the 'other' and 'us' insecure, only by constant questioning, deterring infinitely the construction of security and changing our negative relation to the 'Other' with the positive connotation of dialogue, only through constant questioning of ourselves, rather than the 'Other', adaptation, not only subjectification, can we aim to achieve security[40]. While acknowledging the inescapable nature of distinctions between inside/outside, domestic/foreign which are important elements of the very identity we have, since being social animals we are constructed and sustained by ethically bounded communities, rather than closing such aporias to a new humanist ideal, which would adhere to same inherent strongly ontological principles of security, we should aim to challenge it as a truth claim, analyzing its pervasive and complex system of political, social, and economic power. We should see security as an interlocking system of knowledges, representations, practices and institutional forms that imagine, direct, and act upon bodies, spaces, and flows in various ways. It is such kind of imagination that gives security a meaning, a stable understanding of its changing nature, and a solid ground for making it purposeful [41]. Therefore, acknowledging the power of conventional security practices, which create a surge for identity politics and, while endangering fear, are always useful for some purposes, security can re-gain its conceptual rigor only by escaping strong ontologies, disassociating itself from the aporias of insecurity that are embedded in practices of securitization and engaging with difference in positive terms. Only in this way, the identity of British, an identity of anyone or anything can be safely secured.

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IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, employing the context of identity politics through securitization of migration in Britain it was argued that security fails to overcome insecurity and secure its very own purpose. By exposing its inherent aporias, contradictions in the very meaning of its existence, it has been showed that security engages with the politics of otherness through sameness, falsely assumes existence of stable identities and is embedded in the very thinking of (in)security nexus. Thus, security discourse of modernity incarcerates rather than liberates, radically endangers than makes us safe, engenders fear rather than creates assurance a terminal paradox which not only subverts its own predicate of security, most spectacularly by rendering the future of existence conditional on the strategy of its regimes of knowledge and power, but also seems to furbish a new predicate for global insecurity [42]. Furthermore, deriving from a growing sense that security no longer has a stable referent object, nor names a common set of needs, means, or ways of being[43], a new security agenda has been suggested as a way of re-securing security. To conclude, our times ultimately earn the title of (in)security [44], and our attempts to widen and/or deepen security merely refocuses strong ontologies, rather than secures security project. Hence, answer to the question whether we can secure security depends on our willingness to think, change, and engage critically with the very foundational understandings of what security entails. Yet, our traditional security narratives are inadequate to secure security project.

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