

The Anthropological Gaze: Deconstructing the Security Knowledge

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Abstract. *Humankind lives inside the 'description' of the world which contributes to the formation of his own symbolic universe and identity, and security knowledge is one of these descriptions. However, security is a myth, and security knowledge, which now is based on the threat perception of 'the risk of...', through the rite of securitization process is transformed into technological knowledge, ideologies, cultural systems, and post-political biopolitics. As a result of this process, humankind is back into the Plato's cave in which lives the reality through images broadcasted on internet and social media. Here, in order to question the manufacturing of the security knowledge, is presented the epistemological and critical tool of the anthropological gaze.*

Key words: *security, myth, rite, securitization process, anthropological gaze*

This essay is about the concept of security and the fabrication of security knowledge which here is considered as a 'description' that pretends to be the 'reality.' Indeed, who controls the description of the world controls the world. Humankind lives inside the 'description' of the world which contributes to the formation of his own symbolic universe and identity. These narratives, in their extreme cases, when they officially deal with security-insecurity topics, produce shared anxiety which leads to societal regression characterized by blind-trust toward the political leaders. What is more, our is a 'global risk society' in which reality is created by 'the risk of...' narratives, in which anxiety is the main ingredient, and is fabricated, distributed, and managed by agents: power-knowledge-security (PKS) structures and news-social media-internet companies. However, these agents compete with each other for power and status quo, and present their own 'description' of 'reality' (security-insecurity-anxiety narrative) in which they pretend to play the role of the hero, whilst fabricating their own cultural hero-system². This struggle takes place in the arena of the market of anxiety. In addition, these descriptions are converted in technological knowledge, ideologies, cultural systems, and post-political biopolitics. Therefore, inspired by de Montaigne's words "We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things," and in order to emancipate ourselves from this new version of Plato's cave here is suggested the epistemological and critical tool of the anthropological gaze.

Any time we talk about security-insecurity we talk about anxiety which is basically the first emotion we experience when we were born, and which will accompany us for the rest of our life³. However, most of the time we experience this anxiety not directly, but as an emotion which we live through a description of a fearful event or condition. A clear example of these fearful descriptions which have characterized our recent times are the Cold War period, the War on Terrorism time, the global risk society, and now the Covid-19 pandemic, and as Huysmans argues

“[I]nsecurity is not a fact of nature
but always requires that is written and talked into existence”⁴ .

For the Italian philosopher and psychoanalyst Umberto Galimberti⁵ humankind has never lived in the World, but always in its description which, in different historical periods, has been provided by religion, philosophy, science, and now technology. Humankind lives into the description of the world, and his relationship with it passes through the ideas that wrap the things. These descriptions participate in the construction of the social reality⁶ and the symbolic universe⁷ in which humankind lives his existence.

In this essay, I consider this ‘description’ as a capital⁸ produced and property of power-knowledge-security structures. And because of the dependent use of internet, social media, web pages, etc., (we are connected 24h/7/365 to internet) and the predominance of images in our lives, I see the ‘humankind’ as anthropologically mutated into the category of the ‘homo videns’⁹, which means the individual who lives reality through the images of the media, who imagines the world through the media, and who, at the same time, is intellectually atrophied, and is not able anymore to imagine anything new and different from what the media feed him.

As a consequence, the ‘humankind-homo videns’ lives inside the ‘reality’ (description of the world-capital) produced, fabricated, and managed by power-knowledge-security structures, news companies (CNN, BBC, RT, Al Jazeera, TRT World, CCTV, etc.), and social media and internet companies (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google, etc.); definitely, a modern and technological version of Plato’s cave.

However, I do see our lives globally lived inside what Beck¹⁰ called the ‘risk society,’ in which each local ‘risk society’ experience life inside its ‘description of reality.’ For Beck, our society has been transformed into a ‘Risk Society’ meaning that the risk, which is inherent in modern society, has contributed towards the formation of a global risk society. In modern society, there is a technological change going on. What is particular about the modern risk society is that the hazards of risk do not remain restricted to one country only. In the age of globalization, these risks affect all countries and all social classes. They have global, and not merely personal consequences. Industrial society has created many new dangers of risks unknown in previous ages. The risks associated with global warming are one example. In the present era of industrialization, the nature of risk has undergone tremendous change. Earlier, there was no absence of risk. But these risks were natural dangers or hazards. There was an earthquake, there was epian demic, there was a famine and there were floods. But the risks in modern society are created by our own social development and by the development of science and technology. However, as sustained in this study, this ‘risk of ...’ narrative is a security knowledge which is produced through the process of securitization, and security itself is a myth.

An example of a power-knowledge-security structure that has transformed its own narrative in order to survive and to maintain its status quo position in time and space is NATO. Established during the cold war, up to 1989, it produced a clear description of the world (security knowledge produced through the process of securitization, considered here as capital) divided into two clear competing Manichean

areas, where the threat was embodied by the USSR and the various Communist Parties around the planet. As the Berlin wall collapsed and the USSR imploded, its descriptions of the world changed and unclear images of threats emerged: NATO Strategic Concepts 1991, and 1999¹¹. With the terrorist attack of September 11th, 2001, the description changed again, but the very definition and identification of terrorism were never clear cut. This brought NATO to adopt a different language and grammar in order to produce its new narrative (security knowledge-capital) in which emerged the idea of the existential threat represented by the securitization (1) of ‘the risk of...’; and (2) of the concept of ‘crisis management’, NATO Strategic Concept 2010¹². Both of them anxieties and terminologies open to multiple subjective interpretations. However, as the world was changing, even the security environment changed, because the hero position of NATO was challenged, inside this market of anxiety, by the role and descriptions of insurance companies, private military companies, medias and social medias, and internet companies, each one of them fabricating and distributing their own ‘description’ of the world, their own concept of security and insecurity (security knowledge-capital), while presenting themselves as a hero.

Then, while comparing the reality to the description of the reality, and being conscious of its repercussion on the lives of societies, a clear-cut research question emerges: is ‘security knowledge-capital’ legitimate security knowledge or is something else? Because “legitimate security knowledge is security knowledge which one can profess as a security expert with a degree of seriousness and without being labeled an idealist or a fool.”¹³ Consequently, this question challenges the truthfulness and the presumed good intention of the official narrative and unveils the real power interest hidden behind the official security narrative.

Therefore, in this essay (1) I argue that security is a myth; (2) I define the market of anxiety; (3) I claim that the securitization process is a rite in which security knowledge is fabricated; and (4) I present the epistemological and critical tool of the anthropological gaze.

Security is a myth

Defining the meaning of the term ‘security’ is complicated and subjective, because “security is profoundly political,”¹⁴ has a different meaning for different people, regions, states, and organizations, and its interpretation moves between semiological extremes. Security has been considered as an “underdeveloped concept”¹⁵, an “ambiguous symbol”¹⁶, an “essentially contested concept”¹⁷, a “derivative concept”¹⁸, and “a symbol”¹⁹.

Therefore, based on Barthes’ “Mythologies”²⁰ I argue that ‘Security’ is a myth, which is a system of communication, based on two semiological systems:

- 1) linguistic system, the language; and
- 2) the myth itself, the metalanguage, in which one speaks about the first²¹.

In the linguistic system, the word ‘security’ has only one meaning, ‘without anxiety,’ which is derived from its Latin etymology ‘securitas’ Latin (‘*sine*’= without + ‘*cura*’= anxiety, worry). However, in the metalanguage system, the meaning of the term ‘security’ (the myth of security), is the result of a linguistic-narrative fabrication, operated by a PKS structure, which changes with time and space. In this system the

meaning assigned to the term of security becomes ‘fear of X’, ‘to have anxiety of/for X’, where ‘X’, the cause of anxiety and fear, can change accordingly to the political agenda of the power elites. The metalanguage system-myth represents the security knowledge which is the description of a security reality.

The step from the first linguistic system to the second semiological order, which represents the very fabrication of the myth security (‘fear of X’), is possible through the securitization process through which the power-knowledge-security structure fabricate the ‘security knowledge’, the PKS structure’s capital. Through the securitization process the PKS structure (1) defines and ascribes a name to the ‘X’ which represents the cause of fear-anxiety, therefore, the existential threat to the survival of the community it protects; (2) adds the catalytic element of ‘emergency’ which blocks any external (of the structure) tentative to criticize the move; and (3) presents the myth security as ‘reliable knowledge’, therefore, ‘legitimate security knowledge’ when in reality it can be classified as an ‘image of knowledge’²².

Here, I define a power-knowledge-security (PKS) structure as a political agency that:

1) has legitimate power to get X to do something that X would not otherwise do, and has the power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things²³;

2) is legitimate to perform the security speech act (securitization process);

3) produces ‘technological knowledge’²⁴ (the official security-insecurity knowledge-paradigm of reference) which confers power to all who operate the apparatus, because the securitization of the risk is stripped of its political nature and is not open to political debate on account of it is a knowledge which originates from technology;

4) defines and certifies as reliable knowledge what insecurity is (the existential threat), and the protocol which must be adopted for the security operation; and

5) it has recognized legitimate power and the monopoly of the use of force, therefore it can take and carry security actions (war, crisis management operations, etc).

However, once the security myth is created by any legitimate PKS structure which presents itself as the only security actor, it needs an image-symbol, a ritual, a spectacle-representation in order to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thought, and intuitions).

The market of anxiety

Galimberti²⁵ too considers security as a myth, but not in the linguistic sense, but, because of the instability of the human nature, which is disquieting, is not possible to predict human behavior, the consequential of the human actions, and then the creation of a common and sharable word. This human condition is defined as ‘anguish,’ which is a sentiment that arises when we face the indeterminateness of an un-identifiable, not localizable, not predictable threat, but which is lived as certain, as something that will happen. And from the anguish, there is no remedy.

Then, the technological knowledge of security is converted into the technological knowledge of anguish which is supported by the rise of the market of anxiety-anguish analyzed by the French medical doctor Henri Pradal. For Pradal²⁶ the organization of the industrial society has the interest to distill anguish, to render it normal and consumable, and to distribute it harmoniously in order that every individual will receive a dose of it. Only in this way, it is possible to control society, and the destiny of the individual is tied to the one of his/her society. Anguish-anxiety is the main cement in the mosaic of the human condition. And it is in this arena epitomized by the market of anxiety in which power-knowledge-security structures and news-social media-internet companies compete for power making use of their 'capital' (security knowledge). What is more, nowadays the social media and internet companies do play the role of gatekeepers authorizing to pass through their own channels the 'narrative-description-capital' which they consider right and appropriate and what is not, like independent moral authorities outside the control of the state.

The securitization process is a rite in which security knowledge is fabricated

Buzan, Waeber, and de Wilde define securitization as

“[A]more extreme version of politicization. In theory, any public issue can be located on the spectrum ranging from non-politicized (meaning the state does not deal with it and it is not in any other way made an issue of public debate and decision) through politicized (meaning the issue is part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations or, more rarely, some other form of communal governance) to securitized (meaning the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying action outside the normal bounds of political procedure).”²⁷

This way, the process of securitization is more than a speech act²⁸ through which an issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures, and justifying actions outside the bounds of the political procedure²⁹. It is rather “an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artifacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thought, and intuitions) about the critical vulnerability of a referent object that concurs with the securitizing actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent object with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development”³⁰.

It is through the securitization process that the cause of fear-anxiety is defined, and the myth of security is fabricated. However, being security a technique of governing danger³¹ I identify the same technique in the articulated assemblage of practices and heuristic artifacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) which condensed in the ritual-spectacle of the myth security. The very essence of the securitization process is in its rite.

The rite of the securitization process (1) is a rite of passage, in which the

reality and the audience come out completely transformed at the end of the rite; (2) is a rite through which the PKS presents himself as the hero and fashions his own symbolic action system, meaning a cultural hero-system; and (3) creates two opposite forces: centripetal and centrifugal. The centripetal force is evident, when the rite, for its character of urgency, emergency, and existential threat represented by the insecurity event, participates in the reinforcement and in the recreation of the identity and moral authority of the power-knowledge-security structure.

The centrifugal force of the rite:

1) generates that spark³², and/or social (and religious) electricity that make an audience be called to play not a game but an active emotional-interpretative role because this situation is inherently dramatic: the participants “not only do things, they show themselves and others what they are doing or have done: actions take on a reflexive and performed-for-an-audience aspect”³³; they also crystallize as mass, leaving aside what is a formless and shapeless quality³⁴;

2) spreads fear-anxiety and produces emotional contagion which creates ‘collective effervescence’ by which “within a crowd moved by a common passion, we become susceptible to feelings and actions of which we are incapable on our own”³⁵;

3) transmits an alarm signal which participates in the construction of imagined communities³⁶ through its language;

4) broadcasts panic³⁷ ;

5) recruits subjects among the individuals or transforms individuals into subjects through an operation called ‘interpellation,’ which refers to the process by which people, when ‘hailed’ by discourse, recognize themselves in that hailing³⁸. “Interpellation assumes that different representations of the world incorporate patterns of identity and ways of functioning in the world, which are located within different power relations and which make different interests possible. Concrete individuals come to identify with the subject positions and the representations in which they appear. As subjects identify with them, the power relations and interests entailed in discourse are naturalized and these representations seem to reflect the world as it really is”³⁹; and

6) produces blind trust toward the political leader. The rite provokes an emotional situation defined as large-group regression in which “the individuals within the group lose their individuality to one degree or another, follow the leader(s) blindly, and become prone to taking in (internalizing) political propaganda without really questioning its validity.”⁴⁰

Through this process, the significant⁴¹, empowering⁴² and playing audience is transformed into a Mass ritual, in docile bodies, and acquires ‘habitus.’⁴³ The liturgical mass⁴⁴, unlike in a theatrical representation, is efficient, and no matter how much the service has very important aesthetic dimensions, what is important is the passionate affirmation. The Mass ritual is a closed circle which includes only the congregation and those officiating, and there is no room for mere appreciators. As an obligatory action, its members enter into it and signal to each other and to the hierarchy⁴⁵. This might be compared to the Orwellian ‘Two Minutes Hate’ where

“[A]hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces in with a sledge-hammer (seems) to flow through the whole group of

people like an electric current, turning one even against one's will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic. And yet the rage that one felt was an abstract, undirected emotion which could be switched from one object to another like the flame of a blowlamp."⁴⁶

Therefore, the Mass ritual has completely embodied the language of the security ritual and reacts as a model reader who fully cooperates with a text⁴⁷ because it fully recognizes itself in the same fear-anxiety, in the language, and in the cultural idiosyncrasy and individual idiosyncrasy of the myth security, and then in the ritual⁴⁸. At the same time, the Mass ritual is disciplined and shaped as docile bodies "that maybe subjected, used, transformed and improved,"⁴⁹ and it acquires a 'habitus' which represents "a set of disposition which incline agents to act and react in certain ways."⁵⁰

However, in the ritual the political leader plays the fear-anxiety, and sacrals⁵¹ card and the moral and cultural one, meaning that he presents himself as the moral authority who decides what is right-good-moral and what is wrong-bad-immoral, and that the 'we' culture, the 'we' identity is opposed to the 'other' threat (presented as wrong-bad-immoral and the cause of fear-anxiety).

Then, due to its 'mimesis didactic aspects'⁵², the rite (1) becomes a set of statements and practices through which certain language becomes institutionalized and normalized over time⁵³; and (2) produces a cultural artifact:

"[A]cultural practice traceable to a particular historical context concerned with shaping the politics of security."⁵⁴

In Foucauldian terms, the rite has the power to assemble, to produce, and to fabricate knowledge⁵⁵ and the paradigm of interpretation. In this cognitive space, the power-knowledge-security structure occupies a central panoptical position from which it gazes and controls through its own paradigm the territory, the space, and the use of its security myth-ideology-concept⁵⁶ which is presented and accepted as real knowledge.

To sum up, through the securitization process-sacral political spectacle-ritual,

1) security is converted into an ontological-epistemological paradigm, and into a moral and cultural system of reference which manages and administers fear-anxiety; here culture "denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life"⁵⁷;

2) security makes use of culture patterns (religious, philosophical, aesthetic, scientific, ideological) which are 'programs' that "provide a template or blueprint for the organization of social and psychological processes, much as genetic system provide such a template for the organization of organic processes"⁵⁸;

3) security provides the cultural protocol which the individual observes in the threatening situation because the humankind produces his response to anxiety and fear following culture patterns. For Geertz the response to an insecurity threat is

cultural because, “like a frightened animal, a frightened man may run, hide, bluster, dissemble, placate, or, desperate with panic, attack; but in his case, the precise patterning of such overt acts is guided predominantly by cultural rather than genetic templates”⁵⁹; and

4) security becomes an ideology which function “is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel”⁶⁰.

In the end, I sustain that the securitization process becomes an anthropological place-space because it “is a place intensely symbolized, lived by individuals in which they found their spatial, temporal, individual and collective benchmarks. For the anthropologist, at the same time, it is a space in which he can read, and decode the social relations and the common forms of belonging.”⁶¹.

The anthropological gaze

The security myth which has been created by the power-knowledge-securing structure points to the relation between the production of knowledge and positions of power. For Foucault

“[T]he exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power. (...) Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when a knowledge will cease to depend on power.”⁶²

That is, the security myth like any other concept and theory “is always for someone and for some purpose. Perspectives derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time and space. The world is seen from a standpoint definable in terms of nation, of social class, of dominance or subordination, of rising or declining power, of a sense of immobility or of present crisis, of past experience, and of hopes and expectations for the future.”⁶³

However, if the real purpose of security action is to free people from anxiety-anguish-fear, there is a necessity to deconstruct the hegemonic security-insecurity knowledge produced by the PKS structure and see its real intentions and what lays behind it.

Therefore, what I suggest here is:

1) to take the position of the model and empirical reader⁶⁴, and of an insider, a stranger, and an outsider⁶⁵;

2) to use and practice a clinical gaze that is interested to emancipate from fear-anxiety-anguish the subjects of the securitization process, and is engaged with the human condition of the patient (the mobilized audience);

3) to challenge the PKS structure’s security knowledge with the seven security methodological questions (What is reality? What is reliable knowledge? What is security? What is being secured? What is being secured against? Who provides security? What methods can be undertaken to provide security?); and

4) to adopt a cosmopolitan outlook.

All these four points constitute the essence of what I call the ‘anthropological gaze,’ which has the function to provide an approach-method to de-securitize the securitized issue meaning “the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargain process of the political sphere”⁶⁶.

This is because the PKS structure imposes on its reading of the security reality (1) a ‘specialized visualizing’ which requires the explanation of specialized technicians because the image proposed are sometimes hard to understand for the average people⁶⁷ and (2) a narrow and rapid ‘clinical glance’⁶⁸ which is concentrated on ‘aesthetic’ details that prevent us from having a wider, clearer and deeper picture of the totality of the elements involved in the staging of the securitization speech act. Basically, the basic problem is one of seeing and meaning. As Alexander Wendt states, “people act towards objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them.”⁶⁹ And for Fierke⁷⁰ meanings are fundamentally cultural and made possible by the discourses or codes of intelligibility that provide the categories through which the world is understood.

Foucault, in his work on the birth of the clinic, compares the clinical glance which has been imposed in the medical environment to the clinical gaze which, according to the author, is an epistemological-diagnostic tool⁷¹.

“The clinical gaze implies an open field, and its essential activity is of the successive order of reading; it records and totalizes; it gradually reconstitutes immanent organization; it spreads out over the world that is already the world of language; and that is why it is spontaneously related to hearing and speech; it forms, as it were, the privileged articulation of two fundamental aspects of saying (what is said and what one says).”⁷²

The clinical gaze is based on the question “What is the matter with you?”⁷³ which sees and includes the patient in a whole of relations. On the contrary the glance “does not scan the field: it strikes at one point, which is central; the gaze is endlessly and modulated, the glance goes straight to its object. The glance chooses a line that instantly distinguishes the essential; it, therefore, goes beyond what it sees; it is not misled by the immediate forms of the sensible, for it knows how to traverse them; it is essentially demystifying. If it strikes in its violent rectitude, it is in order to shatter, to lift, to release appearance. It is not burdened with all the abuses of language.”⁷⁴

Now the security myth is confronted with the seven security methodological questions (What is reality? What is reliable knowledge? What is security? What is being secured? What is being secured against? Who provides security? What methods can be undertaken to provide security?). Is the reality presented by the PKS structure’s discourse a reality or the PKS structure only reality? Is this the only possible reality? And a reality for who? The security narrative produced by the PKS structure can be accepted as reliable knowledge? Can we test it? How it has been constructed? Or it is propaganda, an opinion, a ‘*doxa*’? Does the same structure define ‘security’? Or it creates a myth? What is to be secured? The elites’ interests, their properties, their power position, their status quo? Or the single individuals’ interests and lives? Who is the enemy? Who-what produces insecurity? An enemy, or it is the same rigid power framework produced by PKS structure that creates

insecurity? Who provides security to the whole community? The employment of the official armed forces, the police, or insurance companies, private security company? And the methods are to be found in the use of violence, war, the promulgation of the state of exception and the state of emergency? At the end the most important question to be asked is the following: ‘but what kind of world the PKS structure is try to sell to its audience?’, the world fabricated and visualized by the PKS structure, or the world out there? Because the real world is more complicated than the one constructed in a Manichean way by the PKS structure. Is not a world of black and white, in goods and bads, in ‘we’ the goods, the ‘others’ the bads, and the enemies? Therefore, how to construct meanings? Now the problem is that the anthropologist who enters into the anthropological space of the securitization process lives, through his research tools, the same experiences of the Mass audience. However, he is conscious of the general manipulation and the efforts made by the power-knowledge-securing structure to isolate its audience, and to make its space impenetrable to antagonizing and critical narratives-voices-images that can confront, jeopardize its hegemonic position, and become competitors for political support.

Therefore, I argue that the world in which the PKS structure and the anthropologist operate is characterized by the following features:

1) is a contemporaneous world, meaning that through the media-technology we experience distant events in the same moment they happen⁷⁵;

2) we live in a state of super-modernity in which individuals are now required to conceive their relation to history and the world by themselves⁷⁶;

3) our society is a global risk society in which everything revolves around risks⁷⁷; and

4) the predominant mode of politics is post-political bio-politics which “resorts to fear as its ultimate mobilizing principle: fear of immigration, fear of crime, fear of godless sexual depravity, fear of the excessive state itself, with its burden of high taxation, fear of ecological catastrophe, fear of harassment.”⁷⁸ All four characteristics show: first, the ontological and epistemological limits of the process of signification and symbolization of the PKS structure; and second, they and point to the fact that now the human being is alone, is vulnerable, and that he can count only on himself.

The last component of the ‘anthropological gaze’ is represented by the cosmopolitan outlook “which is neither optimistic nor pessimistic but skeptical and self-critical. The world that appears within its field of vision is neither darkened by cultural pessimism or illuminated by belief in progress. There is no attempt here to persuade us that we are on our way towards a world of general human benevolence. Indeed, just the opposite is the case: disasters lurk at every turn, and yet there is also an enticing glimmer of new beginnings —usually it is impossible to tell whether or not the future holds both at once. The main feature of the cosmopolitan outlook is simply that is different.”⁷⁹

Conclusion

What now we are facing is an official and authorized ‘security knowledge-description’ in which the common leitmotiv has become ‘the risk of...’ ‘The risk of ...’ is the new indefinable face of the existential threat to the social community. This has been evident at least in western political discourses that, after the terrorist attacks of

September 11th, 2001, have provided the justification to initiate wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. And now, during this COVID-19 pandemic, we are witnessing how this ‘security threat’ (1) has been wrapped in a war terminology with war bulletin presented by political leaders once a week to their fellow citizens; and (2) has disciplined the world population.

The concern is that the securitization of ‘the risk of’, a common practice nowadays in the political and emotional language, has been converted into ‘technological knowledge,’ which, as Galimberti⁸⁰ argues, becomes the model for the political construction and confirms the supremacy of the technological decision over the political decision. Therefore, technology is converted into an ideology which becomes the mirror of reality and provides the answers to the ontological and epistemological questions on security. At the same time, this technology produces new social relations based on functions in which the individual loses his individuality in the very moment he perceives social interchanges as functional, as something which is not of his concern as individual per se but as an individual with a specific function. Then, it can be said that technology is able to transform the individual, not only as a subject, but as a functionary (an individual which is represented only by his function) whose individuality has been canceled and his perception of reality becomes a standard functional perception which must respond to the technological apparatus’s prearranged harmony.

“[T]he functional perception produces that language which is functional and which reinforces the functionality of perceptions and limit the same perception. Forced under the restricted technological procedure, even the word follows the fate and becomes tautological repetition, recurred definition, hypnotic dictation, which finds its justification and meaning in that logic which is not dialectic (where for dialectic we mean contradiction) and not symbolic (meaning that each refers to a further meaning) which are typical of the common sense. (...)

Under this logic there is the persuasion that there are no meanings outside the space of the “factual data” which in their set form the reality.

As a result of this process: “Yes to realism.” However this acceptance is taken without the minimal doubt that in this way for reality has been accredited only the official stance on an accepted reality.”⁸¹

What emerges from this discourse is that the life of the contemporary western individual has been rendered ‘sane’ inside a space walled by the securitization process, the technological knowledge of security, and the market of anguish-anxiety. Therefore, the work of an anthropologist who enters this space cannot be of a simple observant but should carry an ethical mission in order to free individuals from this political manipulation. This can be done in framing the anthropological gaze proposed in this paper through the concept of emancipation, and the necessity to work in the context of engaged anthropology.

For Booth emancipation “is the theory and practice of inventing humanity, with a view of freeing people, as individuals and collectives, from contingent and structural

oppressions. It is a discourse of human self-creation and the politics of trying to bring it about. Security and community are guiding principles, and at this stage of history, the growth of a universal human rights culture is central to emancipatory politics. The concept of emancipation shapes the strategies and tactics of resistance, offers a theory of progress for society, and gives a politics of hope for common humanity.”⁸² Then emancipation provides (1) a philosophical anchorage; (2) a strategic process; and (3) a guide for tactical goal setting. As philosophical anchorage, “emancipation can serve as a basis or test for saying whether something is true; in other words, whether particular claims to knowledge should be taken seriously. An anchorage is not a neutral foundation but rather a historically contingent yet powerful position from which people can begin to discuss what to do next in their political projects.” Being a strategic process “is a dynamic process with changing targets. It is strategic in the sense that it is concerned with bringing about practical results, but it is a process in the sense that it is a project that can never be completed. Its practicality lies in its being based in immanent critique.” As a guide for tactical goal-setting, it is “as a result of engaging in immanent critique emancipatory ideas can develop that in turn can be translated into tactical action. Praxis is the coming together of one’s theoretical commitment to critique and political orientation to emancipation in projects of reconstruction.”⁸³

In the end, and this is the position that this paper sustains, emancipation is the “freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do. War and the threat of war is one of those constraints, together with poverty, poor education, political oppression and so on. Security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin. Emancipation, not power or order, produces true security. Emancipation, theoretically, is security.”⁸⁴

Therefore, emancipation represents the ethical line to follow which can be attained through the conviction to be involved in an engaged anthropology context.

“To reach this goal anthropologists must play a more intentional and responsible role in working with people, communities and movements —the stake-holders with whom research is carried out.

While anthropologists continue to act as decoders of cultures that are different and look difficult to understand or appreciate by society at large, it is critical for us to become more instrumental.

We must participate in generating and bringing about change. We must be engaged in protecting the most vulnerable from oppression and exploitation and support the empowerment of communities to improve people’s lives. This is a role not comfortably taken by tradition-bound anthropologist; however, an engaged stance moves the application of anthropological theory, methods and practice further along towards action and activism. At the same time, engagement moves anthropologists away from traditional forms of participant observation towards a participatory role by becoming increasingly a part of those communities or social groups that we normally study.”⁸⁵

In practical-methodological terms,

“[E]ngagement includes:
(1) developing trusting relationships; (2) sharing information;
(3) implementing mutual learning strategies through constructive dialogues
with non-experts; (4) developing local-level leaders representing
different constituents; (5) recognizing lay people’s knowledge and their capacity
to contribute to the research as equals; (6) including youth development through
community-service learning; (7) consistent and regular consortium meetings
with local-level leadership; (8) a long term commitment; and
(9) the sharing of resources.”⁸⁶

In concluding this work, I can say that the most important question that the anthropological gaze must pose directly to the PKS structure, and to himself when reading the narrative-script-sermon of the securitization process is ‘*che vuoi?*’ (What do you want?), ‘Why are you telling me this?’, — “you demand something of me, but what do you really want, what are you aiming at through this demand,”⁸⁷ meaning that a dose of skepticism toward meta-narrative is always an antidote against easy fascinations. As my St. John’s University (NY, USA) Prof. Frank LeVeness used to say:

“Who gives you a piece of cake for nothing?
Only your grandmother.”

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Notes:

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