

# 6 Security as emancipation

*Soumita Basu and João Nunes<sup>1</sup>*

## **Chapter summary**

The chapter provides a conceptual introduction to the notion of Security as Emancipation (SAE), originally identified with the ‘Welsh School’ of Critical Security Studies (CSS). The three key tenets that characterize this approach are: recognition of individuals as ultimate referents of security, emphasis on the political underpinnings and implications of security praxis, and a normative commitment towards emancipatory transformations. Employing the case of the 1984 industrial accident in the Indian city of Bhopal, the chapter demonstrates how SAE is useful to understand and act politically upon a specific security issue. The chapter also reflects upon the significance of SAE in CSS, while recognizing its methodological implications and some of its limitations.

## **Learning outcomes**

On completion, readers should be able to:

- identify the main assumptions underlying the idea of SAE, as well as the features that distinguish it from other critical approaches;
- use emancipatory approach in the study of a security issue, with appropriate research questions and methodological tools;
- assess the contribution of the emancipatory approach to an increasingly interconnected field of CSS.

## **Introduction**

On the night of 2 December 1984, a chemical factory set up in the Indian city of Bhopal by the United States-based Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) leaked around 42 tons of Methyl Isocyanate (MIC), a toxic pesticide ingredient, into the surrounding environment. There are no certainties as to how many people died in the hours after the leak, although the estimates range from five thousand to four times that number; official statistics from 1984 locate over half a million people in the gas-affected areas (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2010). Many have died since the disaster from its long-term effects (illnesses such as lung cancer or kidney failure) and others have suffered from genetic mutations and birth defects. According to official figures from compensation tribunals, more than half a million people were affected by the events of that night.

In both International Relations publications and international policy circles, industrial accidents such as the Bhopal case have seldom been identified as security concerns, in spite of the growing list of security challenges identified for the twenty-first century including terrorism, nuclear proliferation, climate change, depletion of energy resources and migration. In light of this, the choice of the Bhopal case for this chapter is unusual because it does not fit into the usual range of security concerns. It is, however, well-suited to discuss the notion of ‘Security as Emancipation’ (SAE).

The focal point of an emancipation-oriented approach to security is the normative commitment towards what Ken Booth has termed the ‘condition of insecurity’ (2007: 101). According to this approach, the study of security must be oriented towards the identification, analysis and redressing of the insecurities affecting individuals and groups in particular contexts. An account is deemed emancipatory insofar as it seeks to contribute to the achievement of security by garnering existing potential for transformation and informing the practical transformative strategies of specific political actors. Importantly, the achievement of security in an emancipatory sense is intrinsically connected with broader political transformation that opens up space in people’s lives, so that they can make decisions and pursue courses of action beyond mere survival.

The industrial accident in Bhopal may not have led to domestic instability or conflict between states of the magnitude that would attract the attention of security scholars. Neither can it be considered to be a successful case of securitization (see Chapter 5). The lives of the Bhopal survivors, however, continue to be largely defined by the events of December 1984. Notwithstanding the security concerns (in the dominant scholarly usage of the term) that would normally be associated with people from India (e.g. the India–Pakistan conflict, terrorism and insurgencies), the ‘security’ of the people of Bhopal (here referring to their ability to have control and predictability over their lives and surroundings) is more intimately linked to the accident. With its interest in the ‘real’ lived experiences of insecurity of individuals and groups, the SAE perspective seeks to address the gap between these two notions of security.

Bhopal investigation can yield important lessons for the study and practice of security, beginning with the need to recognize complex networks of social relations and structures, which systematically place some groups in positions of vulnerability and disadvantage (and others in positions of privilege). It reaffirms the need for a human-centred understanding of security, in light of the absolute unpredictability and absence of control in the lives of individuals and groups as a result of government and corporate decisions and/or inactions. Finally, the Bhopal case calls for an unashamedly normative understanding of security, one that is able to identify the ways in which socio-political arrangements are implicated in the production of threats and injustices, and one that is able to identify existing potential for political transformation.

This chapter has three aims: (a) to introduce and discuss the main themes and concepts in SAE, (b) to demonstrate the extent to which this approach can be used to illuminate dimensions of the Bhopal industrial accident that are frequently left out by other approaches and (c) to highlight, using the case study, the implications of conceiving SAE within critical approaches to security.

### **Security as emancipation: key themes**

Critical approaches to security developed out of a desire to ‘broaden the neorealist conception of security to include a wider range of potential threats from economic and

environmental issues to human rights and migration’ and to ‘deepen the agenda of Security Studies by moving either down to the level of individual or human security or up to the level of international or global security, with regional and societal security as possible intermediate points’ (Krause and Williams 1996: 230). Building up from these insights, Richard Wyn Jones proposed that the concept of security be *broadened* as suggested above, *extended* to include referents other than the state, *deepened* in order to reflect ‘deeper assumptions about the nature of politics and the role of conflict in political life’, and *focused*, crucially on emancipation as the prism through which both theory and practice of security should be viewed’ (1999: 166, emphasis in the original).

It is in this context that the origins of ‘security as emancipation’ can be located (see Box 6.1). Since the publication of Booth’s article ‘Security and Emancipation’ (1991), this approach has affirmed its specificity by combining three sets of ideas: the focus on individuals as the ultimate referents of security, the idea that security understandings and practices are political in their assumptions and implications, and the normative commitment towards the redressing of insecurity and towards emancipatory transformations of the political realm.

### **Box 6.1 ‘Welsh School’ origins and beyond**

The emancipatory approach to security is commonly identified with the so-called ‘Welsh School’ (Smith 2005) or ‘Aberystwyth School’ (Wæver 2004) of Security Studies, because some of its most important proponents (such as Ken Booth, Richard Wyn Jones and Pinar Bilgin) were based at Aberystwyth University in Wales, UK, at some point in their academic careers. These markers have stuck, and in a recent review of the field this approach to security was described as ‘Booth and Wyn Jones and their Aberystwyth students and collaborators’ (Buzan and Hansen 2009: 205). Booth was, indeed, the first to formulate the idea of security as emancipation, which he defined as ‘the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do’ (1991: 319). This definition has been elaborated more recently (e.g. Booth 2007: 112) but the basic idea remains: security is a means towards achieving a life less determined by contingent and structural impediments upon the lives of individuals and groups.

The Aberystwyth/Welsh marker is important but should not be overstated. Scholars around the world now use different aspects of security as emancipation in the context of different agendas. More importantly, one needs to go beyond seeing security as emancipation as a school of thought. ‘Schools’ denote doctrines, hierarchical relations, teachings being passed on and reproduced – connotations that are antithetical to the critical spirit of permanent unease. At the same time, the organization of the field of Security Studies along geographically determined schools of thought is now doing more harm than good, by reproducing artificial separations and impairing the circulation of ideas.

For these reasons, we prefer to define this approach as ‘security as emancipation’ (SAE), and to conceive it as a network of scholars from different locations who, in the course of different theoretical and empirical pursuits, have drawn on a critical, human-centred and transformation-oriented understanding of security – while combining these inspirations with their own ideas and with other approaches (such as feminism, post-structuralism, Marxism, human security or others).

The focus on individual human beings must be read in light of a desire to engage, as faithfully as possible, with ‘real’ conditions of existence, and thereby produce ‘truer’ knowledge about the world. SAE puts forward an ontological and epistemological challenge to dominant thinking about security, setting out to reconsider ‘what is real’ and ‘what we can know’. The version of reality put forward by SAE is predicated upon the idea of the individual as an irreducible unit of political life. As Booth (2007: 225) has put it,

[p]olitically speaking, individual human beings are primordial in a manner that groupings such as nations and sovereign states are not. I therefore consider individuals logically to be the ‘ultimate’ referent for thinking about security in a way contingent groups cannot be.

At this point, it is important to note that while the concept of human security also focuses on individual referents, there are fundamental differences between the subjects of SAE and human security (see Box 6.2). More importantly, it must be stressed that the notion of humanity put forward in SAE does not correspond to some liberal idea of abstract individuality, but to an embodied and fundamentally open conception of what ‘human’ means. Rather than a set of characteristics of what it should entail, being human means having a body with a certain set of needs, a body that is always embedded within a social background and within an environment that makes life possible. At the same time, being human implies the capability to reflect about one’s own position and to make choices about one’s own idea of a ‘good life’ – once pressing concerns about immediate well-being or survival are alleviated. As Booth (2007: 378–386) has argued, being human is above all the ability to become, or invent oneself as, human.

The proponents of SAE thus suggest that security scholarship should seek to identify and redress the structures and relationships that prevent human beings from exploring this potential. In this process, they seek to engage with the ‘real’ conditions of existence: the ‘corporeal, material existence and experiences of individual human beings’ (Wyn Jones 2005: 227). Insecurity in this context is seen as a multifaceted condition – constituted of a network of oppressive relations and structures (economic, social and political) – that determines the lives of individuals and groups. Threats can ‘range from direct bodily violence from other humans (war), through structural political and economic forms of oppression (slavery), into more existential threats to identity (cultural imperialism)’ (Booth 1999: 49).

This leads to another important theme in SAE: the way in which insecurity is conceptualized and embedded in a narrative about the relationship between security and politics. The ‘politics of security’ includes an awareness of the political assumptions that underlie understandings and practices of security; of the processes and struggles through which they are reproduced and contested; and of the effects they have at the level of social relations, political community and the political sphere more broadly.

To begin with, taking on board the politics of security entails that practices of security are seen not as the necessary and natural response to a given situation, but rather as the result of social interaction and political struggle, with different political actors putting forward their own claims to security. Faithful to the post-positivist guiding principle of enquiring into the conditions in which knowledge is produced, SAE sees understandings of security as social products and processes, which derive from political interests, reflect existing opportunities and constraints, result from power struggles and are oriented towards political goals. Even though knowledge about security is ultimately geared towards addressing identifiable

### **Box 6.2 A human-centred approach**

With its insistence on the insecurities of individuals and groups, and with its focus on issues that are normally considered to fall within the remit of development – such as poverty, illiteracy or ill health – SAE overlaps with the human security agenda. On the one hand, the ultimate concerns of SAE can be described as human security ones; on the other hand, some authors identified with the human security approach have used the concept of emancipation to describe their political goals (see, e.g. Thomas 2001).

Despite these similarities, it is nonetheless important to reaffirm the specificity of SAE. This specificity is clear when one looks at the philosophical assumptions that underlie this approach: its commitment to post-positivism and Marxism, for example, or its desire to question the politics behind the ontology of security. SAE also distinguishes itself for its all-encompassing approach towards the scope/meaning of security. Specifically, it sees human security issues as part of a wider context: the global organization of political community (the Westphalian system), the interconnection of political and economic relations (capitalism), social relations of discrimination, prejudice and inequality (patriarchy, racism, etc.). By taking into account the ways in which this legacy constitutes the ethical boundaries of political action, SAE sees the achievement of security as predicated upon broad political transformation, starting at the local level but engaging wholeheartedly with the big issues of world politics. By combining this critical attitude with its dual focus on local politics/world politics, SAE establishes its difference in relation to common definitions of human security, which arguably are content with solving particular issues.

Rather than a form of human security, the emancipatory approach can more aptly be described as human-centred: it takes individuals as the ultimate referents of security and the alleviation of their insecurities as a moral reference point. Moreover, SAE is human-centred in its insistence on denaturalizing dominant understandings. Following from the Marxist critique of fetishization, SAE argues that current arrangements are not natural or necessary, but rather the creation of human beings with particular interests at a particular point in time. In this sense, emancipation involves reclaiming the control over social and political processes, by bringing these back to public debate and democratically accountable political action.

insecurities, the content and relevance of different ‘facts’ about the world is always established by political negotiation.

In addition to being political in their underlying assumptions and in the ways in which they are legitimized, security understandings are also political in their implications, in that they influence the self-perception of actors and the way they relate to each other. More broadly, ideas about security contribute to shaping the political realm by defining the limits of what is seen as possible and desirable. Security is a political phenomenon that, in turn, shapes politics. The ‘politicization’ of security (Fierke 2007: 33) thus entails an acknowledgement of the role of security knowledge in supporting predominant arrangements, or, alternatively, in questioning and transforming them.

Building on this comprehensive understanding of the politics of security, SAE sees itself as a political intervention in the world, committed to the realization of emancipatory alternatives for the identified referents of security. According to the proponents of this approach, knowledge is a form of political *praxis*, that is, a political activity in its own right ('praxis' is the process of practising or enacting theory). A critical account of security has two tasks: first, it must investigate the assumptions, structures and relationships that are implicated in the production and maintenance of insecurities and second, on the basis of this, it must identify existing potentialities for transforming predominant arrangements and seek to contribute to the realization of this 'immanent potential' (where 'immanent potential' means the possibilities of resistance that are inherent within any socio-political organization, such as a state). The activity of studying security is always implicated in the political status quo: it can either contribute to maintaining it or choose to challenge it. As Booth writes, a critical theory of security 'goes beyond problem-solving *within* the status quo and instead seeks to help engage with the problem *of* the status quo' (2005: 10, emphasis in the original).

Given the multiple insecurities affecting individuals and groups in the world today, the emancipatory approach is normatively oriented towards transformation. The transformation of the political state of affairs towards more emancipatory arrangements is, obviously, a slow and painstaking process. Emancipation does not come about automatically, nor there is a universal and unidirectional historical pathway towards an emancipated end-state. Rather, emancipation has been defined by Booth, Wyn Jones and other proponents of SAE as a localized and unfinished process, one that can only be determined by local stakeholders in concrete situations. Indeed, there can be no 'Emancipation' but rather more or less emancipatory options for a given situation, i.e. options that are more or less conducive to opening up space in people's lives so that they can decide and act for themselves. This means that, although the language of emancipation has been at times mobilized to justify the imposition of universalist views, there is nothing inherently 'top-down' about the localized politics of emancipation. Emancipation, as a political process, is about the social interactions of 'real people in real places', and the ways in which they can (or cannot) exercise control over their lives.

Security is important in the process of emancipation. On the one hand, security ultimately refers to a condition in which individuals and groups do not have to fear for their own survival. When people are secure in the sense of survival, they are not immediately worried, for example, about where their next meal is coming from, or whether they will be gunned down by drug cartels, or whether they will suffer from a rampant cholera epidemic. These situations are constraints upon life given that they do not allow individuals and groups to make meaningful decisions or take courses of action to fundamentally alter the course of their lives. All attention is turned to the bleak reality of survival. Emancipation thus *entails* security; further, it involves recognizing and supporting the agency of those whose security is governed – and whose lives are determined – by more powerful actors (Basu 2011: 101). Only by being secure in this sense can people freely decide and act for themselves.

On the other hand, given the importance of security to political identities, relations and communities, it becomes clear that political transformation in emancipatory directions must include a reconsideration of the way in which security is understood and practised. Notions and practices of security undeniably play a prominent role in the current political climate whereby security is used to justify forceful measures including wars and (often exclusionary) legislation (as well as heightened public attention to issues of health, food, water and energy). Without aspirations for emancipation, these policy developments may well introduce or reproduce the condition of insecurity of individuals and groups. In contrast,

an emancipatory understanding of security, through the knowledge it produces, can be an important instrument in broader political transformations.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, the idea of 'SAE' is a *praxis-oriented approach* that undertakes a critique of ideas and practices of security by looking at their political assumptions and effects. In these circumstances, the achievement of security requires that attention be geared towards experiences of insecurity and the way in which they are socially embedded. Security then entails the transformation of structures and relationships of vulnerability through localized political action, aimed at the creation of spaces in people's lives so that they are enabled to make decisions and act beyond mere survival.

### **The Bhopal industrial accident (1984)**

Bhopal is the site of many contesting narratives (see Box 6.3 for timeline); it is the narratives of the people who were worst affected by the accident that are privileged in SAE security analyses. Indeed, it is their vulnerabilities and experiences that form the basis upon which we can begin to think of the Bhopal case as a security concern. The emancipatory approach includes not only the aftermath of the accident but, importantly, the context within which the insecurities have unfolded. To proceed with the security analysis, we must first examine the structures and relationships of vulnerability that delineate the lives of the people of Bhopal, and then highlight the potential for transformations that is immanent in the existing condition of insecurity, including efforts to envision and realize these changes.

Ours is not the first attempt to frame Bhopal as a security concern. In a short write-up titled 'Bhopal is also about security', Ajay Lele (2010), Research Fellow at the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses in New Delhi, suggests that Bhopal is 'beyond politics', presumably because the human costs of the incident are so obvious. Although he makes a reference to human security in his concluding remarks, Lele's main interest is in discussing the threat of the deliberate use of poisonous gases like MIC in 'chemical terrorism'. Others have highlighted long-term health concerns and environmental damage due to the gas leak, making a case for looking at health and environmental security in the area (Rajan 2001; WHO 2007: 29). More broadly, Ward Morehouse, founder of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal, has invoked security with reference to human referents: 'The Bhopal accident deprived people of their right to life, as well as their rights to health, livelihood and security of person' (2001). Here, he uses a rights-based approach to advocate for justice for the people, bringing attention to the impact of the Bhopal incident on them. Commenting on the work of activists like Morehouse, anthropologist Kim Fortun writes that they are 'progressive advocate[s]' who 'try to sell new definitions of health, security and fairness. They help define what counts as relevant, and who and what should be seen in relation' (2001: 299).

While disparate, the efforts to identify the Bhopal gas leak and its aftermath as a security concern rely on distinct *effects* of the accident on health, environment, human rights and indeed national security (the case of 'chemical terrorism'). That the language of security is or can be employed in all these respects is testimony to the 'broadening' and 'deepening' of the notion of security in theory and practice. However, little effort has thus far been made to link these discussions to the significant body of literature – activist, journalist and in the fields of sociology and anthropology – that examines the structural (political, cultural and economic) contexts which surround the accident and defined the experiences of the victims and survivors (see Fortun 2001: 188, 195–203). From the SAE perspective, an exploration of these contexts is the starting point for security analyses. In the case of



Bhopal, structural vulnerabilities of individuals in the community may be examined by looking at their location within the society, the state and *vis-à-vis* the power of Multinational Corporations (MNCs).

**Box 6.3 Bhopal timeline (1969–2012)**

**1969:** UCIL plant, designed by UCC, begins operation in Bhopal.

**1978:** MIC unit installed at the UCIL plant.

**1981–1983:** Periodic leaks lead to hospitalization of workers and nearby residents, including one fatality.

**1982–1983:** Safety risks of the UCIL plant written about in local media; attempts to challenge the plant through legal channels.

**2 December 1984:** Water enters the MIC tank leading it to split, releasing 42 tons of MIC in the night air.

**3 December 1984:** As per the initial police report, 3,828 die, 30,000 are injured, and 2,544 animals are killed. (The actual figures turn out to be significantly higher in later counts.)

**1985:** Parliament of India enacts the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster (Processing of Claims) Act, 1985, making the Union of India ‘the sole plaintiff in a suit against the UCC and other defendants for compensation arising out of the disaster’.

**1989:** The Supreme Court of India approves settlement of \$470 million compensation arrived at in the case between UCC and the Union of India. All criminal proceedings are dropped.

**1991:** The Supreme Court upholds the compensation settlement but the criminal proceedings are re-initiated.

**1992:** Senior UCC management, proclaimed offenders, fail to appear before the Bhopal Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM).

**1994:** UCC sells its shares in UCIL, part of which is diverted to the Bhopal Hospital Trust set up by UCC.

**1998–1999:** Soil and water contamination of the area is confirmed by the state government of Madhya Pradesh (where Bhopal is located) and Greenpeace.

**2001:** Dow Chemical Company acquires UCC.

**2004:** Rashida Bee and Champa Devi Shukla, two activists from Bhopal, are awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize.

**2004:** Following a petition by activists, the Bhopal CJM makes Dow party to the criminal case.

**2009:** CJM Bhopal re-issues warrant against Warren Anderson, CEO of UCC at the time of the accident.

**2010:** CJM Bhopal holds guilty eight accused persons (all Indians) but all granted bail.

**2011:** Indian Council of Medical Research releases technical report confirming long-term consequences of ‘cyanide toxicity’.

**2011–2012:** Bhopal activists protest Dow’s sponsorship of London Olympics 2012.

Adapted from Hanna *et al.* (2005): xxiv–xxviii;  
see also Muralidhar (2004)



An effective starting point is to look at the environment in which the accident happened. As is generally the case with the location of manufacturing units, the plant was set up in the poorer neighbourhood of Bhopal (Rajagopal 1987; Rajan 2001: 390). The workers and the neighbouring community had little or no understanding of the hazards of the plant and were not given information on the dangers of MIC (BBC 2004; Hanna *et al.* 2005: 10–11; Mukherjee 2010: 29).<sup>3</sup> Further, it is reported that, in later years, as the plant stopped being feasible, necessary attention was not paid to its maintenance and safety standards (Rajan 2001: 386; Tully 2004; also see, Keswani 2005 [1982]). The people who were, by virtue of proximity, most at risk from the plant did not have the knowledge or the power to negotiate its entry, functioning, or subsequent exit. The fact that the majority of the affected citizens of Bhopal had no voice in, not enough information about, and little control over their surroundings meant that they were not prepared to deal with the gas leak and its long-term consequences.

The structural vulnerabilities that were present at the time of the accident are well illustrated by the homogeneity of the people who were affected: ‘with almost miraculous precision, the victims were poor and illiterate’ (Rajagopal 1987). Further, as Mukherjee (2010: 29) has argued, ‘[t]he factors that made the poor vulnerable were class specific: poverty, illiteracy, poor sanitation, crowded and ill-constructed dwellings, and total dependence on the state to reduce their vulnerability’. In addition to allowing for a class-based analysis of the insecurities of the citizens of Bhopal, a SAE approach can also focus on gender, by investigating the ways in which women and men were affected differently by the accident, as well as the latter’s impact on social relations in the community (on SAE and gender, see Box 6.4). Chronic respiratory illnesses have made it difficult for men (the traditional breadwinners) to work, leading also to depression. Women have had to bear the overwhelming costs of a community suffering from health and environmental repercussions due to the accident.

Furthermore, a SAE approach also allows us to take a ‘macro’ perspective and look at the global context in which the Bhopal case unfolded. Indeed, this case illustrates the implications of unregulated neoliberal economic relations: the increasing reach of MNCs; the inability (or unwillingness) of ‘traditional’ political authorities to render global capitalist forces accountable and subject to democratic scrutiny; the social consequences of the prioritization of economic and state interests over the welfare and security of individuals and communities.

This is evident in the ways in which the Indian state managed the crisis, particularly in its unwillingness to let the Bhopal narrative develop in a way that would discourage future foreign direct investment (see Rajagopal 1987; Mathur and Morehouse 2002).<sup>4</sup> Further, following the accident, the Indian government made a ‘full and final’ settlement with UCC on behalf of the Bhopal survivors. The Supreme Court of India in 1989 approved \$470 million compensation for the survivors. All criminal proceedings against UCC officials and others were dropped. While criminal charges were later revived, the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the settlement based on the principle of *parens patriae*, that is parent of the nation, whereby the state has the power to act as the parent of any citizen in need of protection (generally used in the context of children). In effect, this paternalistic approach took away the agency of the survivors. With the exception of the proactive city legislature of Bhopal, by and large, the government failed to adequately secure the interests and needs of its own people.

On its part, UCC disposed of its share in UCIL, its Indian subsidiary, in 1994 and left India. It maintains that the State of Madhya Pradesh (where Bhopal is located) assumed

**Box 6.4 Gender and SAE**

As a relational concept, gender is integral to security analyses from a SAE perspective (see Basu 2011). To begin with, SAE is concerned with identifying relations and structures of inequality which systematically place some groups in situations of disadvantage, and which silence and marginalize alternative views. The concept of gender, by highlighting the hierarchical relationship between masculine and feminine values and its political implications, provides a holistic understanding of the experiences of ‘real people in real places’. Indeed, drawing on feminist work, SAE proponents recognize patriarchy – which systemically marginalizes women in society – as one of the ‘ideas that made us [the human society]’ (see Booth 2007).

In addition to analysing power relations, as Jacqui True (2001: 231) points out, feminist approaches have employed gender as a ‘normative standpoint from which to construct alternative world orders’. As such, gender not only provides a better understanding of the condition of insecurity but also works as a theoretical tool for envisioning and realizing emancipatory transformations to which SAE is committed.

Depending on the particular understanding of gender employed for analyses (based on the particular strand of feminism that is used), it may be possible to identify two further overlaps between SAE and feminist approaches to security. First is the recognition that the private and the political cannot be easily separated. The decisions of policy-makers have far-reaching and sometimes unexpected implications for the lives of individuals, families and communities, often well beyond the ‘constituency’ initially envisaged. Second, the connection between the private and the political is also present in the way in which the researcher sees their role in the world. Indeed the reflexive awareness of one’s place and responsibilities towards the world is important to both feminist and SAE scholarship.

responsibility for cleaning up the site in 1998, and that ‘no further legal claims are outstanding against Union Carbide’ (BBC 2004; Union Carbide Corporation 2012).<sup>5</sup> In 2001, UCC was acquired by Dow Chemicals, which claims to have no legal liabilities from the accident (BBC 2004).<sup>6</sup>

In sum, there was a structural inequality between UCC and governmental authorities on the one hand, and the local communities of Bhopal on the other hand, which constituted what SAE would term a ‘condition of insecurity’, that is, a network of vulnerabilities and hierarchical power relations. These vulnerabilities were not only present before the accident, but also determined the immediate reactions to it and continue to characterize its aftermath.

Against this background, much of the support for the people of Bhopal has come from civil society groups. Satinath Sarangi, a prominent Bhopal activist, identifies three phases of people’s movements in the city: ‘spontaneous protests in the immediate aftermath, organized under middle class leaders for the following two years and finally the formation of survivor led organizations’ (2005 [1994]: 175). While, as Sarangi also points out, the civil society initiatives have been periodically racked by conflicting interests within and between organizations and entanglement with regional party politics, the latter day survivor organizations have been of much significance in addressing issues of rights and justice (see Sarangi 2005 [1994]; Mukherjee 2010: 112).

Women have played a particularly important role in spearheading the survivors' efforts. The women's organization *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan*<sup>7</sup> is one of the biggest and most effective initiatives in this respect. In addition to advocacy, civil society initiatives also seek to address relief and rehabilitation needs of the community. For instance, the Sambhavna Trust – co-founded by Sarangi – provides medical support to the Bhopal survivors. The Bhopal issue has also found support internationally with organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (for a limited time, immediately after the accident), Greenpeace and Amnesty International, and with the formation of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (a coalition of civil society organizations).

For the Bhopal survivors and their families, their association with the pesticide factory continues to be a lived reality because of the intimate ways in which it continues to affect their lives. For instance, they are forced to use groundwater that has a high level of toxic content. The Bhopal Medical Appeal terms this groundwater pollution from the factory a 'second disaster' (see also CSE 2009: 18; BMA 2012). At the same time, medical support is difficult because of the nature of the illnesses and an insufficient understanding of the same. Security for these people of Bhopal would entail institutional responses to these problems; also wider transformations, not only in the relations between the state and its marginalized citizens but also in the socio-economic relations between people and corporations, which are increasingly determined by the latter. It becomes clear that redressing the structures of vulnerability that constitute the condition of insecurity of the Bhopal survivors means much more than a compensation for the events of 1984; security is about broader social and political transformation encompassing issues of citizenship and justice. Further, security involves the transformative processes through which the Bhopal survivors seek to achieve greater control over their lives.

In this context, the work of various civil society groups and organizations – at local, national and international levels – on a broad range of issues, including corporate accountability, social and economic justice, medical support for the survivors and their families, and environmental assessment and treatment of the affected area are illustrative of the multiple pathways that have been taken to address the current 'condition of insecurity' of the Bhopal survivors. Importantly, at the local level, the survivors' experience of negotiating their future with governmental bodies, with UCC/Dow and among themselves within civil society has engendered changes in their lives. For instance, the societal upheaval following the Bhopal crises has opened up spaces for women to participate in public debates on Bhopal. Following this, many of the Muslim women have chosen to give up their veils and envisage more empowered spaces for the younger women in the community (Mehta 1996; also see, Mukherjee 2010: 162).

While the Bhopal incident is one of the biggest cases of industrial disaster, there are other comparable cases across the world. Indeed, 'other communities recognize their problems in the history of Bhopal, as the impunity of corporate actors becomes an increasingly familiar story' (Hanna *et al.* 2005: 209). In practice, some communities lead chronically insecure lives as a price for their society's quest for better standards of living, visible in various 'development projects'. At a time when such high value is attached to individual freedom and choice, people's everyday lives are actually being increasingly determined by MNCs and states in the name of prosperity and security. Social factors such as race, gender and class make some people particularly vulnerable to the decisions made by powerful institutions. In this context, an emancipatory approach to security helps us, on the one hand, to recognize and understand these processes and the way they sediment into structures and relationships; and, on the other hand, to envisage and realize positive transformations.

## Conclusion

Both in scholarly literature and the wider political arena, sovereign states are no longer the sole referents or agents of security. Indeed, their employment of security discourse as the rationale for exclusionary policies has been increasingly put under scrutiny. Against the background of these developments, SAE not only offers a critique of dominant security practices but also important analytical tools to envision alternatives with ‘real-world’ value. It does so by taking as its starting point the condition of insecurity, reflected in the experiences of insecurity of individuals and groups; and by upholding a normative commitment towards the transformation of the relations and structures that constitute the identified condition of insecurity. Being secure is ultimately about the referents of security having the potential to think, decide and act beyond basic survival. Following from this understanding of security, SAE provides a unique combination of insights for security analyses.

First, security issues can be recognized by investigating the claims of different actors and their relative positions within socio-political structures. This means that analysts should seek to identify the relations and structures of inequality that underpin these claims, and which systematically privilege some groups while placing others in positions of vulnerability. It also means that security claims should be interpreted as elements in a political struggle, implying forms of power and attempts at identity construction.

Second, understandings and practices of security should be approached as political in their assumptions and implications – and therefore susceptible to transformation. These understandings and practices are underpinned by notions about how society and politics should be organized, and contribute to reproducing or challenging political arrangements.

And, third, the study of security should be informed by the intent to identify potential for emancipatory transformation. Transformation is deemed emancipatory when it contributes to providing security, that is, an enabling ‘space’ for decisions to be made and courses of action to be pursued beyond mere survival. There is no end-state of emancipation where claims and needs can be harmonized. However, as Booth argues, it is almost always possible to identify options that are more emancipatory than others.

The epistemological privileging of referents’ narratives is central to SAE analyses. In the Bhopal case study presented above, the focus was thus placed on Bhopal survivors’ experiences of insecurity. This was elaborated upon by examining the structural inequalities that made the survivors particularly vulnerable to the accident and its consequences, as well as the role of Indian governmental bodies and the role of UCC/Dow. Clearly, any fundamental changes in the state and the corporation’s response would involve re-structuring state–citizen relations and market-centric global economic relations, which is difficult to envision at this time. However, the assumption in SAE that changes in the condition of insecurity are possible and that individuals have the agency (even if latent, at times) to realize change, opens up space to recognize transformations – engendered and immanent – in a given context. In this context, the role of civil society groups, especially survivors’ organizations, was here acknowledged as crucial to addressing immediate concerns and advocating long-term transformations.

A range of methodological approaches and tools can be employed for conducting research using an emancipatory approach to security as long as these are consistent with the epistemological premise of SAE, specifically: the subjectivity of the analyst; recognition that knowledge is used to marginalize particular sections of society while privileging others; and interest in immanent critique. With the focus on individuals and groups as referents of security, ethnographic tools (see Chapter 11) are particularly relevant to approaching

security claims, as are different methods of discourse analysis (see Chapters 16 and 17), which can help analysts investigate the assumptions and implications of these claims. Participatory action research (Chapter 12), with its explicit commitment to supporting positive changes in the community where research is conducted, would make for a good fit within the SAE mandate but is yet to be explored. Further, mapping tools developed by sociologists are also helpful when identifying the structures and relations surrounding security problems, especially the way in which they are embedded in institutions.

The research agenda of SAE requires the continuation of empirical studies that can show how the politics of security works in practice, both in its dominant and emancipatory ways. The conceptual framework of SAE also requires further elaboration, via an engagement with theoretical resources that have been neglected until now. So far, this approach has had little to say, for example, about political economy and the role of class in the reproduction of insecurities. There is also need for more detailed exploration of power and its complexities in relation to the politics of security. These theoretical developments can be facilitated by more systematic dialogue with other contributions in the critical security field, a dialogue in which SAE is yet to participate fully.

In spite of its current limitations, SAE – as it stands – can contribute to the critical security field by acting as a reminder that the study of security is ultimately about the experiences of ‘real people in real places’. It does so by calling attention to the security claims that are often silenced and marginalized. Further, SAE shows: how these claims are embedded within social relations and structures; that it is possible to recognize the violent and undesirable effects of some ideas and practices that use the vocabulary of security, while maintaining that the politics of security is ultimately dependent upon specific interactions and contexts; and, finally, that the critique of security can be both deconstructive (denaturalizing and problematizing) and reconstructive (engaged in political struggles for transformation).

Please see the companion website for a seminar exercise.

### **Questions for further debate**

- 1 Can one be free without feeling safe from threats to life and well-being? In other words, can there be emancipation without security?
- 2 How can one deal with conflicting and/or contradictory claims to emancipation?
- 3 Who is suspicious of the concept of emancipation and why? To what extent have these suspicions been addressed by the proponents of SAE?
- 4 To what extent does the critique of security require an assumption of what is desirable and undesirable?
- 5 What are the scholarly benefits and limitations of the broad security ambit of SAE?

### **Notes**

- 1 We thank Laura Shepherd and Jayashree Vivekanandan for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
- 2 We agree with Matt McDonald (2012) that there is nothing inherently and inevitably violent and exclusionary in security – the ‘logics’ of security is the result of the interaction of actors within certain social and cultural contexts. Here, our argument diverges from the move by Aradau (2008) and Peoples (2011) to conceive emancipation as separate from security.

- 3 Indeed, with its promise of employment, development and prosperity, the establishment of the plant was welcomed by the local community.
- 4 Bhopal continues to be factored into the dynamics of India–US foreign relations. In 2010, an email exchange between Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman of the Indian Planning Commission, and Michael Froman, US Deputy National Security Advisor for international economic affairs, was released in the Indian media. Ahluwalia had written to Froman requesting US support on a matter relating to India's borrowing from the World Bank. In his response, Froman pointed out that they had been 'hearing a lot of noise about the Dow Chemical issue' and suggested avoiding 'developments which [could] put a chilling effect on . . . investment relationship' (see TNN 2010). This was construed as a threat by the Indian media and analysts, even as both Ahluwalia and Froman played down the email exchange.
- 5 For an account of the different measures and lines of argument taken by UCC in the aftermath of the accident, see EPW (1987). The UCC public-relations involvement with the Bhopal case continues to this day, as is evidenced by its ownership of the Internet domain [www.bhopal.com](http://www.bhopal.com)
- 6 Dow Chemicals, however, has been unable to escape the legacy of Bhopal, as evidenced in the debates around its sponsorship of the 2012 London Olympics (see Alexander 2012; Chakraborty 2012; Suroor 2012).
- 7 This may be translated as the Bhopal Gas Affected Women Workers' Organization (Mehta 1996).

### **Sources for further reading and research**

- Booth, K. (Ed.) (2005) *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner.
- Booth, K. (2007) *Theory of World Security*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brincat, S., L. Lima and J. Nunes (Eds.) (2012) *Critical Theory in International Relations and Security Studies: Interviews and Reflections*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Burke, A. and M. McDonald (Eds.) (2007) *Critical Security in the Asia-Pacific*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- McDonald, M. (2012) *Security, the Environment and Emancipation: Contestations Over Environmental Change*, London: Routledge.
- Wyn J. R. (1999) *Security, Strategy and Critical Theory*, Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner.