

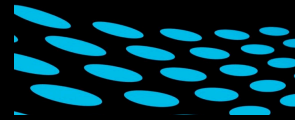
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Academic Foresights

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Securitization Studies



How do you analyze the present situation of Securitization studies?

Securitization Studies is a vibrant and popular area (1). According to Mi Williams (2), “it is difficult to think of any other perspective in security studies that could embrace (and virtually none that has embraced) the analysis of military security in the environment, gender....” Located at the intersection between traditional theories of international relations, securitization studies argue that security issues do not necessarily reflect the objective, material circumstances of the world. Often, security issues are the results of leaders efforts to understand and shape the world. The focus of securitization studies is to understand how and why this happens, and the kind of impact this process has on both the community’s life and politics (3). In particular, securitization theory seeks to explicate the processes through which: (i) the character of public problems is established; (ii) the social commitments that emerge from the collective acceptance by a community that something is a menace, and (iii) the possibility of a particular policy is created. In this light, securitization studies offer a conceptual apparatus that is well equipped to examine, in its broadest sense, the life cycle of a security issue.

There is no “theory” of securitization in singular. In effect, securitization studies are currently informed, essentially, by two different theoretical perspectives: the first is philosophical and the other is sociological (4). The philosophical model covers what is known under the name of the Copenhagen School though some scholars within the Copenhagen School have developed a distinctive take on securitization. The sociological model

securitization was not developed in one site in particular. Rather, it brings scholars of various walks of intellect (Belgium, Canada, France, UK, etc.) (5) view, there are three main differences between these two perspectives: first, that each theory attributes to some important factors, such as the audience and (6); second, the way each theory conceptualizes the relations between politics and security; third, the type of epistemology and explanatory mechanism that a given theory is committed to. For instance, the philosophical view emphasizes language, while sociological theory complements language with practices and, sometimes, with instruments (7).

Securitization theories have been extremely influential in examining issues as diverse as global pandemics, migration, cyber-security, religious violence, and transnational terrorism (8). However, it is important to note that empirical studies of securitization have given us a great deal about both the strengths and weaknesses of securitization studies. Otherwise, it would be wrong to conceive of empirical studies as mere applications of existing conceptual schemes as they often develop original extensions of a given theory.

In your opinion, how will the situation likely evolve over the next five years?

I have always found sloppy uses of the term securitization a tad disturbing. Of course, it is normal that students entertain different understandings and uses of the concept of “securitization”. For career, funding and publication matters, the concept seems to have a great “marketing appeal” on many scholars (9). However, if securitization is used to refer to any construction of threats, what then is left of its theoretical identity? It would actually be legitimate, under those circumstances, to ask: does it have any theoretical content? If securitization scholars take this issue seriously, securitization theories would have to be emptied of their distinctive contents. In other words, the primary challenge that securitization would have to settle is, to delineate, more rigorously, what the boundaries of securitization theories are. This would command, at least more than it’s been so far, a more resolute engagement with other theories of security.

Ken Booth (10), for instance, castigates the Copenhagen School for its lack of

Ren Deen (10), for instance, castigates the Copenhagen School for its lack of ethos; on the other hand, despite its links with realism, some US scholars working in the field of security studies treat securitization with a courteous neglect, because, as the argument goes, framing or the literature on public problems can equally do the analytical job securitization is supposed to carry out (11).

This raises a serious objection, but it is set on a wobbly leg. For security is not just a problem; it is the problem whose stakes are the highest for any human community whose design and effects often involve the constitutive fabrics of the society (political, economic, ecological). That is, while securitization theories intersect with various theoretical frameworks, their conceptual core touches upon issues that underwrite the existence and life of a community (e.g., politics, agency, legitimacy). In sum, the evolution of securitization would depend on the extent to which it is able to engage other theories (head-on), not only in order to establish its value (which, in my view, has been done), but in order to foster and hone its theoretical premises. Seen from this angle, the terrain to cover remains incredibly and potentially rich.

What are the structural long-term perspectives?

Securitization studies have gone through various twists and turns (12). It is not so tricky to offer a long-term perspective on the topic. Perhaps, the past offers a glimpse of what the future might bring. My hunch is that there are essentially three fertile areas for securitization studies. The way I list them below does not establish any hierarchy among them.

First, while the initial debates and discussions focused on the internal structure of securitization theories, their theoretical sources and main concepts, the recent years have witnessed a new wave of studies centered on issues of methods and methodology (13). These days, as I alluded to above, questions that relate to the theoretical underpinnings of securitization seem to become prominent. This is not really surprising; actual discussion is long overdue. In a fact, “the appropriate methods, the research

and the type of evidence accepted all derive to a great extent from the kind of evidence that scholars bequeath their faith” (14). So, this is the first axis around which I think more work is being done, as it challenges students of securitization to clarify their theories, and the extent to which it relates to other forms of theorizing (not just empirical, etc.).

The second axis, which I think might constitute a new domain of enquiry, is the relationship between securitization and normativity. Rita Floyd (15) has put it in terms of just/unjust securitizations. I propose to put it in terms of collective agency. In the course, there have been discussions on the responsibility of speaking or writing (16). I wish to displace the question, and hopefully change its nature. My interest is in understanding the extent to which securitization establishes a collective agency. What does this mean in terms of collective responsibility if things go wrong? What are the implications of addressing the issue of agency in securitization studies could be a path that would lead us from risk/precaution to desecuritization, through cooperation, genocide and violence.

The third and related axis might be around the long-term effects of securitization on people's life and the society's texture, including rules of law, trust, and identity. This is close to the issue of whether securitization has a “logic” and what does that logic entail? The other side of this axis would be to better understand the mechanisms through which the “logic of security”, which is said to underpin securitization, is contained, rolled back or dismantled. For a critical researcher, the issue is important because it is difficult to study security policies and practices without dealing with the issue, with the following questions: what should people do in face of a securitized issue that they deem inappropriate? How should they act when an issue is securitized? What strategies should they deploy when they live within a securitized site? Are the strategies of equal strength, merit and ethical status? (18)

Notes:

(1) For most recent discussions of different versions of securitization, see Thierry Balzacq, ed., *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*

Routledge, 2011; “The Politics of Securitization”, Special Issue of *Security Dialogue* 42(4-5), August-October 2011). The first rendition of securitization can be found in Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. (1998) *Security: A New Framework for International Relations*. London: Lynne Rienner.

(2) Williams, Michael C. (2011) The Continuing Evolution of Securitization Theory. In *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, edited by Thierry Balzacq. London: Routledge, p. 212.

(3) Huysmans, Jef. (1998) Revisiting Copenhagen: Or, on the Creative Development of the Security Agenda in Europe. *European Journal of International Relations* 4: 479-505.

(4) Balzacq, Thierry. (2011a) A Theory of Securitization: Origins, Core Assumptions, and Variants. In *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, edited by Thierry Balzacq. London: Routledge.

(5) For instance, Jef Huysmans, Philippe Bourbeau, and Mark Salter. Some might also mention Didier Bigo, but I am unsure whether he would accept being brought under securitization studies. Though his work on (in)security professionals clearly overlaps with some of securitization studies, Bigo has a distinctive research agenda, one which could be described as directly falling within securitization studies. See, for instance, Bigo (2002) Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of the Exception. *Alternatives* 27: 63-92.

(6) On audience, see see Léonard, Sarah, and Christian Kaunert. (2011) Reconceptualizing the Audience in Securitization Theory. In *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, edited by Thierry Balzacq. London: Routledge. On context, see Mark B. (2008) Securitization and Desecuritization: A Dramaturgical Analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 11: 321-349; Ciută, Felix. (2009) Security and the Problem of Context: A Hermeneutical Critique of Securitization Theory. *Review of International Studies* 35: 301-326.

(7) Léonard, Sarah. (2010) EU Border Security and Migration into the European Union: FRONTEX and Securitization through Practices. *European Security* 19: 231-254.

(8) It is impossible, given the space restrictions, to give a full account of the e

theoretical work carried out by securitization scholars. Here's a (non-representative) list of some of the work:

Barthwal-Datta, Monika (2012) *Understanding Security Practices in South Asia: A Securitization Theory and the Role of Non-State Actors*. London: Routledge; Ceylan, Aydin, and Anastassia Tsoukala. (2002) The Securitization of Migration in Western Europe: Ambivalent Discourses and Policies. *Alternatives* 27: 21-39; Curley, Melissa, and Wong, eds. (2008) *Security and Migration in Asia: The Dynamics of Securitization*. London: Routledge; Hansen, Lene. (2011a) Theorizing the Image for Security Studies: Securitization and the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis. *European Journal of International Relations* 17: 51-74; Bourbeau, Philippe. (2011) *The Securitization of Migration: A Theory of Movement and Order*. London: Routledge.

(9) This is a perceptive comment made by Xavier Guillaume at an IR Seminar at the University of Edinburgh, in 2013.

(10) Booth, Ken. (2007) *Theory of World Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(11) For a notable exception, see Hayes, Jarrod. (2009) Identity and Securitization: Democratic Peace: The United States and the Divergence of Response to India's Nuclear Programs. *International Studies Quarterly* 53: 977-999.

(12) See, inter alia, McDonald, Matt. (2008) Securitization and the Construction of the European Union. *European Journal of International Relations* 14: 563-587; Vuori, Juha A. (2008) Illocutionary Logics and Strands of Securitization: Applying the Theory of Securitization to the Study of Non-Democratic Political Orders. *European Journal of International Relations* 14: 65-99; Stritzel, Holger. (2007) Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen Beyond. *European Journal of International Relations* 13: 357-383.

(13) See Balzacq, Thierry. (2011b) Enquiries into Methods: A New Framework for Securitization Analysis. In *Securitization Theory*, edited by Thierry Balzacq. London: Routledge.

(14) See the forthcoming forum on "What Kind of Theory (if any) is Securitization?" in *International Relations*. Contributors include: Thierry Balzacq, Stefano Guzzini, Jarmo Patomäki, Ole Wæver, and Michael C. Williams.

(15) Floyd, Rita. (2010) *Security and the Environment: Securitisation Theory and Environmental Security Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(16) This is sometimes described as a fundamental paradox. In particular, see Huysmans (2006) *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear; Migration and Asylum in the EU*. Routledge.

(17) Desecuritization is perhaps the other face of securitization theories that has received attention. I think it could be a dynamic field of debate provided that the insights there are not alien to concerns that are dealt with in traditional areas, such as post-reconstruction, mediation, reconciliation and forgiveness, etc. On a recent case of desecuritization, see Hansen, Lene. (2011b) Reconstructing Desecuritization: The Normative Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply It. *Review of International Studies* 38: 525-546.

(18) See, for a start, Thierry Balzacq (forthcoming) (ed). *Security Contested: Reclaiming Emancipation, Desecuritization, Resilience* (London: Routledge).

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