Security as a Normative Issue: Ethical Responsibility and the Copenhagen School

The divide between what is and what isn't security has been blurred in recent decades, with the widening of security (expanding the idea of what can be threatened) and the emergence of critical approaches to security (Krause and Williams, 1997). This is a considerable departure from traditional realist conceptions of security that focus on military power and survival (Mearsheimer, 2001; Morgenthau, 2006). Widening the concept of security thus leads us to consider whether security has any limits as a concept – critical approaches to security focus on less obviously threatening issues like economic inequality whilst aiming for more than simply survival, though there is much debate about what the ultimate goal of security is (Booth, 2007; Burke, 2013). This essay will focus on the contributions of one such critical approach to security, the Copenhagen School (CS). Focusing on an approach that defines security as what can be "securitized" – in the words of the CS (Buzan et al., 1998:19) – this essay will argue that everything has the potential to be securitized, but that not all threats should be securitized; thus, not everything should be security. What is security, however, is dependent on specific situations and thus, on securitizing actors in those situations. The process of securitization depends on the subject (the threat), the referent object (the threatened), the securitizing actor (those trying to remove said threat from normal discourse) and the audience.

To determine what can be considered a threat, and therefore what can be considered security, this essay will examine how variation in these factors changes our attitude towards threats and what we consider to be security. In doing so, we can consider another CS insight into security, "the use of sectors" (Buzan et al., 1998:9) – the division of security into different areas of threat i.e. military, political, economic, societal and environmental threats. Utilising both the concept of securitization and the distinction between different sectors of analysis allows us to develop a holistic understanding of the CS approach to security.

The essay will consider whether there should be a normative theory to determine what should be securitized (Floyd, 2011) or rather, that what should be securitized is dependent on specific situations (Hansen, 2012). This is an important issue, as without a normative direction the CS and its methods are constrained to the role of analytical tool. The essay will conclude that what is security should be defined via what should be securitized in specific situations, as this normative approach reflects the subjective nature of security.

Securitization and Its Components

The process of securitization as outlined by the Copenhagen School is the elevation of a threat – via a speech-act – above normal political discourse and into the realm of security. This is done by actors, most frequently government elites, to prioritise certain issues and threats and thus remove said threats from the public discourse. Initially conceptualised as an act excluding the population from important debates, academics such as McDonald (2008:566) have come to question the Copenhagen School's "assumption of security politics as negative and exclusionary". Yet before we can fully establish the value of securitization, the different variables involved in securitization must first be outlined.

Crucial to securitization are the actors trying to bring about securitization, as well as the potential danger of a threat, the referent object of the threat and the audience at whom the securitization is aimed. To define the limits of what

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security is, we must then define the limits of who can securitize, what constitutes a dangerous threat and how to judge when an audience accepts that a referent object is threatened.

As Roe (2008:617) writes, "in articulating a security threat, an actor thereby claims the special right to handle the issue using extraordinary means". Yet, the Copenhagen School does not provide strict guidance as to which actors are able to convincingly articulate a threat. Vaughn (2009:264) argues that "securitization is not always dominated by states" and provides an example of a humanitarian agency successfully securitizing a threat. Securitization, then, is not solely the domain of government elites but rather it is a viable strategy for non-governmental organizations as well. It can be drawn from this argument that the successful securitization of a threat does not particularly depend on the political power of an actor but rather said actor's ability to appear legitimate, and more importantly, to present a legitimate threat. Krebs and Jackson (2007:38) argue that "legitimacy can be established only through rhetorical action", and furthermore, as Vuori (2008:70) states, this legitimacy is based on the audience's reaction to rhetoric rather than the content of the rhetoric itself: "it is the audience that is the key to the process of securitization, as legitimacy has to be argued somehow, it cannot be forced". However, it should be noted that – as Stritzel and Chang (2015) indicate – a certain amount of legitimacy is derived from the previous and current actions of securitizing actors. Nevertheless, governments and non-governmental organizations alike are subject to the fact that audiences must accept a threat for it to be successfully elevated above normal political discourse.

In the securitization process, both actor and audience are crucial in the effective securitization of a threat. Having argued that the position of the securitizing actor itself is not as important as the legitimacy produced by their rhetoric, we must now consider actor-audience relations and how variation in audience results in variation in the acceptance of a threat. Again, the Copenhagen School fails to illustrate exactly what kind of audience is most likely to accept threats as dangers to their security. Balzacq (2005:173) notes that "although the CS points out that a 'significant audience' must concur with the securitizing actor (who speaks 'security') …the nature and status of that audience remains unaccounted for". Stritzel (2007:363) furthers this criticism, adding that "one cannot always figure out clearly which audience is when and why most relevant, what implications it has if there are several audiences and when exactly an audience is persuaded". As most securitizing moves are attempted by governments, the most common audience for a speech-act is the general population. Yet with the diversification of securitizing actors as highlighted above, there follows a resulting diversification in audiences. Côté (2016:546) recognises this, stating that "the identity of securitization audiences is often dependent on the context of the securitization process in question". The audience is crucial to the success of securitization, with academics such as Salter (2008) noting that audiences have the capacity to reject the securitization of a threat or to challenge the proposed response to said threat. The recognition of an audience with agency fails to be outlined in what many consider to be the founding text of the Copenhagen School, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*; yet, this development of securitization theory is vital for the relevance of the CS, as it advances our understanding of how threats are securitized. If a securitizing actor was interacting with a passive audience, then there would potentially be no limits to what actors claim to be threats and what they claim to be security. As the audience is an active part of the securitization process, however, they play a considerable and often defining role in what is considered to be security in specific situations.

Having examined the role of actor and audience in securitization, it is also important to demonstrate how variations in potential threats and who is threatened affect the possibility of securitization. To do this, the Copenhagen School's other important contribution to security studies – the use of sectoral analysis in defining security threats – will be examined alongside the process of securitization. As Buzan et al. (1998:27) suggest, the "purpose of sectors is to differentiate types of interaction…[as] security is a generic term that has a distinct meaning but varies in form". Due to its categorisation of different types of threat, sectoral analysis is therefore particularly useful in distinguishing what is and isn't security in the military, political, economic, societal and environmental sectors. For example, in the environmental sector, climate change is regarded as an existential threat; in the military sector, however, nuclear war is seen as a greater security threat than climate change. Both threats are legitimate threats to the general population but differ in urgency to different audiences. Ultimately, as Albert and Buzan (2011:414) acknowledge, "securitization is something that remains ultimately tied to the political system", and thus, sectoral analysis can be adopted as a method of evaluating how different audiences react to the attempted securitization of different threats within political discourse. Such work has been undertaken on areas like societal security (Waever et al., 1993) and state security (Buzan, 1991), which may seem to be similar in scope yet are crucially different – societal security focuses on identity

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whereas state security focuses on sovereignty. The expansion of what can be securitized widens the concept of security yet academics such as Watson (2011:4) argue that securitization is not limited to security, stating that, "security is not the only discourse that may be used to legitimize the implementation of emergency measures"; this appears to leave us with no clear answer as to what is and isn't security as the Copenhagen School itself provides few limits as to what can be security.

The final component of the securitization process is the referent object – that which is being threatened. As Bagge-Laustsen and Waever (2000:706) argue, "the character of the referent object makes a difference…making the security speech-act in the name of 'the state' is different from doing it on behalf of… 'the whales'. Other academics have examined the use of the world (Vuori, 2010), infrastructure (Aradau, 2010) and the 'human' (Vaughn, 2009) as referent objects. Simply evoking the threatened in a security speech-act is enough to make it the referent object of the threat. Thus, everything has the potential to be security, as everything has the potential to be threatened. Whether or not something is security depends on the legitimacy of the securitizing actor and the acceptance or rejection of a securitizing move by the audience as threats and referent objects can vary widely and remain the subject of securitization.

Having outlined that everything has the potential to be security, it will now be evaluated whether there is a normative basis for securitizing certain threats. It will then be shown that there is a normative dilemma as to what should be securitized, so the limits of security as a concept belong to the individual using it.

A 'Just Theory' of Securitization? The Copenhagen School and Normativity

Having examined the components involved in securitization, this essay will now consider whether securitization of threats should be a normative aim. The Copenhagen School's initial direction regarding securitization, as laid out in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Buzan et.al. 1998:19), suggests that desecuritization is desirable as otherwise, "opening up the agenda risks securitizing everything, therefore voiding the security concept of any meaning". Yet there are certain threats, such as climate change, that are in need of securitization; it is necessary for both elites and populations to view climate change as an existential threat if any solutions are to be found (Diez et al., 2016). Therefore, further debate is crucial to establishing what should and shouldn't be securitized, as this consequently shows us what should and shouldn't be security. As demonstrated in the previous section, any threat can be securitized, if presented by a legitimate actor and accepted by an audience. This means that as there are few analytical limits to the concept of security, then we must define normative limits to the concept.

Academics such as Floyd (2011:429) recognise the need for a normative guide to the limits of security and ask the vital question: "when, if ever, is it justified to move something out of the democratic realm?". Floyd's own response (ibid) is to formulate a set of criteria that allow security analysts to establish when it is morally right to securitize a threat, similar in method to just war theory. The criteria outlined by Floyd (ibid:437) are that "in order to examine the moral rightness of securitization, [one] must…establish whether or not existential threats are objectively present…examine both the intentions of aggressors and those of securitizing actors…and identify universal values that determine the…moral legitimacy [of that which is being threatened]". These criteria thus constitute limits on what should be securitized and could be used to determine whether it is morally right to securitize certain threats in certain situations.

Floyd's theory offers an answer to the question of what should be securitized, yet whilst this theory provides potential limits for the concept of security, it does not establish what should be desecuritized. Floyd (ibid:437) does however acknowledge the need for desecuritization, stating that "a just securitization theory will have to be complemented by criteria that determine just desecuritization". This is crucial to determining what should be security, as any threat has the potential to be security, making it then necessary to provide a normative guideline for both securitization and desecuritization. As Hansen (2012:530) notes, "the terms were coined together … [and] 'securitization' was invented in tandem with its opposite concept", therefore an equal focus on the oft-neglected concept of desecuritization is necessary. Yet there is no parallel normative guideline to Floyd's criteria of 'just securitization', as scholars focused on desecuritization reject the notion of security as objective. As Hansen (ibid:535) argues, we should not "assume that we could identify a set of universal principles that would give us the answer to whether securitizing…the

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environment, terrorism, or immigration is a good or a bad thing". In contrast to Floyd, Hansen rejects universal ethical principles and instead emphasises "personal responsibility" in deciding whether to securitize threats (ibid:536). Nyman (2016:823) furthers this argument, stating that "the value of security is contextual and unfixed… [and thus] the focus should shift…to studying actual situated security practices in context". This debate between principles of just securitization and subjective interpretations of security stems from what Austin and Beaulieu-Brossard (2017:305) regard as "several 'generations' of theory" within securitization theory (ST), consisting of a "plurality of perspectives that has done much to expand the empirical and theoretical coordinates of ST". Hansen argues from the post-structuralist perspective of the initial Copenhagen School arguments, whereas Floyd belongs to a 'post-Copenhagen School of ST' (ibid). Whilst Floyd's theory is a valuable contribution to the debate surrounding the normative value of securitization, its focus on objective threats and universal values is problematic due to the subjective nature of security – at most, an intersubjective consensus on what constitutes security in a certain situation is achievable. Thus, Hansen's interpretation of security as a subjective concept and securitization as a subjective process is a more useful analysis of what is and isn't security.

Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated that there are few limits to what is and isn't security due to the few limits of what can and can't be securitized. The securitization process depends on the legitimacy of the securitizing actor and the acceptance of a threat by the intended audience. Thus, the securitization process is not limited to government elites reacting to major threats but is also open to non-governmental organisations and international organisations as well. The securitizing actor is fallible as audiences can reject the legitimacy of threats or reject proposed responses to said threats. This leaves us with a lack of guidelines as to what is and isn't security.

Having shown that the analytical limits of security lack definition, the normative aspects of securitization were considered. Academics such as Floyd (2011) suggest a just securitization theory that dictates what should and shouldn't be securitized in a given situation. However, others (Hansen, 2012) reject such principles as they do not reflect the complex and subjective nature of security. Instead, we should decide what is and isn't security in specific situations rather than developing abstract principles on the subject, with the desecuritization of threats as our aim. Thus, security is defined by those who use the concept.

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