



Stefano Guzzini

A dual history of 'securitisation'

Stefano Guzzini

PhD, Senior Researcher, Professor
sgu@diis.dk

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DIIS· Danish Institute for International Studies
Østbanegade 117, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark

Tel: +45 32 69 87 87

E-mail: diis@diis.dk

www.diis.dk

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What was later to be labelled the ‘Copenhagen School’ conceived of security studies at the meeting point of strategic studies and peace research. We were in the Cold War, but at the end of it, that is, in the context of the changes in the Soviet Union that started with the rise of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze in the mid-1980s. The devolution of Soviet control in Eastern Europe seemed to vindicate those more moderate peace research approaches which were prominent in particular in Germany and Finland. Those studies had been clearly focusing on military matters. Indeed, they accepted ‘playing the game’ of the Cold War divide, just as strategic studies did. Yet – and in this they followed the inspiration of much Peace Research – they would not accept the underlying assumptions of the inevitability of the security dilemma and the predominantly military definition of security. Arms control and *détente* was not just a way to *stabilise* military relations, as many US strategic planners would have it. Instead, they were meant to *transform* military relations. *Ostpolitik* and the ‘Helsinki process’ were a way of returning diplomacy to its central place and getting political control over military affairs.

At the same time, the Copenhagen meeting of strategic and peace studies develops an original understanding of security: security *is* what security *does*. Talking security is not innocent. More precisely, the discourse of security mobilises a given bias in our politics, whether such bias was intended by anyone or not. This sounds rather novel for much strategic studies, in terms of its inspiration and abstract way of putting it. You will not hear any general talk this way. And yet, as I will show (with the open support of the Copenhagen School), such an understanding is only possible if the discourse of security has historically acquired such a logic (or grammar) in the first place. Over time, security has taken over much of the content and heritage, the practice and world-view (i.e. the discourse) of the *raison d’État*.¹ It is this history which explains the content of this particular discursive bias and also its always historically contingent relevance. Security has become a very special term within our political discourse, to use Connolly’s apt phrase, a term whose analysis allows us to understand, and is almost a proxy for, changes in politics.²

The aim of this preface is hence to provide a dual historisation of ‘securitisation’, i.e. of the origins of the Copenhagen School in terms of its direct

¹ Ole Wæver, ‘Peace and security: two concepts and their relationship’, in Stefano Guzzini and Dietrich Jung (eds), *Contemporary Security Studies and Copenhagen Peace Research* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 53-65 (56).

² William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1974).

world historical context and of the historical origins of the specific bias in our political discourse which is prompted by security discourses.

1. The history of securitisation-theory: 'The Cold War is what we make of it' and the return of politics

It all started with 'desecuritisation'.³ Since the cottage industry on the Copenhagen School seems to be almost entirely concerned with who securitises what, how and how much, it is important not to leave out of sight that this is not the main theoretical puzzle with which it all began. We have to get back to the Second Cold War⁴, when the USSR had entered Afghanistan, when the first Reagan administration decided to re-enter arms race, when the German government broke over an issue of foreign policy (if there ever was any need to show the occasional *Primat der Außenpolitik*), when millions took to the streets to campaign against the stationing of 'Euromissiles' in Western Europe, and when the risk of 'a nuclear war nobody wanted' made an ugly return.⁵ When international affairs seemed again stuck in a state of (cold) war, how could politics re-gain its place?

The classical realist answer was basically: it could not. Once the security dilemma was back in place, when arming was the best means to feel secure, and yet everyone arming was making us all less secure, we were stuck again in a collective action problem. But this answer, as nicely logical as it was, seemed irresponsibly sterile in the face of the potential Armageddon. Moreover, it ended up in a fallacious reversal of Clausewitz's rule, as severely criticised by Raymond Aron earlier on.⁶ Rather than seeing war as a prolongation of politics with other means, politics became the prolongation of war with other means. Diplomacy would become the handmaiden of a worst-case security analysis and practice in need of being sold to an international public. This is the bias of security discourse: it mobilises the militarisation of politics, the reversal of Clausewitz.⁷ But if disaster was to be avoided, politics could not just give up and play the eternal second fiddle.

³ Ole Wæver, 'Beyond the "Beyond" of Critical International Theory', in *COPRI Working Papers* 1/1989 (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 1989); Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and desecuritization', in *COPRI Working Papers* 5/1993 (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 1993); Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and desecuritization', in Ronnie Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 46-86.

⁴ Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁵ Dieter S. Lutz, *Weltkrieg wider Willen? Die Nuklearwaffen in und für Europa* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981).

⁶ Raymond Aron, *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz. II: L'âge planétaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

⁷ Stefano Guzzini, 'Foreign policy without diplomacy: the Bush administration at a crossroads', *International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2002), pp. 291-297; Stefano Guzzini (ed.), *The return of geopolitics in Europe? Social mechanisms and foreign policy identity crises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

In more theoretical terms, we faced the 'dilemma of diplomacy'. When diplomacy seemed most needed, it was least feasible. On the one hand, diplomacy can only do its job, if the conflicting parties speak the same language (in which they can agree to disagree). As Kissinger noted, 'when domestic structures – and the concept of legitimacy on which they are based – differ widely, statesman can still meet, but their ability to persuade has been reduced for they no longer speak the same language.'⁸ Kissinger's central concern was how to recreate a 'common culture' which would allow diplomacy to play its role. At one point Kissinger even wrote that the greatest need of contemporary diplomacy was an agreed concept, that of 'order'.⁹ Thus, it is a necessary condition for diplomacy in a legitimate order that a common language be established despite all the structural misgivings of contemporary politics. On the other hand, diplomacy is the means through which such a common language needs be found in the first place. And that produces the dilemma: the common language is the condition for the possibility of diplomacy to work, and it is diplomacy which makes it possible for such a common language to develop. This circle is not only necessary for Kissinger's approach¹⁰, but it is a general dilemma for diplomacy in the specific context of a cold war or of a stuck security dilemma. It is a dilemma, though, which can be attenuated by referring back to the time where a common stock of historically shared meanings in diplomatic discourse existed (such as the *raison d'État*), or, if that is not enough, by placing practical bets.

Kissinger's policy of *détente* was such a 'historical bet'.¹¹ To put diplomacy centre stage, it was obviously not possible simply to ignore the military competition, but nor could one just leave it at this. As he put it, '[i]n every decade the alternative to policies of sentimental conciliation was posed in terms of liturgical belligerence as if the emphatic trumpeting of anti-Communism would suffice to make the walls come tumbling down'.¹² Instead, Kissinger's *détente* can be best summarised as an 'effort to resist expansionism and to keep open the option of historical evolution'.¹³ Although *détente* could lull the West into believing that competition might be over, Kissinger was convinced that domestic weaknesses and an increasingly hollow legitimacy made *détente* a higher risk for the Soviet Union.

Central for the development of 'desecuritisation' was yet another historical bet: German *Ostpolitik*.¹⁴ Whereas Kissinger's *détente* ultimately did not escape the primacy of military matters, as odd as this may be for a foreign minister (perhaps

⁸ Henry A. Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy: Three Essays* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1969): 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁰ Stanley Hoffmann, *Primacy or World Order: American Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1978).

¹¹ Henry A. Kissinger, *The Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little Brown, 1983), p. 243.

¹² Henry A. Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), p. 123.

¹³ Kissinger, *The Years of Upheaval*, p. 240.

¹⁴ Wæver, 'Securitization and desecuritization'.

less for a national security advisor), German *Ostpolitik* went a step further. Just like the Helsinki process, it truly tried to 'desecuritize' the Cold War divide in Europe. With the first left-liberal coalition in government in 1969, German foreign policy tried to decisively break with its previous strategy. The new Chancellor Willy Brandt had been former mayor of Berlin at the time the Berlin Wall was erected. It was obvious to all that the strategy of not recognising any country which would recognise the sovereignty of the GDR ('Hallstein' doctrine) and the FRG later joining NATO both increased the security and status of the FRG, but ended up hardening the division of Germany – and Europe.

Hence, the new government devised a series of measures which would allow a more reassuring stance to its Eastern neighbours and the Soviet Union, in exchange for which it would make the relations between the two parts of Germany an issue of diplomacy and politics rather than a strategic competition. It is here where Ole Wæver takes his practical inspiration for thinking beyond the bias of security discourse. The German government used diplomacy for confidence-building measures, which, in turn, was to allow diplomacy to find ways to establish a common language and de-escalate relations from purely military competition to political bargaining. These measures included most prominently the German signing of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the *Ost-Verträge*, that is, the recognition of the boundaries which were the result of the war and the 1945 Potsdam Conference. The bet here was that by accepting the borders, one would make them more permeable. Since all these concessions made it harder to insist that 'in the name of national security' no human contact could be allowed, i.e. since it undermined 'securitisation', it de-militarised domestic and international relations. Politics could find its role again and perhaps ultimately succeed in what Willy Brandt's adviser Egon Bahr had called 'change through rapprochement' ('Wandel durch Annäherung') in a 'policy of small steps' ('Politik der kleinen Schritte'). When Gorbachev eventually changed course, German *Ostpolitik* saw itself vindicated.

Hence, the fact that theorising starts with desecuritisation and German *Ostpolitik*, not with securitisation shows that for the theory, at least at the start, the main issue was not the identification of securitising actors, but the analysis of desecuritisating practices which would undermine the inherent bias of security discourses, hence reverse again the reversal of Clausewitz which was so typical of the Cold War. In the context of the Second Cold War and its demise, the approach was looking for ways to keep the bias of security discourses, their 'securitisation' of politics, at bay.

And that clearly relates this theory to the Peace Research tradition. In another key, it repeated the basic line of Peace Research, namely that the Cold War was only a necessity as long as people kept believing in its premises. Realist explanations of the Cold War were not just external observations of a reality given, but an intervention in that very political reality. If everyone believed in the law of the jungle and acted upon these beliefs, the world would look like a jungle. In short, the security discourse of the Cold War was a self-fulfilling prophecy, the

'Cold War was what we make of it'.¹⁵Peace Research was to expose this as a learning pathology in security discourses, and not a natural necessity, and to devise means to contain the inherent bias of the discourse of security. Politics had to regain its place.

2. The history of securitisation-discourses: The politics of security and its origins

As the first section showed, my understanding of securitisation theory is driven by the early practical inspiration. This has a series of implications. Most importantly, I see the performative component of securitisation theory (what security *does*) less as a single 'speech act' than as a long, developing process. Moreover, I see securitisation less as a kind of conspiratorial or elite manipulation than as the manifold processes that give prominence to the discourse of security (the reversal of Clausewitz) in public debate or diminish it, as in the processes of desecuritisation. This means that I see 'securitisation' not in the 'act' of those 'speaking' security, but in the possibly unintended and unconscious de-/mobilisation of the inherent logic, or grammar, of the discourse of security. This begs the question, however, of where the discourse of security would have gained its inherent logic from. It is here where a second necessary historicisation has to take place, not about the context of the theory itself, but about the content of its central concept.

What does security do? De-/securitisation as a process

Let me return to the central definition of security. According to the reference definition, securitisation is a successful speech act 'through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat'.¹⁶ Given the previous section, this definition needs some further analysis.

There is first the need to be clear about what is meant by 'intersubjective', since the definition is not that clear about it. It means something different from just 'common'. By approaching security as an intersubjective phenomenon, the Copenhagen School reacted to a deadlock in security studies. On the one side were those who argued that security was ultimately an objective phenomenon. Although actors may interpret phenomena differently, in the last resort, the nature of a threat would realise itself. A bomb is a bomb. Whether or not you see the wall,

¹⁵ For a more detailed argument, see Stefano Guzzini, 'The Cold War is what we make of it': when peace research meets constructivism in International Relations', in Stefano Guzzini and Dietrich Jung (eds), *Contemporary Security Analysis and Copenhagen Peace Research* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 40-52.

¹⁶ Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 491.

running against it will hurt. But that was insufficient to account for those relations where both sides (or more) would share a common understanding in which the bomb was no threat, as in relations of amity.¹⁷ Luxemburgers do not spend sleepless nights over French nuclear weapons (and not even about French tax-inspectors). Hence, and although this does not deny the potential relevance of the bomb as an instrument with mighty consequences when used, it does not have the same relevance in all relations in which it exists. Giving systematic priority to the inherent ('objective') qualities of a bomb for the analysis of its actual relevance was putting the cart in front of the horse; what decided its relevance were the political relations around it.

On the other hand, there were those who tried to approach security as something ultimately subjective: a threat was in the eye of the beholder, not in the weapon itself. Or, which amounts to the same thing, anything could be seen a vital threat – even if it were not a weapon, but simply some political move – if only one actor perceived it as such. Again, although there is surely an element of perception in the analysis of threats and the 'feeling' of security, a purely subjective definition of security seemed to elude the fact that not just any subjective perception 'goes'. Indeed, perhaps perceptions counted only if they were not purely subjective to start with. Only those perceptions were relevant which have been made possible by the shared understandings of the dominant discourses among foreign policy elites.¹⁸

Hence, the way forward was to look at those intersubjectively shared discourses to locate what security is, or rather, how an issue of security is constituted in the first place. The verbal form of security as 'securitising' is hence not just meant to suggest a kind of manipulative propaganda which produces a general or common understanding as the definition perhaps suggests (and as surely many researchers did). Securitisation is related to a unit of analysis which is neither objective, nor subjective, nor indeed the aggregation of different subjective understandings. Securitisation refers to a discursive level of foreign policy traditions whose ideational resources are mobilised to understand events.¹⁹ It is in this discursive mobilisation that such events can be constituted as threats, i.e. that 'securitisation' happens. This makes 'securitisation/desecuritisation' foremost a broad conceptual move for locating security at an intersubjective level.²⁰

¹⁷ Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962).

¹⁸ Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

¹⁹ See also Ole Wæver, 'Identity, communities and foreign policy: Discourse analysis as foreign policy theory', in Lene Hansen and Ole Wæver (eds), *European integration and national identity: The challenge of the Nordic states* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 20-49; Ole Wæver, 'European Integration and Security: Analysing French and German Discourses on State, Nation, and Europe', in David R. Howarth and Jacob Torfing (eds), *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 33-67.

²⁰ For an early analysis, see Jef Huysmans, 'Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier', *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1998), pp. 226-255.

Securitisation therefore broke with this potentially interminable security debate by proposing that security is understood not through its allegedly objective or subjective substance, but through the process of constituting what counts as security. Or put differently: the process of constitution was its (relevant) substance.

In this regard, it makes sense to look for the analysis of 'performatives', i.e. for the ways in which how we recount the world not only describes, but interacts with that very world. Our talking of security is part of the constitution of what counts as security. And here enters the idea of a 'speech act' and with it a particular way of framing the performative relation, which, as we will see below, may, however, end up distorting the initial practical inspiration.

Conceiving of security as a speech act is important, because it shows that the form/performance of security can be seen as the politically most relevant component of its content. However, it cannot show that this is all that there is to its content.²¹ For, unlike the original conception of a 'speech act', security speech does not in itself constitute the significant act, as does, for instance, a promise. Only in its most legal sense can security be empirically conceived of as a 'speech act' in terms of a single event. This rare case would apply to those moments where a formal national security speech constitutes a threat of war, an offer of peace or, paradigmatically, a declaration of war or surrender. Lawyers have little difficulty understanding the idea of a 'speech act', since they have defined the practical effects of such statements in laws or customs. However, this was never the case for the paradigmatic case from which securitisation – indeed desecuritisation – initially derived; German '*Ostpolitik*-isation' makes most sense as an ongoing *process*, not a single event.²²

Hence, for me, stressing the procedural character of the original securitisation analysis means that its performative component is simply part of an ongoing social construction of (social) reality. In this, securitisation refers to the successful mobilisation of the logic of the discourse of security, the reversal of Clausewitz, which allows extraordinary means, and desecuritisation refers to those processes that mobilise other discourses and diminish the role of the discourse of security, its successful demobilisation, if you wish. That means that all the discussions about the factors which are necessary to make securitisation successful are correct, but do not touch the underlying continuity and latent effect of such security discourses. That is, the discourse of security is stable; its (de)mobilisation is the variance in the study. Put more sharply: the discourse of security does securitisation, always; it is what defines it. But the discourse of security is not always mobilised or prevalent. It is a discursive resource for some. To have this capacity, however, it needs to be a constitutive component of the way of thinking and of legitimate politics for all.

²¹ See also Matt McDonald, 'Securitization and the construction of security', *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 14, no. 4 (2008), pp. 563-587.

²² For more about this argument, see Stefano Guzzini, 'Securitization as a causal mechanism', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 42, no. 4-5 (2011), pp. 329-341.

Security and legitimacy

So far, I have proposed conceiving of securitisation not as a speech act, but more generally as a performative process, and understanding (de)securitisation as the (de)mobilisation of a given security discourse that intervenes in our more general political discourse. In an empirical theory, that makes de-/securitisation akin to the analyses of causal mechanisms.²³ Causal mechanisms can be seen as ‘triggers’ whose conditions for functioning can be contingent, yet their effects known, or the other way round, their effects are contingent, although we know what pulled the trigger. But where does this trigger come from?

Again, it may be quite useful to return to the methodology of conceptual analysis. A constructivist conceptual analysis would include three steps.²⁴ A first step is about the often-contested meanings of a concept. The more abstract the concept and the more important it is in our scientific discourse, the higher the probability that its meaning is significantly affected by the theoretical context within which it is used. Power means different things within different theoretical and meta-theoretical settings, which is something conceptual analysis can lay bare, but not necessarily overcome (the problem of ‘explanatory perspectivism’). A second step consists in finding out whether the concept has a significant performative effect, whether its representations intervene in social reality. For the concept of power, I found this effect as derived from its close relationship to the very definition of politics. Invoking power mobilises a discourse in which an authority made visible needs to justify itself; power is connected to political responsibility and triggers a need for justification. A third step is then a conceptual history which develops why the particular performative practices around a concept could have acquired such a status over time. There is nothing inherent in ‘power’ to arrive at that. It depends on the political culture within which it has developed. For power, the crucial moment was the development of an empirical and not normative conception of politics.²⁵ Politics was no longer merely defined in terms of reaching the common good, but related to the idea of the ‘art of the possible’, a manipulative understanding which stresses possible agency and locates responsibility. Realising an ideal authority was no longer the end, but power became the mere means of ruling. This, however, did not cut the link between power and legitimacy; on the contrary, tying it to potential agency ‘personifies’ the power-responsibility link. It keeps mobilising a discourse of legitimisation whose rules, however, have moved over time with our political culture.

The parallel to security should be obvious. Also security is connected to the development of the *raison d’État*. In fact, it is closely connected to the evolution of the modern state. That the Copenhagen School insists so strongly on its statism

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Stefano Guzzini, ‘The concept of power: a constructivist analysis’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2005), pp. 495-522.

²⁵ This is conventionally anchored with Machiavelli. See Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte* (München: Oldenburg Verlag, 1957 [1924/29]).

makes little sense in terms of securitising actors, etc. But it has its history in the fact that asking someone to die for you in war demands extraordinary justification. After all, these are the ultimate extraordinary measures to which the theory relates.

It is this very particular state prerogative, and its justification, which is at the base of a specific discourse of legitimation which has come down to us as the discourse of security. The medieval state in Europe had already taken over a series of religious attributes in which sacralisation moved over to the King.²⁶ With the modern *levée en masse* and the 'democratisation' of warfare – less reliant on mercenaries and notables, both often prone to leave the battlefield when fortune turned – mass popular mobilisation asked for a different type of legitimation. The reference to, and glorification of, the nation provided this to some extent. It is hence only normal that securitisation in the name of the defence of the nation and its identity would come up as the second reference object of the theory initially run in parallel to the state before it became a mere sector of societal security.²⁷

But with the nation also came a further democratisation of politics in Europe. Our present discourses of legitimacy have become closely tied to the ideas of rights, either individual or (sometimes) collective. When ordinary politics are changing in such a way, extraordinary measures start with less than asking any citizen to die for their country. It can mean the suppression or at least suspension of basic rights or institutional norms and procedures for particular policies. The discourse of security, the invoking of the national or vital interest, still implies the reversal of Clausewitz and transfers a military logic into a purely Machiavellian understanding of politics where the overriding end justifies the means.²⁸ But it now does it in a different democratic context with different implications. The *raison d'État* can still be openly invoked or more surreptitiously mobilised for extraordinary consent, but principles of accountability and transparency have made it more visible, historically exposed and hence resisted. While the scope of the security discourse's applicability has grown bigger, its very status and logic has also become more contested in an ever-changing historical environment.

Such a historical understanding of (de)securitisation is also otherwise consequential. The Copenhagen School has been criticised for being basically still too conventional or realist in its reading of security, being connected to exceptional measures, done by foreign-policy elites, etc. But just as the increasing number of security sectors indicates, this is not to be understood as the 'essence' of

²⁶ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's two Bodies: a study of medieval political theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

²⁷ See respectively Ole Wæver, 'Societal security: the concept', in Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup and Pierre Lemaitre (eds), *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe* (London: Pinter, 1993), pp. 17-40; Ole Wæver, 'Insecurity and Identity Unlimited', CERL, Paris, 29-30 September 1994, 31 pp.; and then Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

²⁸ In this sense, indeed, the discourse of security is taking an issue out of regular politics. But that does not mean that the practices of de/mobilising this discourse are outside politics. At times, they may be the core of politics.

security, but rather as the effect of a historical development in which certain actors have traditionally come to be authorised to talk and effect war and peace in a 'realist' way.

This implies that, by reifying a historical moment into a general framework of analysis, securitisation theory may indeed help to reproduce such an understanding, although it does not need to.²⁹ In return, it implies, however, that if a different understanding of security (beyond the *raison d'État*) appears and becomes shared, the Copenhagen School will also have to adapt. Its conceptualisation is historically bound. If, for instance, our understanding of legitimacy changes, mobilising an old-fashioned discourse of security will not be the same trigger. In fact, looking at the ways the justification of extraordinary measures actually proceeds is a way of understanding the historical evolution of both the discourse of security and political legitimacy.

Finally, such a historicisation implies that the whole analysis only makes sense within the specific cultural contexts in which the performatives are realised. This is crucial for understanding the purpose and need of the present volume. Such necessary contextualisation applies already for the very discourse of security. Although it may indeed exist across several cultural contexts, and quite certainly within societies that evolved out of European or Western political culture, its content is necessarily diverse. The way historical developments have shaped the political discourse within a country is empirically variable and hence also the meaning and practices of security discourses, regular politics, extraordinary measures, and more generally political legitimacy. The historical path dependency needs to be elucidated within each (national) environment.

Moreover, in order to understand the chances of (de)mobilisation of such discourses, the analysis needs to investigate the local context. This includes the political economy of the production of security expertise, the media system, the political system and its cleavages, as well as the collective memory of lessons learnt, which is the depository of interpretative resources and identity discourses.³⁰ Also, the other way round, by analysing successful (de)securitisations in the political discourse and practices, one can make inferences into the real existing practices of legitimation in a particular country. If the Copenhagen School is applied as if it had developed case-independent generic scope conditions for (de)securitisation, in my opinion, this misses the point, even if the original formulation can be understood that way.³¹ Instead the discourse of security and the analysis of its (de)mobilisation, i.e. (de-)securitisation, are meant to provide a

²⁹ Jef Huysmans has repeatedly cautioned against these reflexive effects from early on e.g. Jef Huysmans, 'Migrants as security problem: dangers of "securitising" societal issues', in Robert Miles and D. Thränhardt (eds), *Migration and European Integration: the Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion* (London: Pinter, 1995), pp. 53-72. He has also insisted on exposing the historicity of Schmitt's approach to the exception in the discussion of contemporary security. See, for example, Jef Huysmans, 'International politics of insecurity: Normativity, inwardness and the exception', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2006), pp. 11-29 (23).

³⁰ Guzzini (ed.), *The return of geopolitics in Europe? Social mechanisms and foreign policy identity crises*.

³¹ I am still indebted to Ludvig Norman for stressing this aspect.

focus for an empirically contextualised analysis to explain the political dynamics, threat constructions and hence discursive processes in the first place. And from here, we also get the first material for the understanding of Regional Security Complexes, since they are resultant of different securitisation processes, be they at the national or inter/transnational level. Securitisation theory should be used as a way to understand the national and regional specificities of discursive processes of political legitimation, compare them and/or bring them together for the understanding of regional security dynamics. In other words, the general approach can be made to travel also in different environments from where it originated, but the actual content of legitimation processes and mobilised threat constructions (whether intended or even conscious or not) needs to be established case by case.

Conclusion

The Copenhagen School began with desecuritisation, and with the concern during the Second Cold War of a renewed mobilisation of the logic of discourse of security, which is characterised by reversing Clausewitz' famous maxim. Thinking securitisation in parallel to desecuritisation implies, or so I argue, that both have to be understood as processes. They are truly performative in that the way we practise (and talk) security is part and parcel of its very constitution; but it is perhaps not best described as a 'speech act'. In what I believe to be faithful to the spirit of much early writings in the School, I rather conceptualise (de)securitisation as that process in which the discourse of security is (de)mobilised. Hence, whereas the discourse of security does indeed evacuate the political by allowing extraordinary measures, the (de)mobilisation of that discourse is highly political, in fact, as central to the definition of politics as it can be. For it contributes to the definition of the boundaries of what counts as legitimate.

This discourse has acquired this special place in our more general political discourse by being the heir to the tradition of the *raison d'État*. And so, a second historicisation must insist that the way it functions today is both temporally and culturally bound and variable. The ever-expanding components of legitimacy in democratic societies and the very understanding of what extraordinary measures could or could not entail make the discourse of security historically contingent, as are all the factors which make certain (de)mobilisations of this discourse more successful in some contexts than others: threat (de)constructions are embedded in and need to resonate with collective memories and the lessons of the past. Against the background of specific political processes, the content and dynamics of (de)securitisation can be understood; in return, analysing (de)securitisation also reveals a crucial part of national political processes and their regional/international relations.

This is one of the tasks of the present volume. Like any theoretical enterprise, 'securitisation theory' asks for an internal check of its coherence. Yet, my insistence on its particular dual history aims to show that the theory is particularly sensitive to context and time or change. This kind of framework needs to be

applied and re-thought through its empirical applications. An application of the theory in realms in which it was not initially conceived, as here mainly to the European south and South America, provides the context to find out whether the logic of security discourses 'travels', i.e. how potentially different discourses of security are constituted. Moreover, examining such empirical analyses outside the initial cases from which the theory derived assesses how processes of (de)mobilisation of security discourses can differ from one country to another. In other words, the contextualisation allows the potentially different logic/grammar of security discourses and the varied ways of mobilising them to be double checked. If securitisation is seen as a causal mechanism, then this can be viewed as the theoretically necessary research which specifies possible conditions for the mechanism to come into being.

But the present volume can also be seen as an invitation to pursue a second way to use 'securitisation theory'. Besides analysing the national processes to elucidate the way the theory functions, an application of the theory to the national context can help provide an understanding of how the discourse of politics functions in different countries. Processes of securitisation are coupled with understandings of what defines and divides the realms of normal and exceptional politics. Such analysis is thus evidently pertinent in countries which have had a large military tradition – where the reversal of Clausewitz' dictum was the rule not the exception – which potentially still informs their process of democratisation. The study of security is part of our political discourse. Precisely because such discourse is not confined to purely military matters or foreign affairs, the theory also has application to and implications for domestic politics. Studying the specificity of national and regional political discourses allows theorising the ways security discourses are (de)mobilised; in return, the ways security discourses are empirically (de)mobilised allows national or (regional) conceptions of politics to be specified. This book is the start of such a dual endeavour.

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