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## **The limits of securitization: its ambiguous stances and the meta-theoretical impossibility of ecologism**

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# Master Thesis International Relations

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**“The limits of securitization: its ambiguous stances and the meta-theoretical impossibility of ecologism”**

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## Introduction

In recent years “environmental” concerns appear to get traction in the public debate and, more interestingly, in the realm of ‘high-politics’. Climate change and its corollaries, such as the increased level of extreme weather events, loss of biodiversity, or direct harm to human and non-human entities, have become increasingly difficult to deny or ignore for global powers as the former unleashes its first social and ecological effects. As a result, academics, political elites, and broadly civil society participants are forced to imagine and coordinate new economic and political paradigms to avoid environmental havoc.

Meanwhile, there is a growing concern about a global movement to authoritarianism, symbolized by the growth of political parties at the radical-right or far right, the recurrence in democracies to an ever-growing use of the ‘state of exception’ (see Agambem, 2004) or even the farce historical return of inter-state wars in Europe. Particularly, a lack of political imagination (see Fisher, 2009), Nietzschean nihilism and uncertainty, collude into a general state of pessimism and generalized fear to challenge the ‘there is no alternative’ mantra.

In this context, it is only understandable the ‘obsessionism’ with security during the last two decades (particularly in English-written literature or Europe), that led to a wide popularization of terms such as ‘securitization’, ‘human security’ or ‘collective security’.

Within this profuse terminology, probably in Europe, the most influential theory to understand, think and analyze security, has been the so-called securitization theory, initially developed by the Copenhagen School (CS). Its originality was rooted, curiously enough, in the explicit promise of renouncing to describe security as a quintessential given reality, security in its “pure form”, or the true account of security. Instead, it aimed to treat it fundamentally as a political reality, both performative of a new kind of politics (the realm of security) and constructed by social actors (Buzan et. al., 1998, Waever, 1989, 1995).

Since its creation in the 1990s, the theory had to prove its validity, practicability and explanatory power, against an array of different “security issues,” such as immigration, terrorism, or increasingly the anthropogenetic concerns of climate change, pollution or resource depletion.

This essay is intended to assess, given the high-stake and the severity of environmental problems, and the recurrent importance of hybrid conceptualizations such as “environmental securitization”, to what extent using securitization theory to approach “environmental security concerns” is convenient. Hence, what are the epistemological, political and theoretical limitations of the framework and how it is able to engage with the main discourses, ideas and core problems of human-made environmental degradation. Therefore, the proposed research question will be, in a clearer way:

*Q1: Is securitization a convenient framework to study the implications of climate change and other anthropogenetic environmental issues in Security Studies?*

To accomplish that objective, the present essay will be divided into a series of chapters. Chapter I will briefly give a broader context of the theoretical context wherein securitization developed and describe the main assumptions, grammars and concepts of securitization theory, particularly in its canonical Copenhagen School formulation. Chapter II will deal with the major sources of ambiguity and contradictions of securitization theory, with the aim to demarcate what securitization theory really is and the major sources of disagreement between the researchers and political thinkers; alongside two major axes of discussion: essentialism-constructivism and contextualism- universalism. Chapter III will outline the main methodological conundrums securitization theory faces, in order to grasp the practical dilemmas of the framework and prepare for the eventual practice of a securitization analysis. In Chapter IV, it will be claimed that securitization, in fact assumes a particular liberal ontology and despite its diversity, it meta-theoretically constrains the political game in a manner that leaves out one of the big discourses confronting anthropogenetic natural degradation, ecologism. Finally, in Chapter 5, a case-study will be carried on the issue of deforestation (previously almost non-explored by Securitization Theory), as a way to illustrate and further analyze how the meta-theoretical limitations of the framework are impacting the possibilities of research and its arguable political implications beyond the field of Security Studies.

## **I. Literature Review: Security Studies and the Irruption of ‘Securitization’.**

### *The Why of Securitization: A Tale of Wideners vs. Narrower*

In order to clarify what is going to be understood as securitization during the development of this work and understand why securitization theory ‘justified itself’ in the first place, I will initiate the line of argumentation by providing briefly some comments about the political and theoretical context in which securitization emerged.

The 1980s, amidst the dissolution of a bipolar international world, established a revival of a renewed interest sprouted in the field of International Relations and Security Studies<sup>1</sup>, about the ontological character of security. Obviously, security was already a central political concept in Western thought, as Dillon (1996) argued, intimately linked to widespread philosophical desires of metaphysical certitude or, even more politically grandiosely, declared as the pre-condition for politics and sovereignty (Hobbes, 2017). Humbler associations within the study of IR tacitly linked implicit accounts of security with the survival of the nation, the state, and military threats, without further philosophical grounding. However, the development of alternative conceptual notions of security, that is, the debate about what security is or is not (ontology of security), its referent object (who is ‘secured’, who or what is the security agent, hence, which political actor is able to provide security or secure the referent object) ; or what are the meaningful threats one should consider in a comprehensive security analysis, only started to be exhaustively discussed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (see among others Buzan et. al., 1998, Smith, 1999).

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<sup>1</sup> A revival that affected to the field of Security Studies as a whole (see Walt, 1991), after a decade of decay that started in the mid-60s, where the scholarly production heavily contracted.

Departing from a previous tacit consensus in IR where security was merely implicitly taken as security of a state against the armed threat of other states.<sup>2</sup> One of the biggest debates emerged around the so-called ‘wideners’ and the ‘narrowers’. The former ones defended an extended research agenda and a ‘wider’ concept of security, including dimensions traditionally neglected in Security Studies, such as non-state actors (like the individual or the region), a non-militaristic thematic agenda (accepting economic, social, and environmental sectors and threats as part of the analysis and concept of security) and diversifying the methodological approaches in research.

The traditionalists or narrowers, often departing from the more traditional realist or neo-positivist theoretical perspectives, argued against these new ‘broadening’ trends in the discipline. They aimed to caution of the possible loss of analytical of a too-stretched concept of security, the potential loss of policy applicability of the field (thus, compromising its usefulness for the wider public), and a potential loss of focus on the considered most relevant dimensions of Security Studies, the military and strategic studies (Baldwin, 1997, Paris, 2001). The two antagonizing positions are, to some extent, merely simplified archetypes. Most of the authors did not commit to a blind defense of a broad or narrow understanding of security. They did instead concede that either wideners had contributed decidedly to the revival of Security Studies by stimulating and fostering new scholarly discussions or that narrowers were not wrong about the need of establishing certain conceptual limits to security. Indeed, a too-broad, widely encompassing notion of security, irrespectively of its normative desirability, risked losing empirical applicability and colluding with other significant concepts in the social sciences such as welfare or justice (Baldwin, 1997, Smith, 1999, Paris, 2001).

The so-named Copenhagen School offered a possible third way, with its theory of securitization, that deemed, on the one hand, to elude the problem of the limits and conceptual extension of security while, on the other hand, effectively permitting a change in the militaristic and state-centric paradigm of orthodox or strict Security Studies. Buzan et al.

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<sup>2</sup> A major exception to this trend may be the anarchist and Marxist traditions that saw the working class, as the preeminent historical referent object of security, threatened both by the capitalist economic forces and the bourgeoisie-controlled state apparatus (see among others Bakunin,2020, Marx,2019).



(1998) or Waever (1989,1995) notably influenced a turn from an understanding of security as a given external reality, as a thing (onthos), that either the researcher had to discern carefully and then apply to understand the world or in the case of orthodox realists (merely use as a given already-established epistemological category), towards a new emphasis of security as a constructed reality.

Security was, therefore, or at least securitization processes (the discursive political use of security), conceived as an inter-subjectively, thus socially constructed reality. Therefore, the researcher should not primarily aspire to define foremost what security is or distinguish the fundamental objective threats against a referent object of security but should pay particular attention to the processes, framings, and political consequences of ‘using’ security (see Buzan et. al., 1998). Additionally, the intrinsically explicit character of a speech act emplaces the community of researchers to study what is being said by the relevant actors instead of tackling or discerning the murky shadows of ‘objective interests’ (see Waever, 1995).

However, the emergence of an array of different publications and empirical studies on ‘securitization’, particularly in Critical Security Studies, has diversified and broadened the initial proposals and objectives of the research (not without controversy). Thus, despite the original input of the CS, centered on the works of Weaver (1989,1995) and Buzan et. al. (1998), it may not be correct anymore to write about a grand theory of securitization. Instead, ‘securitization’ can be described as a strand of diverse but connected readings of security (see Balzacq et al., 2015, 2016) that, it could be argued, mainly have in common their belonging to the inter-disciplinary agendas of constructivism (security as a socially constructed phenomenon, and often in conflict with the former; security as a performative concept), their engagement with a particular set of categories, and their refusal to defend security as a intrinsically desirable good.

### *Securitization: a brief outline*

Beyond its biggest theoretical compromises and innovative epistemic ambitions. Securitization can also be characterized through its linguistic component, the speech-act<sup>3</sup>,

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<sup>3</sup> A term originally created in Austin’s (1975), theory of language.

which differentiates “securitization” from other approaches, by highlighting how “security”, can change context and politics just by its mere utterance (it “does” by merely saying it). Besides that, each securitization process/act is differentiated from other ‘securitization’ processes through its concrete discursive ‘actors’ and its particular object (empirically circumstantial and not essentially given). The use of the linguistic resource of the speech act is intended to highlight the self-referentiality of the securitizing move (whose utterance changes or is aimed to change the political field wherein an issue is ‘played’). Nonetheless, securitization is not merely the speech act itself (that is only the initial move)<sup>4</sup>, but it also encompasses the acceptance or assent of the speech act of a relevant audience to be successful (see Buzan et. al. ,1998, 25).

Nonetheless, according to the CS, not all speech-acts are to be deemed as “securitization” moves-acts but merely those, that additionally, adequate to a certain “security” phraseology, characterized by “the designation *an existential threat (by whichever political actor), requiring emergency action or special measures, and the acceptance of that designation by a significant audience (consent of the audience)*” (Buzan et. al., 1998, 27). Thus, the securitizing speech act is necessarily recognizable by its existential dramatism (a matter of survival), an appeal to urgency, and openness to ‘non-normal politics’, (e.g., a state of exception in Agamben’s, 2003, terminology), aimed to be justified by the beforementioned threat to existence and the temporal dimension of emergency. Moreover, it claims a certain constructivist perspective and inter-subjectivity by including the role of the audience in the formulation.

Once the concrete speech-act is identified and it meets the necessary security phraseology, it is possible to identify the three main groups of actors and units of analysis within the securitization framework:

- *The securitizing actor*: that is, the one that starts the process of securitization (declaring something existentially threatened) and without whose initial opening of

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<sup>4</sup> With the exception, perhaps of its more radically post-structuralists interpretations, when perhaps as Balzacq (2005) or Stritzel (2007) seem to argue, the audience is not really there, or it is not in practice incorporated to the securitization move.

- the speech-act; the process of securitization could not be “opened”; for instance, the state, a private firm, or a regional supra-national political entity, a national society...
- *The audience*: that must accept (or reject) to some extent the securitization act, its justificatory logic, and particular grammar, and on whose acceptance lays the success or failure of the process, its empirical representation is heterogeneous, ranging from the general public in a particular democratic state, a global audience or perhaps, the most powerful individuals within the armed forces.
  - *The functional actors*: “Actors who affect the dynamics of a sector. Without being the referent object or the actor calling for security on behalf of the referent object, this is an actor who significantly influences decisions in the field of security. A polluting company, for example, can be a central actor in the environmental sector—it is not a referent object and is not trying to securitize environmental issues (quite the contrary)” (Buzan et al., 1998, 36). However, this group of actors or agents in the communicative relationship appear almost as a relevant outsider, an external influence of the fundamental dyadic dialectic between securitizing actor and the audience.

Besides the actors and subjects of the securitization process; we could identify linguistically its object, which is called the referent object of ‘securitization’. This is the considered passive entity of the communicative relationship and the thing or reality aimed to be ‘secured’. In its contemporary form, it is usually a human collective (see Buzan et. al. ,1998), for instance, a state, a nation, a society, or a group of people. However, it can also be an impersonal entity, particularly concerning our purposes, the environment, nature, the biosphere, or even the non-human living creatures.

Tantamount to the interest in securitization that effectively changed the relevant terms of discussion within Security Studies is the idea of ‘de-securitization’. The term directly denotes the contrary of securitization explicitly. However, its meaning and consequences are not as clearly established (see Balzacq et al., 2016). Arguably, it describes a process of ‘recovery’, ‘loss of saliency’, or new political logic that was dealt with through special measures and outside the rules and processes of ‘normal politics’ again back to normality (re-politicization) or even further into oblivion (de-politicization) (see Buzan et. al., 1998, Waever, 1995,

Huysman, 1998). Trying to pin down its meaning further, McDonald (2012) defends a common understanding underneath more descriptive or normatively charged terms, thus, securitization would be mainly the grammar that places issues outside security-defense logic. Nonetheless, the debate has been more disputed lately by outlining potential risks of de-securitization (by reducing the emphasis on a sector or threat), sometimes prompting a problematic loss of saliency, for instance, in the domain of violence against women (see MacKenzie, 2009) or HIV (Elbe, 2009), the practical and logical barriers to de-securitization of specific security issues (Donnelly, 2017, Roe, 2004) or by denying altogether the inherent negativity of security grammars (Nunes, 2012, or broadly the Welsh School, e.g., Booth, 1991).

## **II. Ambiguities in the framework: a dyadic re-structuring of the contemporary debates.**

After a brief contextualization of the current security debates and a review of the ‘traditional’ categories, theoretical assumptions, and logic of the securitization framework, I will deal with the ambiguities, contradictions, and main lines of criticism between the scholars that have engaged with the CS. These divergences and conflicts ‘within’ the securitization theoretical underpinnings are, to some extent, a necessary consequence of existent ambiguities that lay on its theoretically conflicted foundations (considering here as such the CS’ ones), its methodological aspects, and the lack of clarity/intrinsic vagueness of some of the key concepts. I claim that the substantive differences could be understood through a scheme structured alongside two central broad philosophical binary positions: essentialism-constructivism and universalism-contextualism.

This present chapter will try, thus, to assess the ambiguities and demarcate the theoretical extension and range of the securitization framework (what is discussed, said, and assumed within the securitization scholar) by the proposed new two-folded structure. The aim is to provide a solid grasp on the discussions to then, in the following structures, delve deeper into what ‘securitization’ cannot say or does obscure (what leaves necessarily at the margins).

### *Essentialism-Constructivism*

Arguably the most prominent ambiguity of securitization theory comes from a stark tension between the discursive and constructive aspirations of securitization, where security is constructed by words and a communicative process, and it is not an ex-ante ontological reality, and the CS’ essentialist formal structure of security.

Indeed, this apparent contradiction is already present in Buzan et. al. (1998,35) when they claim: “*objective security assessment is beyond our means of analysis; the main point is that actors and their audiences securitize certain issues as a specific form of political act. Actors who securitize do not necessarily say 'Security,' nor does their use of the term security necessarily always constitute a security act*”, despite arguing that “*in any case, it is neither*

*politically nor analytically helpful to try to define “real security” outside of the world of politics and to teach the actors to understand the term correctly... The distinction between subjective and objective is useful for highlighting the fact that we want to avoid a view of security that is given objectively and emphasize that security is determined by actors and in this respect is subjective. The label subjective, however, is not fully adequate. Whether an issue is a security issue is not something individuals decide. Securitization is subjective and socially constructed.” (1998, 31).*

Here, the puzzle is self-evident. On the one hand, securitization posits a universal and objective security/securitization logic that permits the analyst to talk about security or securitization, even when the relevant securitizing actor does not mention ‘security’, or reject ‘security’, even when political actors mention explicitly ‘security’ (emphasizing aprioristic ideas of and an alleged self-referentiality of securitization). On the other hand, it explicitly rejects security as something ‘*given objectively*’, ending up defining securitization as an intersubjective construction (emphasizing the dyadic communicative process between the securitizing actor and the audience).

If these ideas are considered analytically, we are open with three main logical possibilities to solve the textual conundrum:

- a) Security is an intersubjective practice, so the relevant political agents and, broadly, the context determines what security is. Therefore, they have epistemic primacy over the researcher and the own CS’ definitions of security (see Ciuta, 2009).
- b) Security is a partially objective reality, described by an essentialist grammar of securitization (special measures, decisionism, existential threats, audience...), and perhaps, mainly if we follow the works of Wæver (1989,1995), intrinsic performativity and self-referentiality (by ‘saying’ security or using the grammars of security, the political play-field is challenged and potentially changed). The who, what, why, where, and when of security still remain politically contested (but do not enjoy analytical primacy)<sup>8</sup>.
- c) Security is an ineffable concept or reality (or in a more radically post-structuralist venue that ‘objective’ reality does not exist), meaning that any human language cannot express its core or typical ontological structure or that, at least here, it is not the practical concern of the CS’ research agenda (that is concerned exclusively with the practical outcomes of using security, its self-referentiality). Hence the framework of securitization is merely used because

of its 'utility', or more vaguely 'practicality' both at an internal (sufficient analytical clarity to be used in empirical studies) and an external dimension; as it may 'enlighten' the decisions of political actors (in a broad sense, although political elites are the ones often stressed) by highlighting the potential trade-offs of 'securitization' an issue (and thus attributing responsibility to the discursive choices of different actors) or due to its capabilities to understand how security, politics, and communication are interacting in practical terms and perhaps, create the theoretical conditions to challenge the security discourses of the dominant 'securitizing actors'.

In any case, the tensions between essentialism and constructivism are partially unsolved. The possibility a) seems to be aimed directly as the most desirable in opposition to a realist understanding of security (see Waeber, 1995, Buzan et. al., 1998). However, it is left unexplained why security in the securitization framework was associated pre-politically with the Schmittean terminologies of existential threat, survival, the necessary appeal to extraordinary measures in any speech act (see Ciuta, and Trombetta, Balzacq, 2005) or the self-referentiality of the securitizing speech-act. However, b) it is relatively at odds with the defended aim of changing the debate about the conceptualizations of security by re-introducing realist terminologies again and diminishing the theoretical importance promised to the audience and a more inter-subjective, contextually-sensitive theoretical construction. C) is probably the most nuanced logical conclusion that is left to tackle the dilemma. Functionality-Practicality is also arguably one of the biggest strengths of the theory of securitization over other conceptualizations of security. Nevertheless, this emphasis on 'practical or functional value' may beget undesirable managerial understandings of security studies; wherein the political dimensions are obscured, and the intrinsic and perhaps necessary agonistic political debate (see Mouffe, 2000) that security implies is reduced to positivist rationales of utility maximization and technical bargaining between experts.

### *Contextualism-Universalism*

Moreover, CS' securitization, as it has been argued by Ciută (2009), Balzacq (2005) or Balzacq et. al. (2015, 2016), has showcased, in parallel, a particular ambiguity surrounding

its positions on the debates around universalism and contextualism<sup>5</sup>. At first glance, the canonical theory on securitization, as depicted in Buzan et. al. (1998), promises a context-sensitive framework by outlining the empirical divergence of referent objects, threats, or sectors, that broadens in practice, what security means, in comparison with previous militaristic-defense definitions of security. Furthermore, it seems to be aware (although this is sometimes lost in empirical studies or following reflections) of the importance that the context owes internally (the influence of structures of powers to make a successful securitizing move, the relevance of the beliefs of a concrete audience, the linguistic competence of the speaker...), at least to summon the required ‘felicity conditions’ (conditions necessary to make the ‘speech act’ a success). This is as well appreciated in the interest to get “securitization” outside of Europe (after a more provincialist start, wherein the empirical discussions are centered on European matters. Scholar soon will rectify and increasingly is aim to stretch the domain of application, also towards the non-Western and non-democratic polity (see Vuori, 2008 and Tickner and Waever, 2009).<sup>6</sup> There is an argument, therefore, to defend that securitization, at least mildly, aspires to embrace the relevance of context<sup>7</sup>, portraying contextual circumstances as analytically necessary to comprehend the empirical ‘felicity conditions’ (see Balzacq, 2005) and as a broadeners of the categories of security.

Nonetheless, the empirical vocation and aim of context-sensitivity, is again at odds with the non-contextual framework of Schmittean grammars (special measures, urgency, existential dimension of threats or alleged politically exclusionary effects).<sup>8</sup> This has led to a confrontation between those who, implicitly, defend the universalism of ex ante

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<sup>5</sup> Something that Balzacq (2005), claims as being linked to the theoretical ambiguity (and untenable position according to him) of the ‘speech act’, defended by the CS in their wording, both an illocutionary (so security is self-referential practice, something is done only by saying ‘security’) and a perlocutionary (centered on the effect of saying security) views on security.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth of mention that in fact, securitization theory has its theoretical predecessor in the studies and conceptualization on regional security complexes, which through its inherent focus on regional context, was already pointing out to a desire for more contextually sensitive paradigms (see Buzan et. al., 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Other authors such as Vuori (2004), while attacking the Euro-centric empirical emphasis of the first studies on securitization, did not fully refused to defend an alternative universalistic conception of security, but attempted to find this outside Schmittean grammars, in this case by claiming that security is always attached to the pursuit and maintainment of legitimacy, by the relevant political actors. To some extent, similar conclusions are also reached in Baysal (2020), through a different argumentation.

<sup>8</sup> That according to Waever (2007) is not possible to eliminate from the theory of securitization.



categorizations of security (see Buzan et. al., 1998, Waever, 2007)<sup>9</sup> and those who outline the need to further the contextualism of securitization (e.g., Ciută, 2009, Balzacq, 2005, Stritzel, 2007), thus taking contextualism more seriously with more radical theoretical implications.

Ciută (2009), or even Trombetta (2008)<sup>12</sup>, have argued for a sort of agency-driven, contextualist account of security, departing from the belief that it is necessary to privilege, both from epistemic and ethical reasons, a view on security that cares about the different conceptions, effects, and discourses that actors develop in different contexts, without presupposing a determined internal logic. Thus, they advocate understanding security through the political context and actors (what they do with security, for security, and what they mean by security) and not to pre-conceptualize security and securitization and then merely identify similar patterns in a compilation of different empirical cases. This does not necessarily mean, per Ciută (2009, 320-324), that security could mean anything (something improbable due to the practical limitations of actors in a context of increasingly globalized politics) or that the objective is to defend a boundless notion of security. In fact, it is arguably intended to explore the boundaries and horizons of what different actors, in a different context, defend or practice as 'security' (whilst negating the possibility of an aprioristic and de-contextualized logic of security).

Coming from a similar contextualist perspective, Balzacq (2005), Balzacq et. al. (2016), or McDonald (2008); urge to incorporate context in a broad sense (the world 'outside'/'beyond'/'prior' to the securitizing speech act<sup>12</sup>) to the securitization framework. However, context, in a broad sense, is unsatisfactorily depicted in the latter as a set of circumstances, mere intervening variables, or as facilitating conditions by the CS (see Balzacq et. al., 2016, McDonald, 2008). According to Balzacq (2005) and McDonald (2008), this showcases a lack of theoretical development in those domains, the needs to be rectified in order to address how this external context directly conditions (as an extreme possibility),

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<sup>9</sup> Whose 'imposed' pragmatic universalism is fiercely criticized by Howell and Richter Montpetit (2020), as it is directly characterized for its Euro-centric understandings of security and politics and arguably, methodological whiteness; by not addressing explicitly race, mobilizing racial imaginaries (a normal and desired politicized European order against an anarchic non-Western World) and by virtue of his historical blindness.

or at least heavily influence, what can or cannot be securitized or viewed as a threat, why or why not the relevant political actors in the securitization process choose or reject a specific discursive strategy, how the securitization process is temporally carried out, or even why the audience is keen to accept, assent or oppose a concrete security construction. To summarize this position, context should not be regarded as a disturbing empirical factor or the secondary explicative device in the securitization theory. Instead, it should be addressed as a fundamental and constitutive part of the securitization process.

The last central strand of contextualist criticism against the CS' securitization framework comes from the perception that the framework unfairly establishes a historically de-contextualized *tabula rasa*, incapable of taking into account the normative implications of historical legacies of oppression, discrimination, or colonialism and that simultaneously seems to replicate imagery and binarism coming or reinforcing colonialist perspectives of the world (see Howell and Richter Montpetit, 2020 or Bertrand, 2018). Consequently, in recent years, the securitization paradigm has had to deal with accusations of civilizationism, racial blindness, and pro-Western rhetoric. Specifically, the main critique here comes from the lack of acknowledgment of the CS securitization framework to address the structures of power and communicative process, thereby failing to grasp and indeed perpetuating) how analytical categories contribute to reinforcing past racist-colonialist stereotypes and rationales (Howell and Richter Montpetit, 2020, Hansen, 2020, or concerning environmentalist and post-humanist debates on security; Grijalva-Maza, 2021).

Besides the more explicitly ethical and post-colonial critique of securitization theory, it is also a matter of debate how much securitization deals with temporality and historical context, as a result of the shallow entanglement of historicity in the framework of the CS, where contextual historicity seems to initially not to mean analytically much more than an *atrezzo* or intervening variable within each particular securitization process. To be clear here, Buzan et. al. (1998, 59); explicitly claims, for instance, that “*a number of variables other than military capability can play a significant role in the establishment (or not) and maintenance of military securitization; the principal ones are geography, history, and politics*”. But as it is suggested in Donnelly and Steele (2019), second-generation scholars do not only seek to understand the historical context when the securitization succeeds (as a way to explain this)

but instead go beyond that by exploring “*any and every context in which (de)securitisation is contested, negotiated, imagined, visualised, and resisted*” (216). Indeed, Donnelly and Steele (2019, 217) propose to extend the historical inquiry to recognize the extremely temporally diffused patterns of securitization and de-securitization (see also McDonald, 2008). Furthermore, they seek to analyze the implications of ritualistic forms of reenactment or re-engagement with securitization processes and rationales (sometimes in heavily institutionalized forms), even when the securitization of an issue has already been ‘declared’ to be over. Hence, the “historical contextualists” defend a vision of securitization that is less ‘magical’ (abruptly immediate) or temporally exhaustive (since it does not usually have a clear-cut beginning or end) but that instead is understood as a practice embedded in a particular history and, at the same time, happens to be the outcome of concurrent historical developments through a certain period of time.

Concluding we can re-group into three groups the main concerns of the ‘contextualists’ regarding the CS theorization, which is accused of:

- 1) an unjustified lack of care about the actual positions and uses of political actors in their context (by instead privileging an alleged universality of the Schmittean grammars),
- 2) being insensitive to or negligently undertheorize the effects of the ‘non-discursively constructed dimensions of the world’ (e.g. physical laws, environmental disasters, diseases...) <sup>12</sup>, or context in a broader socio-political and socio-linguistic sense (for instance, the linguistic competence of the authors, relevant power structures, legality, the existence of institutions...) and how both condition, impact and promote (de)securitization processes (and its resistance, counter-securitization movements...) <sup>13</sup> or the attitudes of the audience towards their evaluations of threats (and also often, of political leaders) and lastly
- 3) in concrete, a shallow understanding and engagement with historical process and, largely, temporality (both due to ethical and epistemic concerns).

As it was briefly considered before, the first moments of securitization in the initial works of Waeber (1989, 1995), highlining the text and its qualities without much concern for the context, are then discarded towards a more context-sensitive approach in Buzan et. al. (1998); *Security: A new framework for analysis*, that has been discussed here much more extensively <sup>12</sup>. On the one hand, this increased tension prompted securitization and served to

cater support and critiques to the new proposed reading of security. Nonetheless, it has obviously led to an important discussion and critique of that half-baked theoretical compromise. Indeed, in practice, securitization studies are forced to navigate those contradictions between a framework that promises a total synthesis between constructivism and universalism while pretending to preserve context-sensitivity and without renouncing to classically essentialists and traditional understandings of security as a given pre-political logic (particularly with the enmeshment of Schmittean grammars).

### **III. Preliminary methodological reflections: the method, the speech-act, epistemic concerns.**

Following the previous chapter, where a dyadic framework was proposed to understand the range of the main debates within and against the securitization framework, it is necessary, as well to deal with certain methodological considerations, with the objective of furthering into the main dilemmas the literature has found, when securitization is applied to real case scenarios and prepare the methodological foundations to design *a posteriori* our proposed case-study in Chapter V.

In its CS traditional outline of the securitization theory, discourse analysis was intimately associated with the framework as a privileged analytical resource that could promise to apply the theoretical insights of Waever and Buzan to an array of empirical cases. Methodologically, this had all the sense given the primacy that theorists had given to discourse, particularly speech acts (in their oral or written versions)<sup>12</sup>. Williams (2003) notoriously was one of the first voices to reject this narrow focus on speech on securitization theory by affirming that it is not possible anymore in the 21st century, to ignore the primacy or at least saliency of the visual aspects in the communication processes. Thereby, Hansen (2010, 2011) attempted to establish a theoretical framework to include further the analysis of visual representations in the framework of securitization. However, particularly in discussion with the last article arose a substantial controversy between ‘securitization scholars’ on how independent images can become from the textual-spoken signs and how they contribute to shaping discourses and the perceptions of threats in its terms. Hansen (2011) was moderate in her approach by preserving a central connotative role to the text and speech as fundamental tools to study the decoding of visual representations. In opposition to this, Heck and Schlag (2012) have conveyed, through a more radical perspective, towards a more extensive autonomy of the visual aspects (by virtue of their unequal ability to metaphorically speaking security), or even pointing out a primacy of the visual aspects in communication.

The conversation is obviously not a novelty in the broader visual and communication studies field. In fact, Stuart Hall (1980,1997) did already theorize, through an analysis of the

decoding and encoding processes between TV broadcasters and their audience and the visual representations of mass media, about the relative autonomy of visual imaginary. Although for Hall, neither the image nor the text was autonomous from the social context (cultural hegemony). There was always a 'space' open for the audience to decode (interpret or extract connotation from a message). A "left out" space, that offered the possibility of political alternative, collective action or dissent against the context of the dominant or preferred readings of both text, visual representations and visuals supported by text (that are characterized for a more consolidated or 'fixed' denotative and connotative dimensions).

Beyond the 'visual' criticisms of the dominant role that speech has in securitization that seems to forget the undeniable visibility of current mass communication, some authors (see Hansen, 2000, Guillaume, 2018, Hirschauer, 2020) have expressed concern<sup>12</sup> about the power inequalities that, in some contexts, are embedded in speech. Through this understanding, they claimed that speaking is sometimes a matter of privilege and silence imposed as the only communicative alternative to the oppressed (see Hansen, 2000). Thus, this must be taken into account to unhinge its connotations of resilience and resistance (Guillaume, 2018) and its connections to structuralized political inequalities. Thus, they have argued for the connotative value of silence, that it is not only understood by Hansen (2000) as a negation or absence of speech but rather as a way of 'being' (pointing out the significance of the body and the relation between the physical bodies and speech), a producer of specific language games, in Wittgensteinian terminology (Guillaume, 2018). Silence, thus, is claimed, should be part of the securitization analysis, mainly when we are dealing with potential power inequalities and marginalization (that is often the case). Nonetheless, this attempt to 'illuminate' silence might lead to well-known analytical and ethical conundrums. Particularly the question of agency; (who is entitled or should ethically be legitimized to connote silence in the name of other) or the question of interpretability (to what extent is possible, to get a plausible interpretation that could enjoy from a minimal inter-subjective validation from the bodies and non-verbal communication, when speech and text are not present) still spur important discussions between scholars.

Finally, in what concerns the methods of analysis, the so-called Parisian School of security study, engaging with the securitization framework (through an acceptance of its

constructivist aspirations and part of its vocabulary), challenged the figure of the speech act, *ad integrum* (Bigo, 2002). They did by transmuting the centrality of the speech-act (and thus, the spoken or written) into the centrality of the techniques and practices of power of those who govern (here in obvious reference to Foucault's idea of governmentality) and those who executed, in practice, the orders of the rulers. Thus, the Parisian School security practices are the by-product of power-laden structures and, paradoxically, the creators of new sources of insecurity (Bigo, 2002, 2008). Security and securitization are intrinsically, thus, negative and reactionary conceptions. To uncover those practices, methodological openness is required, one that can 'see' beyond and within the text-speech of the political elites and that is concerned with the sociological reality of the practice of security.

In sum, all the different contentions centered around the theoretical figure of the speech act have sponsored a need for extending the potential methodological arsenal available to the researcher on security and securitization. Furthermore, the critical targeting of the speech act has proved not to come only from a normative or theoretical standpoint. Instead, it has emerged from the mere empirical practice of trying to conduct research on securitization in the 'real world', where the speech act, only very rarely, can satisfactorily explain much larger social processes (see Stritzel, 2007). Therefore, besides discourse analysis, other methods such as content analysis or ethnographic observation are increasingly becoming common devices within the studies of securitization (at least to the 'reformists or 'eclectic' securitization scholars) in an attempt, precisely, to apprehend all the other meaningful and necessary factors, that are 'there' when 'securitization', normally as a process, unfolds. It is necessary to grasp, nonetheless, that this expansion of methods is not exempt from conflict and precisely is causally engrained in an array of various critiques against Waever's (1989,1995), illocutionary and post-structuralist (mostly Derridean) views on security, and its milder translations into the theoretical ambiguities and contradictions present into the work of Buzan et. al. (1998).<sup>10</sup> Thus, being also part of a more contextualist-sociological approach to securitization or ethical concerns about securitization normative outcomes. The choice of, for instance, focusing on visuals and images, bodily expressions-silences in different ways seems to threaten both the 'magical' performativity and the self-referentiality

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter II.

ascribed to the speech act by assigning to the empirical description and formation of the audience, the context (what the CS characterized merely as facilitating conditions) and generally, the world outside of the text an analytical primacy.

Again, as a more practical issue, an increased plurality of methods could allegedly damage the prospects of producing similar enough research designs. Hence, comparative empirical studies (particularly as the methods engage with more open to interpretability or close to artistic interpretability). However, the hypothetical loss of a never fully accomplished set of epistemic goals, such as comparativeness and reproducibility of findings (that even within the stretch methodological margins of discourse analysis has not yet proved to deliver those outcomes), might be worth, at least for the critics, to enhance the contextual sensitivity, ethical stance, or analytic validity of the framework.

To be clear, there is no apparent methodological leeway in conducting an empirical securitization study. Balzacq et. al. (2016) argue that the question of “*what are the relevant criteria for adjudicating whether a development is an instance of securitization (or not)*” remains to be addressed (520). However, others, such as what is the temporal spectrum of securitization (when temporally the research should be started and when finished) or even what are the relevant contextual conditions that should be studied; remain fundamentally unsolved and open to individual interpretations (yet there has not been offered a persuasive encompassing framework that has theoretically justified a more robust justification of how to address them). Even if one wants to use Buzan et. al. (1998) as a dogmatic guide, the fundamental tensions and contradictions of the work, as we commented in the previous chapter, would make it almost impossible to establish a common, neat methodology that could be applied to empirical studies.

Nonetheless, for the purposes of this essay, attempting to respond clearly to these questions will not be essential, or at least possible. However, dealing with them and the broader theoretical developments of securitization theory is essential to delimitate the extent of the current methodological debates and controversies surrounding the exclusive emphasis on discourse analysis and the speech act, that are increasingly contended as exhaustive explanatory devices capable of comprehending in most cases, the complexity of social



interactions that could occur on a securitization process. Thus, to establish what can and what can be logically done through the analytical use of securitization theory and also how, in practice, securitization can and cannot deliver its normative promises (e.g., politicize security, illuminating the possible trade-offs and abuses of 'security speech', get Security Studies outside of a mere 'clash' of holistic, systemic theories...).

#### **IV. ‘Environmental securitization’: Assumptions of separateness between human and nature and meta-theoretical anti-ecologism.**

The environment, understood as the non-human domain of the ‘world’, has only come to the fore of politics in recent years. Indeed, it has not been present in the field of International Relations until the 60s (in association with the debates on nuclear proliferation and nuclear warfare), and until much more recently (perhaps the 90s), it has not acquired saliency in the security debates (see Hough, 2021).<sup>11</sup> The first ‘mainstream’ debates in the 90s were carried out as part of the broadening of Security Studies (e.g., through the notions of human security). However, these soon were accompanied by an array of critiques; such as precluding an unduly conceptual enlargement (Baldwin, 1997, Deudney, 1991, Paris, 2001), promoting a serie of alleged wrongs by associating security with environmental concerns, (such as compromising global political stability; through nationalistic security frames) or the potentially, spurr a tendency to militarize solutions to problems that did require from other specific means (see Deudney, 1990, Waever et. al., 1993)<sup>12</sup>.

Nonetheless, the coinage of ‘environmental securitization’, or more precisely, ‘securitization in the environmental sector’ (perhaps preliminarily precluded in Buzan et. al., 1995), did not consolidate until the publication of *Security: A new framework for analysis* in 1998. Securitization in the environmental sector is, according to Buzan et. al. (1998), distinct from other sectors due to the bigger structuring role of science in the political debates, its disputed referent object (whether ‘Mother Nature’ itself or human civilization dependent on environmental factors) or the sources of threat (human or non-human)<sup>16</sup>. It is also characterized in Buzan et. al. (1998) as a security issue often characterized by systemic politicization (and not securitization) and only locally successful securitizing attempts<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Although obviously human activity has affected the environment before (e.g. extinction of species, depletion of natural resources) and the environment has always severely condition the possibilities and existential fate of human beings.

<sup>12</sup> Note here that he is connoting security through a more state-centric, narrower conceptualization.

Environmental security has also been defined by its polymorphism: within it, an array of issues and threats are included: disease, overpopulation, resource depletion, natural disasters, pollution, or, most saliently; climate change, which encompasses a set of multi-factorials and to some extent, not entirely predictable environmental outcomes (see Hough, 2021, O' Toole, 2015, 2016, Graeger, 1996, Buzan et. al., 1998). In order to not deal with all the particularities of the broad specter of issues englobed in the concept of environmental threats or security issues, only environmental threats that are *anthropogenetic* will be theoretically scrutinized, meaning here, those environmental issues that originated broadly due to human societal and economic schemes of production and consumption. These environmental anthropogenetic security issues have an additional, almost self-contradictory peculiarity in common. Namely, that the referent object and the referent subject ('who' is threatening) are or might be identical (e.g. capitalism threatens capitalism through climate change and environmental degradation in a traditional Marxist fashion).

This detail, which could be seemingly distinguished as trivial, has intimate connections with ontological liberal assumptions of the securitization theory: the belief in a universal separateness, across time and space, between the individual and the environment (analogous to other ontological liberal assumptions: such as the separation between individual and political community). The latter engrained assumption does not necessarily mean that securitization theory, as argued by Grijalva-Maza (2021), intrinsically embraces a radical positivist viewpoint that places the human above a completely objectified nature. However, it does necessarily forget an ontological alternative, that human beings, particularly human collectives, might be not only entities surrounded by threatening or threatened environments but 'ecological' beings (in systemic and not dialectical relationships with "nature"). Solely from this ecological standpoint (or ontological assumption), it is possible to take care of the seemingly linguistic absurdity of a securitizing actor, trying to defend itself from itself (e.g., human civilization advocating 'secure' human civilization from human civilization itself)<sup>16</sup>. The puzzle could only make sense because it leaves a vital piece of information outside the securitization analytical framework. A piece of information that nonetheless is necessarily assumed; that human collectives are mediated or conditioned by the ecological conditions and relationships.

In this sense, my claim is that securitization assumes that human beings are logically but also ontologically separated from “nature”; from that viewpoint, securitization is intrinsically anti-ecological. In part because it undertheorizes the sociological importance of the ecological context, but more importantly because it can only recognize climate change or other anthropogenetic security issues through a dialectical liberal political frame. It obscures systemic or more organic forms of understanding security that go beyond humans talking to each other and constructing (or attempting to construct) a textual “we”, dialectically opposed to a constructed threatening and outsider “other”. Thus, it cannot engage with ecological ontological assumptions that do not recognize the possibility of a “delimited” ecological other (except perhaps “other ecological systems”, if we emphasize a set of specific ecological relationships) and that includes in the “we” (attempted by virtue of the dyadic interaction between a human securitizing actor and a human audience), something more than the human (the human as a part of a broader “natural” system)<sup>17</sup>.

To be clear, during this dissertation it will be used the distinction that Dobson (2007) gives concerning aiming to distinguish both environmentalism and ecologism. Environmentalism would mean the ideology-approach that aims “*for a managerial approach to environmental problems, secure in the belief that they can be solved without fundamental changes in present values or patterns of production and consumption*”. Meanwhile, ecologism would be defined as the set of diverse ideas whose ultimate commonality lies in the belief “*that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the nonhuman natural world, and in our mode of social and political life*”. (Dobson, 2007, pp. 2–3). After clarifying both concepts, it is important to distinguish that the claim defended here is not that securitization cannot recognize or engage with any discourse or practice aimed to “secure” nature or that has environmental goals as its direct or indirect referent object; but that it does not leave theoretical space to the political possibility of ecologism, it cannot even conceive it.

Thereof, Securitization Theory assumes or constructs the limits of political possibility of how the actors can deal with them in a liberal-managerial fashion. However, the causes for this meta-theoretical constriction of limitation of the political possibilities it is not only built

around its liberal ontological assumptions but also comes directly from its incapacity to comprehend revolutionary logics or deal with ideas of emancipation, both of which are often engrained, to some extent in the discourses and practices of ecologism.

Firstly, securitization theory cannot deal with the idea of revolution, because even if we broaden what we can consider as ‘audience’, or we ignore the ‘audience’ altogether to study non-liberal polities (Vuori, 2004, 2008); securitization theory constraints the political possibilities merely to the non-politicized, the political normality (politization) and the phase of securitization (exceptionally dealing with an issue through special measures but not entering into the questioning of the legitimacy of what it is normal). Moreover, it does so, without leaving analytical space to the impugnation of the normal without engaging in ‘normal’ politics (which are deemed to be the problem itself); (see Holbraad and Pedersen, 2012).

Patomäki (2015), coming from a different perspective (Risk Studies), points out a similar direction but with a more specific critique. Securitization cannot, according to him, recognize the threats coming from the structure of the global political economy because it can merely research what happens *within* a specific given social structure, and even its more contextualist approaches (among others Balzacq, 2005 or , 2009) fail to address how the global political economy may affect, specific contexts and securitization processes. Thereof, it could be argued (beyond Patomäki s claim) that it cannot incorporate the attitudes or discourses of anti-capitalists or radical economical reformists (in this case). That is, because it cannot even recognize the economic system as part of politics itself, neither imagine a movement that could question the normalcy of economy (always treated as a given), because to start with systemic economic models are essentially non-theorised in the framework (as if they were natural phenomena). In sum, securitization framework is neither capable of depicting the consequences of the global political economy in the environment and human beings (individually or collectively), and it does not leave space for the “creation” of a new global politico-economical normalcy (something deemed necessary given the structural economic cause of the most salient anthropogenetic ecological issues, such as climate change).

Additionally, the securitization theory does not conceive the possible emancipatory character of security<sup>13</sup>. This does not come as a surprise, as the initial aim of securitization was to promote a framework for the analysis of security not directly concerned with essentialized moral connotations (plainly, if security or securitization processes were morally bad or good). It is true that some authors aspiring to grant the theory some ethical standpoint have attempted to identify *ad hoc*, de-securitization, and emancipation (see Aradau, 2004), but the association has been empirically contested (see among others, Elbe, 2009, MacKenzie, 2009). Even if it were not, this would only imply that through the securitization framework, it is impossible to conceive security as an emancipatory endeavor. This relates to what was established in the third chapter, that securitization within its ambiguities does still begets a certain essentialist viewpoint of what security is. Particularly, through securitization, security can only admit to being constructed in reactive and defensive ways (against a threat, against a threatening force, or subjectivity). This logically prevents security from having any emancipatory reach by becoming a mere outlandish defense of a previous order of normalcy. Security thus is not prepared to ‘create’ new orders, only to preserve or react against real or imagined threats to the prevailing one. It cannot, therefore, envision other potential conceptualizations, such as security as the construction of resiliency (for instance, more ecologically resiliency), security as the prevention of risks (Patomaki, 2015), or security as the emancipatory transformation of threatening economic “normalcies”.

In conclusion, the securitization framework is meta-theoretically constrained to assume a particular liberal human ontology (one that describes a binarism between a separated human society and a threatening or threatened environment) and also to comprehensively engage with systemic considerations (both ecological and economic), or the potential transformation of those given structures in creative or non-normalized ways. This, as a consequence, implies an environmentalist (in practice, primarily liberal) construction of ecological issues, where the political field game is analytically narrowed, in a way, that, within the framework, it is not possible to make sense of the precise problem of the ‘normal’ global political economy,

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<sup>13</sup> In opposition, to other movements of Security Studies, such as the Welsh School, which center is precisely an identification of security with emancipation (Nunes, 2012, Booth, 1991).

underlying other socio-political institutions and sub-contexts and to restrict transformative political imagination, beyond reformist or authoritarian reforms.

## **V. The Deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon as an illustration of the intrinsic limitations of securitization in the environmental debate.**

### *A preface: designing the case- study*

To illustrate the implications of the ecological shortcomings of securitization through its practice as a method of analysis, a simple case-study will be developed of an anthropogenetic case of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon (concretely during the 2019 great fires). This case is selected because it fits the criteria of an anthropogenetic case, as deforestation in Brazil has clear linkages with the expansion of the agricultural frontier. Specifically, the process of deforestation has been unraveling over the last 60 years (albeit with ups and downs) and followed by the more direct or indirect complicity of the federal government. Mainly, the deforestation in the Amazon has been conducted to produce beef and other agricultural goods such as soy, and to a lesser extent palm oil and sugar cane (biofuels) or rice and cotton (see Fearnside, 2005, Verweij et. al., 2009).

Selecting this case tries to expand the reach of our conclusions, beyond the most obvious case of climate change<sup>18</sup>, by pointing out its applicability in other domains such as deforestation, a domain with very scarce research within the ‘environmental securitization’ empirical studies. The study departs from the justified assumption that certain events that unfolded in 2019 could fulfill the potential criteria to conclude the existence of an internationally sponsored “securitization” move (or more than one). This justification is grounded on the important international and domestic political repercussions of the Amazonian fires in 2019, the declarations and discourses of geopolitically relevant international representatives, the positions of the Brazilian government (particularly its president Bolsonaro), and the cultural-media portrayal of the events from different parts of the world.

It could be claimed that what happened discursively was an attempt to frame the situation of deforestation within security grammars (perhaps even Schmittean), given the context and inter-textual elements at our disposal. This frame of deforestation under the umbrella of a security issue was soon followed and run temporally parallel to other counter-securitization



strategies and conflictive views between actors on defining the relevant referent object, the threat, and the necessary means to tackle alleged environmental harm.

As we mentioned earlier, the case is intended to be of a primarily illustrative nature. Thereby, the intended analysis will not require an excessive sophistication but only from a certain descriptiveness intended to justify in practice our previous meta-theoretical claims on securitization. An outline of the relevant context will be provided through the scrutiny of relevant secondary literature, while the central assessment of the contending securitization moves will be derived from the uses of a discourse analysis (the most paradigmatic method in securitization empirical applications, as we mentioned earlier), coming from a myriad of relevant sources, such as social media, TV broadcasting or newspapers. Lastly, at the end of this chapter, it will be reflected if and how the securitization framework effectively showcases its anti-ecologism (or at least, how it leads to the marginalization of ecological possibilities) when it is applied to a specific case scenario. Furthermore, it will be assessed how an increasing defended expansive or eclectic methodological approach (mainly by transcending the model of the speech-act and incorporating the non-verbal practices) within a reformed securitization research agenda (see Chapter III) could alleviate or not the intrinsic anti-ecological stance of securitization and also the potential limits to reform.

#### *A brief contextual explanation and the 'securitization battle'.*

The Amazon has always been acknowledged as a significant domestic issue within Brazil, given its territorial magnitude (more than half of its landmass territory) and its international status as the biggest tropical forest on the planet. For the political elites and military official of Brazil this saliency has connotated both a “colonial-expansionist” opportunity and a security hazard (da Silva Cardoso and da Silva Tavares, 2018, de Paiva Silva and Teixeira Júnior, 2021, Lourenção, 2006, Zirker, 2015). The Amazonian territory allegedly posed a strategic liability; due to the practical impossibility for the state to exercise effective control on the area (most of its territorial landmass) and by presenting itself as a “feared” opportunity

to external aggressors<sup>14</sup>. Concretely, during the dictatorship period (ranging from 1964 until 1985-1988), the military leaders assigned maximum priority to the region's economic development, aiming to “develop” the country, increase its grip over the area (also militarily), and “civilize” it; which often translated in deliberate incentives to deforestation, substantial infrastructure projects and implication in indigenous repression and assassinations (see Silva Cardoso e da Silva Tavares, 2018; Heck et. al., 2005, BRASIL, 2014).

Hence, the Amazon has been enmeshed with connotations of threat and security grammar for decades. Deforestation and progressive woodland loss have also been a constant in the country (and not only in the Amazon). Whilst the *trabalhistas* (Worker’s Party) governments of Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff (2003-2016) assumed new international compromises that achieved some reductions to the rates of *desmatamento* (woodland loss), particularly during the terms of the former (Raftopoulos and Morley, 2020). The following right-wing governments of Michel Temer, and particularly Jair Bolsonaro, showcased less concern (or any concern at all) for the expansion of deforestation, curtailing vital funds to the Brazilian environmental agency that were justified by the aims of government reduction and a newly expanded developmentalist agenda (Raftopoulos and Morley, 2020).

### *Securitization and counter-securitization moves: the discourses of power*

Within this context, in the summer of 2019, we can distinguish an initial securitization opening (that had already precedents), an explicit speech act from part of the international security, particularly Western leaders (such as Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron or Justin Trudeau). As we outlined before in Chapter III, it is unclear to assess what are the criteria established to consider something an effective speech-act, to delimitate its temporal extension or identify the relevant audience<sup>15</sup>. However, it could be contended that the declarations of relevant political leaders (that in some sense continue until the current day) did spur a feeling of “threat” to the Brazilian government; in part rooted in the historical militaristic fear of the Amazon, that at least was severe enough, to force the Brazilian

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<sup>14</sup> That despite the relatively peaceful regional context, has persistently being an obsession of the Brazilian armed forces. A perception that only could increase with the growing “guerrilla” activity (coming from Colombia) and US military expansion on the region during the 1980-1990 (Zirker, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Although here we will

government to reply and carry a simultaneous international and domestic campaign directly. Moreover, it led, at least according to “leaked” documents, the Brazilian military to consider France (also territorially present in the Amazon); as the most prominent external threat to Brazilian sovereignty (see Gielow, 2020). All this discursive entanglement, for the sake of the analysis, will be divided into three main securitization (and counter-securitization initial movements; speech-acts) that will be described through the central syntactical axis of the canonical securitization framework (identification of the referent object, the constructed threat and additionally if interesting the referent subject).

*The threat of deforestation in the Amazon by a threatening complicit Brazilian state; against the global environmental heritage and global population-civilization.* Concretely, Macron called on the G-7 group in August 2019 to “develop more powerful mechanisms to prevent the fires” and to involve “the NGO’s and the native peoples more (to) stop the industrialized deforestation process” (Macron, 2019a). This was soon followed by condemning statements of the German Chancellor or the Canadian president. After the G7 summit, Macron explicitly stated: “that NGO’s have raised the question during year of granting the Amazon international status”, and he argued in favor of an international norm or principle that could open the possibility of intervention whenever “a sovereign state took obvious and concrete measures that were against the interest of the planet” (Macron,2019b). The discourse, despite not yet leading to direct practical actions (that have always remained unspecified), is part of a broader claim as the French president recognized, to see “the lungs of the Earth”, as a global heritage or internationally controlled area, due to its climatic implications. It engages thus, with an environmental vision that regards maybe the intrinsic value of the Amazon Forest as a referent object, as the terms “heritage” or “our house”, employed in some of the discourses, mobilizations, and international media coverage; but that mostly emphasizes the causal connection of the fire and the deforestation with the climate changes and the risks it posits to the global population or human civilization (Macron, 2019a).

Letting the question of the audience aside (whose identification and description may take too long), it could be convincingly argued that while the issue was not in a direct textual sense defined as a global security issue, it was strongly framed around a logic of urgency, survival

(“our house is on fire”) and around the need of decided-special measures<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, it heavily resembles the CS’ analytical requirements to identify “securitization”.

In any case, in a direct or meaningful sense, the movement did fail to back the wording with credible deeds. A development that might be explained by the relative weaknesses of an international coalition unable to garner enough support, the lack of adequate resources, and without the will to commit enough politically to deal with an environmental problem<sup>20</sup>.

*Main counter-securitization move: A threatening international community of developed states against Brazilian sovereignty over the Amazon.* The government of Brazil seemed to initially opt for a denial of the problem of deforestation itself, arguing that the fires were “normal” due to the conditions of “drought” and analogous to those that occurred in other parts of the world. A mere consequence of the traditional usage of fire in the Amazon (Mazui et. al. 2019), or that the media was purportedly manipulating the information to punish his government (Bolsonaro, 2019). However, this initial denial was followed by a new insistence on the threat to the sovereignty of Brazil. This new framing, in terms of sovereignty, is not new in Brazilian politics and is embedded in an extended regional diplomatic tradition, particularly ambivalent in Brazil, of distrust towards the external powers, both the old colonizers and the US (see Tickner,2008). In addition to the attempted contestation of the threat and the inversion of referent subjects, the discursive move straightly points towards re-scaling the issue from a global context to a national one. Something that can be clearly appreciated, for instance, through a brief analysis of the UN speech of Jair’s Bolsonaro, wherein the possessive (referring to the Amazon forest) is repetitively present and in which is explicitly rejected the vision of the Amazon as a “global heritage” or more romantically, the “lungs of the world” (Bolsonaro,2019).

*Alternative Securitization Approach: A network of criminal environmental activists (sponsored by NGO’s and influential Western figures), threatening to sabotage the Brazilian’s economy, international reputation, and environment.* As a corollary to the counter-securitization strategy, the Brazilian president (without much proof), through interventions in social media or TV broadcasters; blamed the environmental NGO’s of the fires, that were repeatedly labelled as “criminal” (Bolsonaro, 2019b, Bolsonaro ,2019c) and

broadly identified the causes of the fires, to “crime” (Bolsonaro,2019b, Bolsonaro ,2019c). Not only the NGOs were accused of propagating or directly instigating the fires but also of threatening Brazilian sovereignty and government. Indeed, these organizations were profiled as insider enemies, aiming to conspire against Brazil their vested materialistic and radicalized interests. In general, beyond NGO’s, overall activism in the Amazon, was considered as threat.

Environmental “criminality”; similarly, then, to what did happen during Bolsonaro’s presidency and the uses of “crime” discourses surrounding the *favelas* (see Müller, 2018), contributed to the domestic justification of the need of a quick “green” militarization (or use of the armed forces, even in indigenous protected areas to deal with so-considered environmental security issues) and the promises of an enhanced “control” the situation there where the state was deemed more absent. A stance that does permit the government to de-link deforestation from its historical causes,while bolstering its image as a “hard-liner” against crime.

Furthermore, the discourses associating crime with environmental activism had been unsurprisingly followed by a spike surge on the number of activists assassinated, most of which from indigenous populations (Global Witness, 2020) contributing to a sense of impunity towards the perpetrators in the Amazon and the sponsoring of a certain “securitization” of economic interests in the region.

#### Some reflections on the case-study: silences, post-humanism and the intrinsic limitations of the framework

Using the present case-study, it is possible to see the justification for some of the previously methodological or contextualists criticisms, against the framework of the Copenhagen School. Particularly, the limitation of the analysis to speech in a strict sense, permits only or at least privileges greatly the speech of the power, such as the political elites or perhaps, the media broadcasters (see Hansen, 2000, Guillaume, 2018). Furthermore, it is difficult in practice for the researcher to access the “text” of the marginalized, that can only appear, insofar as it is supported or “used” by more powerful agents. In our case, for instance, the

indigenous people's discursive positions (although potentially pluralistic) were difficult to access directly through a study focused on readily available secondary sources, social media, or newspapers; despite the direct effects that deforestation poses to their communities, sense of identity and broadly, social aims. Indeed, without an exhaustive search or the openness to methods such as participant observation, specific textual resources or even visual analysis, there is a great risk of only portraying their "security, counter-security, asecurty" positions "through" the rhetorical uses of others (e.g. Western political elites) incurring in obvious concerns about legitimacy and representativity. Moreover, the focus on speech does not only impede to give account of the alliterized (that cannot talk or cannot be heard), but less explored, impedes securitization to scape its anthropocentrism. Only humans (mostly, powerful ones) can talk, and "nature" or other living creatures can be merely understood as objects to, at best, be secured. Hence, the suffering of animals has not been comprehended, at all, in our case study.

There is a potential leeway to counter this anthropocentrism, that links with the proposal of Hansen (2000), to account for the insecurity of those who cannot speak or are directly forced to not speak in certain ways (in her case Pakistani women). It has also potentially less ethical caveats, given the radical impossibility of the non-human living creatures of speaking (although primates may constitute a gray area). That is, including silence in the analysis, understanding it as a form of being, rather than a negative sense of speech. For instance, by expressing the killing and suffering of sentient being (through their bodily languages) as (de) securitizing moves by themselves, or at least through the "mediation" of the observer<sup>16</sup>.

Besides, the possibilities of an expanded methodological approach. The framework cannot apprehend<sup>17</sup> from an ecological standpoint, how normalcy is precisely at the root of the problem, the possibility of radical changes or "see" the systemic global economic pressures at the roots of the problem. Particularly, in our case the "main" drivers of deforestation are

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<sup>16</sup> Although, it is obvious such "openness" might collide with positions, both negating the possibility of securitization to reconcile with non-anthropocentric conceptions of security in more radical ways (where nature can be a subject or distinctions subject-object; human-nature are blurred), such as the one of Grijalva-Maza (2021) or more general narrower securitization scholars that would consider such broadening of the framework untenable.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps a more sophisticated and contextualized case-study could alleviate some of the defects of the emphasis on a brief analysis of speech. However, this will not suffice, staying within securitization theory, to grasp these fundamental ecological concerns.

the expansion of the agricultural frontier (as we briefly advanced in the contextualization) and broadly, the extractive activities of other natural resources (timber or mineral resources). Throughout our analysis this fact is almost not covered up (perhaps partially by the discourses of NGOs), but what is utterly ignored within securitization theory, is the systemic pressure of markets. This is particularly salient given the context of Brazil as an export-based economy, which bases its economic growth on the sale of commodities<sup>18</sup> (see OEC, 2020) that are then consumed predominantly in developed countries, there will be always strong incentives and forces to advance deforestation.<sup>19</sup>The “normal” capitalist handling of the international economy and the asymmetric relations between distinct national political economies; thus, disappears, when securitization engages with environmental security, becoming a giant elephant in the room.

Discourse analysis does neither, contribute to the outline of meaningful political alternatives. It is rather unclear how through the proposed case-study, even if reformed, one could politically imagine beyond what has been said by the power, and a rationale of defense-reaction to it (what is there already given). In fact, securitization theory risks constantly the threat of becoming a mere reproduction (more or less critical) of the discourses of the status quo. In our case, security connoted a metaphorical exchange of moves wherein the threat was depicted as merely the Brazilian Government irrespectively of international context or from the Brazilian government coming both from environmentalist criminals and from the external powers themselves (re-framing the referent object). Meanwhile, the root causes, divergent ontological conception or the marginalized are grossly left aside.

Summarizing, during this chapter it was carried out a simple application of the securitization theory centered on the analysis of an illustrative case- study: the deforestation of the Amazon Forest during 2019 fires in the region. It was concluded that the main discursive strategies were an international one blaming the Brazilian government, followed by negation and an attempt to change the referent object and threat, and the introduction of sovereignty debates

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<sup>18</sup> In fact, Brazil was the biggest exporter in the world of soybean (its most valuable export in gross economic terms), raw sugar or frozen meat (OEC, 2020). Being soybean, sugar and cattle; particularly the latter, associated with agricultural expansion and deforestation in the Amazon (Fearnside, 2005, Verweij et. al., 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Of which the failure of the Ecuatorian government to receive international compensation in exchange for not exploiting the resources of protected areas in the Amazon, is particularly insightful (Lalander and Merimaa, 2018).

by the latter. Finally, the Brazilian government carried out an alternative securitization move, identifying deforestation (and other ills) with the activities of a network of environmental criminals (including international NGO's and activists). It was claimed that while a more eclectic methodological approach can limit or open the reach of non-anthropocentric, bring out more inclusive accounts of securitization, and perhaps even, through expansion of context, add the necessary inputs about the ecological dimensions and relationships that condition, influence, or improve the chances of success or failure of an actor. Securitization theory is not able to deal with ecologist practice and thought, because it remains at most reactive to the discourse of power, bypasses the essential role of global political economy both conditioning the actions of actors and in the construction of insecurity, and additionally, constrains political imagination of alternative normalcies (also in more economic domains).



## VI. CONCLUSION

It is fair to recognize that, albeit its potentially unsolvable contradictions and ambiguities, securitization has stimulated and changed the terms of the debates on security. Those ambiguities have also allowed the CS proposed “framework for analysis”, to foster its popularity by fulfilling some of the desires and aspirations of the post-Cold War security analysts by effectively broadening up the concept of security both in terms of its “sectors” of application (referent objects), the conceivable threats, the role of agency and actors or even in terms of the methods that could be used to research about security.

During this essay, securitization has been defined and contextualized within the broader tradition of security studies. Following the initial literature review, it was argued that the main debates of securitization are traced alongside two main argumentative axes: essentialism-constructivism and universalism-contextualism, and it was claimed that both binarism are directly linked with the ambiguous stances present in the framework. After analyzing and establishing some methodological guidelines and exposing its main dilemmas, the main argument of the work was established: securitization theory is intrinsically anti-ecological or at least it cannot engage meaningfully with ecologist discourses, ontologies and ways of understanding the “political”. Conclusions that were reached through a critical theoretical revision, wherein this anti-ecologism, was identified as a cause of the liberal-environmental ontological assumption of the framework (separation human-nature), the incapacity of securitization to engage with revolutionary logics (due to an implicitly narrow understanding of the political possibilities), its oblivion of the global economic systems and the political echoes of capitalism and its conscious refusal to identify security with any progressive or emancipatory goal (which contributes to a more reactive and defensive understanding of security)

In the last chapter, a case-study on the “securitization” moves concerning the deforestation of 2019 fires, was carried out, to illustrate how the stated metatheoretical limitations of securitization could have an impact in its application. Throughout a simple case analysis, three distinctive securitization and counter-securitization construction could have been identified: The state of Brazil vs human civilization-house; An international community against the sovereignty of the Brazilian state over the Amazon and environmental criminals

(allegedly activists and international NGOs) against Brazil and the Amazon. Despite, the more or less interest that the analysis could have garnered, it was further established, in accordance with previous discussions, that the framework tended, particularly when the methodology was centered around a restrictive vision of the speech-act to alliterize the insecurity of the marginalized and forget about the suffering of other non-human sentient beings.

Assessing, directly the proposed research question: *Is securitization a convenient framework to study the implications of climate change and other anthropogenic environmental issues in Security Studies?* My claim is that at least, in what concerns the environment, and particularly multi-factored scenarios that are a by-product of human activity such as climate change or deforestation; securitization does not only fail to be analytically or theoretically congruent but rather ‘obscures’ the most relevant and concerning aspects of security and more paradigmatic discourses (such as ecologism), while tending, in practice to sustain, at least the economic *status quo* and anthropocentric perspectives of the relationship between human-reality. Limitations, that particularly, if one considers, the liminality of security, between its theory and practice, should be even more concerning.

It is true however, that a theory cannot do everything, and that indeed securitization got its impulse precisely for not trying to reach this goal. It may have its space, but it definitely should not be understood anymore as a neuter framework, able to recognize the potential politicization of security, without self-reflecting on how the own frame of how, what and why to see security, could have, as well relevant political implications.

Lastly, it is necessary to highlight that this essay aimed to contribute to an already literature of reform, critique and exploration of the limits both of environmental security, and more concretely securitization theory. Nonetheless, an almost or more challenging question, is still left to be addressed; the question concerned with how to ideate new visions and theories that could answer to the relevant eco-political concerns, open political imagination and stimulate, again, as securitization did in its moment; the debates within Security Studies.

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