

## 4. Methods

---

“The nature of African states, and the opposition they encountered, has to be inferred from problematic and incomplete sources.”<sup>1</sup>

This chapter focuses on the methodological considerations and reflects on the processes of data collection and analysis. It will show how archival research can enrich theoretical discussions within the study of International Relations and connect security studies with postcolonial theory by means of a historical perspective. Chapter 4.1 introduces the general constructivist perspective employed in this study, emphasising of socially constructed nature of (in)security and history, and its implications. This section also comments on the comparative perspective of this study regarding French and British Togoland. Chapter 4.2 will delve into the details of the archival field research, including reflections on analysing records *along* or *against* the archival grain. Furthermore, this section will provide an overview of the archives visited along with addressing the associated challenges. It concludes with a presentation of the research and evaluation procedure that was followed to operationalise the used securitisation framework.

### 4.1 Research Design

#### 4.1.1 A Constructivist Study

This study takes a constructivist perspective. As an epistemological stance within the social sciences, constructivist approaches now form a broad field of research, yet, the minimal consensus is that the social world(s) around us (and thus all objects of research) are socially constructed through actions, shared ideas, expectations, and the production of

---

<sup>1</sup> Skinner, *The Fruits of Freedom in British Togoland*, p. 211.

knowledge.<sup>2</sup> The implication for the present study is that both (in)security and history are equally perceived as socially constructed and thus as contingent. In the case of security, the study follows perspectives that consider security as a “derivative concept,”<sup>3</sup> meaning that the underlying understanding of security ‘derives’ from one’s political attitudes and philosophical worldview. From a constructivist critical discourse point of view, the question does not arise as to whether these ideas correspond to ‘reality’.

Constructivist approaches to knowledge production come with ontological and epistemological implications. At the core of constructivism are questions about what constitutes reality and the possibility and status of our knowledge about this reality. Constructivist approaches assert that (social) reality is contingent and socially constructed, experienced differently by those who observe, interpret, or assign meaning to it, including constructivist researchers themselves.<sup>4</sup> Constructivist approaches thus elude positivist notions that set out to pinpoint a ‘true’ state of any given research object to a stable ‘reality.’ These implications lead necessarily to the questions of actors’ subjectivity,<sup>5</sup> and the relationship between agency and structure, which social constructivism assume to be mutually dependent.<sup>6</sup> These notions have found their way into constructivist approaches to security research.

“We do not try to peek behind this to decide whether it is *really* a threat (which would reduce the entire securitization approach to a theory of perceptions and mis-perceptions). Security *is* a quality actors inject into issues by securitizing them, which means to stage them on the political arena in the specific way [...] and then to have them accepted by a sufficient audience to sanction extraordinary defensive moves.”<sup>7</sup>

From this constructivist perspective, security is thus not to be seen as an object, but as a historically evolved negotiation between power, knowledge, and authority. The epistemological interest of the work therefore does not aim to identify and analyse security problems, but rather to pursue the question of how and under what conditions empirical objects become security problems in the first place. Constructivist works therefore focus on the contextual conditions in which a text or statement is produced and on language as a carrier of discourse.

The research question and its sub-questions in this study emerged from an assessment of the existing body of research, and the underpinning theoretical foundations but

---

2 Alexander Wendt, *Social theory of international politics*, Cambridge studies in international relations 67 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1; for a more specific appreciation of constructivist understandings in IR see the seminal work by Wendt, “Anarchy is what States make of it”

3 Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies*, p. 22.

4 Teresa K. Beck and Tobias Werron, “Gewaltwettbewerbe,” in *Ordnung und Wandel in der Weltpolitik: Konturen einer Soziologie der internationalen Beziehungen*, ed. Stephan Stetter, 1st ed., Leviathan Sonderband 28 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2013), p. 250.

5 Huysmans, “Agency and the politics of protection,” p. 5.

6 Anthony Giddens, *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

7 Emphasis in original. Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, *Security*.

especially from these ontological reflections. The inquiry extends beyond the construction of actors' social identities, delving into the examination of the practices and policies facilitated within the framework of these constructions. In this manner, it is elucidated how power dynamics play a constitutive role in shaping subjectivities.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the study explores how actors categorise and interpret events, organising these perspectives based on varied reactions and strategies. The research interest is to capture and understand the arguments and constructions of meaning of the individual actors around security. To investigate these inquiries, an abductive-oriented content analysis was employed, and the discourse-analytical question was posed: How does a security threat manifest? Causal and processual questions were intricately connected with the objective of scrutinising power dynamics and the evolution of subjectivity and agency.

Constructivist perspectives, as paraphrased from Neta Crawford, emphasize the historical and social construction of institutions and practices, providing context to the present by illustrating how we arrived at the current state. Yet, "constructivists have little to say about what needs to be done."<sup>9</sup> Epistemological-constructivist works align with post-structuralist theories, asserting that every theory is simultaneously a political-social practice, challenging the notion of objectivity in research. In this framework, all social processes, including scientific works, are understood as discursively negotiated. Scientific contributions are acknowledged as part of the construction and legitimation of social reality, highlighting that no research is neutral, as the research process itself is based on prior political decisions. Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans argue that methods in research are not merely for acquiring information but are also performative and integral to the world they engage with.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.1.2 A Qualitative & Comparative Study

Togoland was chosen as a case study because of its status as a UN trusteeship territory, which renders it historically distinct. As an internationally supervised UN trusteeship territory, Togoland stands out as a unique and significant case within the broader context of decolonisation. Consequently, it presents a distinctive and compelling situation for researchers to explore and analyse. Through the involvement of the UN, insight can be gained into the discourses and practices of a decolonisation and statebuilding process that took place in the global context of decolonisation struggles. Due to their accountability to the UN, the French and British Administering Authorities left archival trails of reports, verbatim records, transcripts, minutes, and publications. These materials serve as valuable resources for discerning how the administration was conceived and executed, as well as identifying perceived dangers throughout process. In the case of Togoland, the examination of security dynamics during decolonisation not only illuminates its impact

<sup>8</sup> Doty, *Imperial encounters*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Crawford, *Argument and change in world politics*, p. 427.

<sup>10</sup> Claudia Aradau et al., eds., *Critical security methods: New frameworks for analysis*, New international relations (London, New York: Routledge, 2015); Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans, "Critical Methods in International Relations: The Politics of Techniques, Devices and Acts," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 3 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066112474479>.