

Externalist Understanding: Focus on the Context

Asking why some securitisation moves succeed while others fail, and what the political consequences are, Balzacq's shift to focus on the *perlocutionary act* brought contextual factors into the centre of the analysis.²³ While prioritizing the *illocutionary act* allows for an analysis of a context-independent *grammar of security*, that is, the intended functions of security speech acts in any given society, prioritizing the *perlocutionary act* has allowed for the emergence of a diverse body of scholarly work that has focused on specific kinds of context, for instance the regional context,²⁴ international context,²⁵ political-historical context,²⁶ or gendered context.²⁷ In other words, the focus shifted from the 'grammar of security' to the 'dialects of security.'

In their different facets, these dialects focus on the social, political, and cultural contexts in which threats are constructed. Contextual factors are non-exhaustive and include, for example, the symbolic and social capital of the securitising actor, the cultural or historical disposition of the audience, power relations between securitising actor and audience,²⁸ etc. Context is not a purely independent variable, though, because agents can also bring about or prevent certain contexts. In this regard, Bonacker points out that this contextualist reading of securitisation theory is analytically unsatisfactory, as it has not yet been clarified from a methodological point of view what is meant by a "context."²⁹ But the *methodological situationism* that he proposes to replace 'context' suffers from the logical fallacy that he defines situations *idem per idem* as "interactional contexts in which social order is first produced."³⁰ Nonetheless, he draws attention to the fact that if context is emphasized too much in the *perlocutionary-/context-focused* strand of securitisation analysis, its validity degenerates into 'everything depends on context' and thus loses analytical sharpness.

3.1.2 The Audience's Agency

Already in 1998, the representatives of the Copenhagen School assessed that in the *grammar of security* the audience represented the *conditio sine qua non* because an "issue is secu-

²³ Thierry Balzacq, "The Three Faces of Securitization," *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 2 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066105052960>.

²⁴ Nergis Canefe, "Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question," *South European Society & Politics*, no. 3 (2013)

²⁵ Nicole J. Jackson, "International Organizations, Security Dichotomies and the Trafficking of Persons and Narcotics in Post-Soviet Central Asia," *Security Dialogue*, 2006.

²⁶ Jef Huysmans, *The European Union and the securitization of migration* (2000); Jef Huysmans, "Agency and the Politics of Protection," in *The politics of protection: Sites of insecurity and political agency*, ed. Jef Huysmans, Andrew Dobson and Raia Prokhorovik, 1st ed., Routledge advances in international relations and global politics (New York, N.Y: Routledge, 2006)

²⁷ Hakan Seckinelgin and Joseph Bigirumwami, "Securitization of HIV/AIDS in Context," *Security Dialogue* 41, no. 5 (2010)

²⁸ Silva, "Securitization as a nation-building instrument"

²⁹ Thorsten Bonacker, "Situierte Sicherheit," *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen* 28, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.5771/0946-7165-2021-1-5>.

³⁰ Emphasis added, Bonacker, "Situierte Sicherheit," p. 7.

ritized only if and when the audience accepts is as such.”³¹ A discourse that takes the form of presenting something as an existential threat to a referent object does not itself create securitisation – this is merely the securitising move.³² Legitimacy for extraordinary measures must be argued somehow and cannot be forced.³³ Thus, securitisation is not a goal of an interaction whereby securitising actors present themselves and the extraordinary measures as legitimate, but rather legitimacy is the goal of a process of securitisation. Thus, a threat is not only accepted or rejected, but negotiated between the securitising actor and the audience.³⁴ As Ezeokafor and Kaunert put it, the securitising actor must find a “line of argument that will effectively resonate with or swing the audience in full of support of the intended line of action.”³⁵ The analytical focus must therefore be directed towards the intersubjective negotiation process.

Between the internalist and externalist strands of securitisation there has been a divergence of what or who constitutes the audience. Vuori, although decidedly studying securitisation in non-democratic contexts, leans toward the *internalist/illocutionary* strand of securitisation, arguing that the audience’s receptibility of a securitisation move depends on the socio-historic contexts, thereby rendering any fixed *perlocution*-centred definition of an audience non-sensical.³⁶ Therefore he holds that “audiences depend on the *function* the securitization act is intended to serve.”³⁷ Vuori sees an advantage in defining audiences by their “ability to provide the securitizing actor with whatever s/he is seeking to *accomplish* with the securitization.”³⁸

Balzacq, as a representative of the *perlocutionary* and context-centred strand, stresses that securitisation is not a one-way process but that both the speaker and the audience bring agency into the interaction.³⁹ Balzacq et al. emphasize the notion of an ‘enabling’ or ‘formal’ audience that “empowers the securitizing actor [...] to act.”⁴⁰ Adam Côté, who characterises earlier definitions of the audience as “agents without agency”⁴¹ emphasizes that these definitions represent important departures from previous ones, as they define audiences by what they contribute to the securitisation process rather than by a task or characteristic. Michael Williams stipulates that “this raises questions about who counts as a ‘significant audience’ and how this idea should be applied to states or organizations that do not boast a functioning public sphere,”⁴² while Vibeke Tjalve underscores that it is

31 Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, *Security*, p. 25.

32 Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, *Security*, p. 25.

33 Wæver, “Securitization and Desecuritization”

34 Stritzel, “Towards a Theory of Securitization,” p. 363.

35 Ezeokafor and Kaunert, “Securitization outside of the West,” p. 88.

36 Juha A. Vuori, “Illocutionary Logic and Strands of Securitization,” *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 1 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066107087767>.

37 Vuori, “Illocutionary Logic and Strands of Securitization,” p. 72.

38 Emphasis added, Vuori, “Illocutionary Logic and Strands of Securitization,” p. 72.

39 Balzacq, “The Three Faces of Securitization,” p. 172.

40 Thierry Balzacq and Stefano Guzzini, “Introduction: ‘What Kind of Theory – If Any – Is Securitization?’,” in Balzacq et al., *What Kind of Theory – If Any – Is Securitization?*, Vol. p. 7.

41 Adam Côté, “Agents Without Agency,” *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 6 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010616672150>.

42 Williams, “Words, Images, Enemies,” p. 517.

quite difficult to define term “the public,” which many studies adopt prematurely within the securitisation framework.⁴³

3.1.3 Securitisation Theory? Or: How to Predict the Present

Attentive readers will not have failed to notice that the present study has so far been careful not to speak of securitisation *theory* but only of the securitisation *framework* or *concept*. On the one hand, one of the great attractions of securitisation and a major reason for its success is its usefulness as an analytical framework capable of practical application and empirical enquiry. On the other hand, it has been criticised for being more of an interesting observation than a theory that has a practical purpose for political actors. This ambivalence, that is, the symptomatic lack of theoricity has been subject of the 2014 forum “What kind of theory (if any) is securitization theory?”⁴⁴

The “(if any)” in the forum’s title was a suggestive reference to the doubts harboured by some of the most prominent securitisation scholars. Their choice of words was telling about their implicit understanding of theoricity and consequently their answer to the question in the title of the forum. While Thierry Balzacq and Stefano Guzzini, both representatives of the context-centred *perlocutionary* strand, largely avoided the combined term ‘securitisation *theory*’ and speak simply of ‘securitisation’ or ‘the concept of securitisation,’⁴⁵ Wæver, after begging the question “*what* is politics, theory, sociology and philosophy,”⁴⁶ simply continues to refer to securitisation as ‘the theory.’

Yet, whether and to what extent securitisation constitutes a theory was not explored in depth by Wæver and though he admitted that “the specific meta-theoretical explications were not available at the time, but probably present implicitly,” Wæver concludes confidently:

“Many references [to securitisation] are to the ‘idea’ or the ‘slogan’. However, numerous dissertations and other studies have been made with this ‘framework for analysis’, so it seems that more than the concept has proven useful. [...] The critical question is rather whether it has been *too much* of a theory – whether it is necessary and/or helpful to play the theory card that hard or more is gained by a ‘less theoretical’ approach such as, for example, the so-called ‘sociological’ version. To assess this, the discipline needs to cultivate a more elaborate terminology and publication format for assessing *how* a theory participates in specific studies – what exactly does it do.”⁴⁷

Since the theoretical framework of this present ‘theory-driven’ historical study draws in large part on securitisation, the substance of this assertion should be addressed.

43 Vibeke Schou Tjalve, “Designing (De)Security,” *Security Dialogue* 42, 4–5 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611418715>.

44 Thierry Balzacq et al., eds., *What kind of theory – if any – is securitization?* 29 (2015).

45 Balzacq and Guzzini, “Introduction: ‘What Kind of Theory – If Any – Is Securitization?’”

46 Balzacq et al., *What kind of theory – if any – is securitization?*, p. 26.

47 Ole Wæver, “The Theory Act,” in Balzacq et al., *What Kind of Theory – If Any – Is Securitization?*, Vol. p. 31., emphasis in the original