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(De)securitisation dilemmas: Theorising the simultaneous enaction of securitisation and desecuritisation

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Abstract

This article theorises the simultaneous enaction of securitising and desecuritising moves. It argues that the frequent simultaneity of these two processes, which are normally considered mutually exclusive within Securitisation Theory (ST), has previously gone unnoticed given a set of methodological, temporal, and ontological biases that have developed within ST. Demonstrating how these biases can be overcome – and even reconciled with the seminal texts of ST – by drawing on work from within social theory and elsewhere, we argue that the frequent simultaneity of (de)securitising moves most urgently requires us to reconsider the normative status of desecuritisation within ST. Although desecuritisation has traditionally been viewed as normatively positive, we argue that its temporally immanent enaction alongside securitising moves might introduce more violence into security politics and, in fact, exacerbate protracted conflicts. Ultimately, we make the normative ambitions of some within ST more opaque. Desecuritisation is not a shortcut to the ethical-political good within ST.

Keywords

Securitisation; Desecuritisation; Security; Copenhagen School; Normativity

Introduction

On 14 July 2015, the Islamic Republic of Iran concluded a diplomatic agreement on its nuclear programme turning the page to three decades of exclusion from the international community. Despite this, then President Obama immediately remarked that:

> The deal before us doesn't bet on Iran changing, it doesn't require trust; it verifies and requires Iran to forsake a nuclear weapon, just as we struck agreements with the Soviet Union at a time when they were threatening our allies … proclaiming their commitment to destroy our way of life, and had nuclear weapons pointed at all of our major cities – a *genuine existential threat*.[1]

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[1] Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal' (Washington DC: White House, 2015).

Obama continued that the US still has 'a lot of differences with the Iranian regime', especially those 'hardliners' who continue to 'chant "Death to America"'. But, he added, this is not 'what all Iranians believe'. With these words, Obama situated certain aspects of the Iranian state as existentially threatening to the US, while simultaneously foregrounding that not 'all Iranians' were considered in these terms and concluding an agreement with those 'non-hardline' elements. Likewise, while sanctions related to nuclear proliferation would be gradually eased, sanctions targeting hardline elements would continue. For Obama, these seemingly contradictory policies were necessitated by us all now living 'in a complicated world'.[2]

These recent episodes in US-Iran relations are surprising for Securitisation Theory (ST). While Obama's words demonstrate a continued *securitisation* against Iran he also simultaneously politicises the ontological definition of the Iranian state by *externally* and *artificially* dividing its population between 'hardliners' and 'moderates'. In doing so he also – paradoxically – introduces a set of *de*securitising *moves* at the very moment of securitisation. These desecuritising moves set out conditions for being or not being a 'moderate' (or, simply, 'non-threatening') entity at the very moment of securitisation. And such a simultaneous enaction of securitising and desecuritising moves is not rare. In fact, we argue this process to be the norm. Take a Ronald Regan speech of 1983. There, Reagan asks for that the US 'pray for the salvation' of the population of the USSR who live in 'totalitarian darkness' but who are – simultaneously – the 'focus of evil in the modern world'. Here, a similar division is evoked between an 'evil' enemy and a *potentially* 'moderate' or 'good' populous who can be saved if they meet the condition of splitting their sociopolitical identity away from the politics of the USSR. Further examples following this logic are found in Table 1. In each case, what is important to note, however, is that the definition of who or what is to be securitised against ('hardliners') and who is potentially reconcilable ('desecuritisable') within a political process of accommodation is being *externally* and *artificially imposed*. The desecuritising moves contained in these words are – it is clear – *demands*.

In this article, we explore the processes by which securitising moves are frequently *simultaneously* coupled with desecuritising moves. We see these simultaneous (de)securitisations as critical moments of political *coercion* that occur within the (global) politics of security. The *demands* made by Obama, Reagan, or others upon elements of very broadly securitised referent subjects (a '*referent subject*' is 'what threatens' in Thierry Balzacq's terms)[3] are political 'preconditions' for the desecuritisation of particular groups or individuals within a societal sector. These preconditions are frequently laid out at the very *moment* of securitisation itself due to elements of ambiguity that exist within all the key elements of any (de)securitisation process: the securitising actor(s) themselves and their respective audience(s), as well as referent objects (that is, 'what is threatened'). However, this simultaneous enaction of desecuritising preconditions with securitising moves is deeply problematical for classical strands of ST. Typically, processes of securitisation and desecuritisation are seen as mutually exclusive. While securitisation is said to represent a turn to the exceptional, desecuritisation is spoken of as a return to 'normal' politics. It is generally argued, that desecuritisation is a process that necessarily *follows* securitisation, temporally: it must come 'after' securitisation. *But, as we have now seen, this conceptualisation is in fact very frequently empirically falsified and, instead, desecuritising moves come with securitising moves.*

We provide a theoretical resolution to this paradox of the simultaneous enaction of securitisation and desecuritisation by developing the methodologies, temporalities, and ontologies of ST. In doing

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Thierry Balzacq, *Securitisation Theory* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 36.

Table 1. Simultaneous (de)securitising moves in action.

Case Study & Referent Object	Referent Subject		Speech Act Example
	Securitised Element	Desecuritised Element	
'The American people' in US–Iran relations (1998–2001) (2013–16)	'Theocracy' (Khamenei) 'Conservatives' 'Hard-liners'	'Iranian people' (Khatami) (Rouhani) 'Reformers' 'Moderates'	'... if you look at Iranian behaviour, they are strategic, and they're not impulsive. They have a worldview, and they see their interests, and they respond to costs and benefits. And that isn't to say that they aren't a theocracy that embraces all kinds of ideas that I find abhorrent, but they're not North Korea.' Barack Obama (interview with Goldberg, 2 March 2014)
'Western Civilisation' in the End of the Cold War (1983–91)	Soviet Leadership Communist Ideology	Soviet Population	'Let us pray for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness – pray they will discover the joy of knowing God. But until they do, let us be aware that while they preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination of all peoples on the Earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world.' Ronald Reagan ('Evil Empire' speech, 8 March 1983)
'Western Civilisation' in War on Terror (2001–15)	'Islamists'	'Moderates'	'I want to speak directly tonight to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme in the name of Allah. The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends.' George W. Bush (address to Congress, 20 September 2011)
Syrian State and Society in Syrian Civil War (2011–15)	'Terrorists,' '*Takfiris*' 'Islamists'	Syrian Population	'We have to fight terrorism for the country to heal. We will not be lenient. We will be forgiving only for those who renounce terrorism … When a surgeon cuts and cleans and amputates, and the wound bleeds, do we say to him your hands are stained with blood? Or do we thank him for saving the patient?' Bashar Al-Assad (speech to Syrian Parliament, 3 June 2012)
Danish Cultural Identity in the Danish cartoon crisis (2005–6)	'Fundamentalist Muslims'	'Moderate Muslims'	'Modern, secular society is rejected [only] by *some Muslims* … by treating Muslims in Denmark as equals they made a point: We are integrating you into the Danish tradition of Satire because you are part of our society, not strangers. The cartoons are including, rather than excluding, Muslims.' Flemming Rose, Cultural Editor of *Jyllands Posten* ('Why I published those cartoons', *The Washington Post*, 19 February 2006)

so, however, we seek not to undermine the fundamental tenants of ST, but quite the contrary, to demonstrate that this process can be comprehended from within the very founding texts of ST as well as so-called second-generation texts. Indeed, we theorise the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves by way of a *return* ST in its, more or less, original form. We propose to move forward by turning *back*. And we do so precisely in order to theorise the complexity that our empirical phenomenon of concern demonstrates without diluting ST as a collective research programme. Indeed, the possibility (or even *necessity*) of the simultaneous enaction of securitising and desecuritising moves can be tacitly located within the classical literature of ST, whether that of its first (for example, Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde) or second (for example, Balzacq, Stritzel, and Vuori) generations. Consider indeed ST's founding text – *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* – and Buzan et al.'s early words that securitising speech acts are required to:

> Follow the security form, the grammar of security, and construct a plot that includes an existential threat, point of no return, and a *possible way out*.[4]

Security speak is described here as structurally requiring a 'possible way out'. This could mean several things: from the total 'annihilation' of the threat (viz. the war on the militant group 'ISIS') to the establishment of a hermetically sealed 'Garrison State', in Harold Lasswell's famed terms, that would keep threats at bay. But it might also be interpreted to mean the necessity of including particular *de*securitising moves at the very moment of securitisation that, again, *externally* demand a division of the referent subject into existentially threatening elements (for example, actual 'ISIS' fighters) and potentially reconcilable elements (for example, those 'sympathetic' to ISIS). Indeed, we read Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde's words as possibly implying the need for a set of conditions under which desecuritisation can occur that are temporally co-articulated with securitising moves. These conditions are intended to work to 'split' referent subjects in ways that make securitisation and its exceptional measures thinkable by working within the more or less grey ontological zones that pervade referent objects, subjects, and audiences in security today. Our argument is thus – we suggest – grounded in the very *genesis* of ST.

Our key claim is less that the simultaneous enaction of securitisation and desecuritisation is surprising or unthinkable within ST but, rather, that is has been neglected in the literature for several reasons. In particular, we believe the process has been overlooked due to a failure to enquire fully into the '*multiplistic*' ontologies of core ST units: the securitising actor, the referent subject or object, and/or the audience.[5] By drawing out the multiple ontologies of these distinct units, we demonstrate that the simultaneity of (de)securitisation is: (a) often necessary for securitising actors themselves to reconcile their conflicting identities and interests; and (b) an ethico-political form of *violence* against referent subjects (those securitised against) in ways that undermine the usual positive ethico-political status gifted desecuritisation when discussing socio-political problems (see below). The central importance of unpacking the simultaneity of (de)securitisation lies in this second claim: once we appreciate the multiplistic ontologies of referent subjects, it becomes clear that desecuritising moves are, in effect, external efforts to '*split*' supposed threats into more or less securitised and desecuritised parts, more or less threatening parts, requiring more or less extraordinary measures. These 'splitting speech acts' become then a clear form of violence. The idea, for example, that Iran can be neatly divided between 'hardliners' and 'moderates' is largely an external imposition that ignores the complexities of individual and collective identities 'on the

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[4] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), p. 33.

[5] On multiple ontologies, see John Law, *Aircraft Stories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

ground' in that polity.[6] And, as we will show, because these 'splittings' are enacted *from the beginning of securitisation*, they dramatically undermine the normative potential of desecuritisation as a process typically considered as the return to a normal, peaceable, political negotiation.

We now proceed in two main sections. We begin by first briefly laying out the tenants of ST and, in particular, the usually described relationship between securitisation and desecuritisation. In the same section, we then outline a set of three biases – *methodological, temporal, and ontological* – that underlie the blindness of ST to the frequent simultaneity of (de)securitising moves. We focus on these biases in full recognition of the fact that they are only *partial*. They are dominant frames of reference within ST but they have never erased the more nuanced views that were always already articulated by a host of ST scholars. The challenge, thus, is less to 'overcome' or 'rewrite' these biases within ST so much as to recover what they obscured in their becoming overly dominant modes of thought. It is thus that the article's second section symmetrically takes up these three biases – *methodological, temporal, and ontological* – but offers our alternative conceptual understanding of how they can be reconfigured in order to understand this phenomenon. The final section of the article then discusses the normative implications that emerge from our argument. Specifically, we argue that the process laid out upsets the classical view that desecuritisation usually stands in normatively 'good' terms to securitisation. In disrupting this dominant perspective, we in turn call for paying greater attention to power inequalities within desecuritising processes and the potentially *negative* long-term effects that the 'splitting speech acts' of desecuritisation can sometimes provoke within communities. Indeed, we then conclude by noting that though our argument hereafter is largely theoretical, it is far from academic in its importance. Instead, we suggest that understanding the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves may provide deep insights into the mechanisms underlying some protracted conflicts, recurrent socio-political crises, and beyond.

Three biases in securitisation theory

Almost from its inception, ST has been revised and extended to form several 'generations' of theory. In consequence, there 'is not only one theory of securitisation but potentially many, [each] with [its] distinctive center of gravity'.[7] This plurality of perspectives has done much to expand the empirical and theoretical coordinates of ST. In particular, scholars have worked to enlarge the locus of possible *empirical* enquiries into security politics beyond the state and its speech acts and into images, algorithms, non-state actors, and beyond.[8] These empirical enquiries have, in turn, led to substantive adjustments to the theory of ST. Indeed, today Holger Stritzel goes as far as to speak of a *post*-Copenhagen School of ST.[9] And this development of ST into a 'big tent' of scholarship has been

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[6] For instance, Mohammad Khatami questionned this dichotomy while president in 1998: 'Terms such as conservative, moderate and the like are more often meaningful in the West. Of course we have differences of opinion in Iran too, and one political tendency firmly believes in the prevalence of logic and the rule of law while there might be another tendency that believes it is entitled to go beyond the law.' Mohammad Khatami, 'Transcript of interview with Iranian president Mohammad Khatami', *CNN*, available at: {http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html} accessed on 19 February 2017.

[7] Thierry Balzacq and Stefano Guzzini, 'What kind of theory – if any – is securitisation?', *International Relations*, 29:1 (2015), p. 99.

[8] See, among others, Juha Vuori, 'A timely prophet?', *Security Dialogue*, 41:3 (2010), pp. 255–77; Lene Hansen, 'Theorizing the image for security studies', *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:1 (2011), pp. 51–74; Marieke De Goede, *Specualtive Security* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

[9] Holger Stritzel, *Security in Translation* (London: Palgrave, 2014).

crucial to maintaining the contemporary relevance of the approach. Yet, the complexity of contemporary security politics might warrant, we suggest, an attempt to recover securitisation *theory* in its originally concise, incisive, powerful, and *unified* form. We thus propose to move forward, now, by turning *back* to the origins of ST, before gradually discussing some of its conceptual variants.

ST originally argued that something becomes a security issue when security actors (verbally) proclaim it to be one and an audience accepts this claim. That understanding blended, first, a discursive understanding of social life ('*security is what states make of it*') with, second, a decisionist perspective influenced by the philosophy of Carl Schmitt. The theory began by suggesting that actors use speech acts to employ a security grammar attributing an existential threat to a referent object (for example, the environment) or (collective) subject (for example, the American people). Drawing on linguistics, the 'act' in a 'speech act' referred to the principle that a verbal utterance *does* something to an object or subject.[10] As Ole Wæver put it, 'by saying it, something is done (as in betting, giving a promise…). By uttering "security", a state representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it.'[11] The use of 'whatever means' becomes possible provided a target audience accepts the securitisation move, thus 'securitising' the issue. Alongside this discursive element, ST's Schmittian roots saw it counterpose an 'exceptional' security politics (in which utilising '*whatever means necessary*' is possible) to a 'normal' politics conceived of as dealing with issues through public debate and accommodation. In consequence of this second move, ST also theorised how securitised issues could be shifted back into this 'normal' political realm via 'desecuritisation'.[12]

Wæver first drew on Derridean thought to define desecuritisation as a failed securitisation move in which a target audience no longer accepts an initial securitisation move.[13] However, this understanding quickly came to be broadened by other scholars who sought to redress the 'comparatively scant attention' paid to desecuritisation.[14] They, most commonly, suggested that issues could be *deliberately* desecuritised not in consequence of any audience failure to accept securitisation but as a deliberate 'positive' normative-political move to reject the 'exceptional' realm of security politics. A diverse literature emerged around this basic idea, which Lene Hansen has summarised through a typology describing desecuritisation as involving one or more of four 'political forms' including *change through stabilisation, replacement, rearticulation*, or *silencing*.[15] While the first two of these four forms – stabilisation and replacement – are relatively 'neutral' in their understanding of the ethics of desecuritisation, and posit only that particular securitised issues sometime simply 'slip away' in their intensity (for example, the end of the Cold War) due to contingent factors or, instead, be replaced in their 'relevance' when a *more* threatening issue emerges, the last two of the four possibilities – rearticulation and silencing – are far more ethico-politically loaded in their intentionality. Setting aside *silencing* for our purposes,[16] *rearticulation* has, indeed, become the most common of these four ideal-type modes of desecuritisation in the literature.

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[10] John L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 99.

[11] Ole Wæver, 'Securitisation and desecuritisation', in Ronnie D. Lipchutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 55.

[12] Michael C. Williams, 'Words, images, enemies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 47 (2003), p. 523.

[13] Wæver, 'Securitisation and desecuritisation', p. 56.

[14] Claudia Aradau, 'Security and the democratic scene', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 7:4 (2004), p. 389.

[15] Lene Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation', *Review of International Studies*, 38:3 (2012), pp. 525–46.

[16] We leave aside *silencing* in this discussion here as it is relatively rarely used in the literature. An exception is found in Megan MacKenzie, 'Securitisation and desecuritisation', *Security Studies*, 18:2 (2009), pp. 242–61.

Rearticulation most often seeks – especially *vis-à-vis* the 'societal' sector of ST – a calling into question of the us/them or self/other relationship that underlies Schmittian understandings of securitisation by voicing issues of common identity that might bridge or overcome this dichotomy.[17] Although this can be achieved in many different ways, the basic sentiment is expressed in Claudia Aradau's words that desecuritisation can become 'emancipatory' in its effects if the process is understood as one working to employ fundamentally '*different*' speech acts'.[18] These 'different speech acts' are, indeed, central to the more normatively minded visions of ('rearticulary') desecuritisation that seek to bridge securitisation theory with more explicitly political and normative projects in security studies. For example, instead of seeking to desecuritise migration through a deconstructive process uncovering, say, the exaggerated nature of the threat, a 'different speech act' might involve stressing mobility – and so migration – as a political-democratic practice taking us back to the Kantian notion of universal hospitality.[19] The basic claim here is thus that if ST is based on the principle that a verbal utterance *does* something to an object or subject, then *saying* something *different* might *do* something *else*. And given the *negative* ethico-political status that *most*[20] scholars in ST attribute 'security' as a label, it is hoped that a desecuritisation based on *saying and doing things differently* will have positive ethico-political effects that help move an issue away from an exceptional politics of security and back into the realm of politics proper.

The difficulty, however, in seeing desecuritisation in terms of different speech acts is not that such a conception of desecuritisation is undesirable. Rather, it is that such an approach presumes that securitising agents do not themselves actively pursue a concept of desecuritisation or, if they do, that others can intervene and fully overcome that power-laden process. The argument rests, in other words, on a *reification* of the original securitisation/desecuritisation binary. The reason for this reification *vis-à-vis* those who take an ethico-political stance is, of course, simple: for desecuritisation to have positive political or emancipatory content, it is usually imperative that the 'agents of desecuritisation should not be the self-same agents of securitisation'.[21] This article is based on the empirical observation that securitising agents very often *do* carry out desecuritising moves at the *very moment* of securitisation and consequently that alternative interventions are likely seriously circumscribed in their possibilities. We return to the full implications of this claim in the latter half of this article but, for now, it is important to keep in mind this dominant normatively 'loaded' conceptualisation of desecuritisation as the positive-political counterweight to securitisation as we move to discussing why ST has been relatively blind to the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves in practice. In particular, we now want to suggest that a set of three biases – methodological, temporal, and ontological – have worked to hide this phenomenon from view and, in doing so, neglected its important implications.

Bias #1: Methodology

Methodologies restrict our interpretation of the world by emphasising one reality while hiding others.[22] In ST, three core methodological choices have obscured our view of the frequent

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[17] Aradau, 'Security and the democratic scene'.

[18] Ibid., p. 393.

[19] See, respectively, first, Jef Huysmans, 'The question of the limit', *Millennium*, 27:3 (1998), pp. 569–89 and then, Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans, 'Mobilising (global) democracy', *Millennium*, 37:3 (2009), pp. 583–60.

[20] For a review, see Jonna Nyman, 'What is the value of security?', *Review of International Studies*, 42:5 (2016), pp. 821–39.

[21] Paul Roe, 'Securitisation and minority rights', *Security Dialogue*, 35:3 (2004), pp. 279–94.

[22] Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans, 'Critical methods in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20:3 (2014), pp. 596–619.

simultaneity of securitising and desecuritising moves: the predominance of deductive methods through the privileging of a methodologically collectivist approach, case selection strategies, and a division of labour between scholars working on securitisation and desecuritisation. We now take each in turn, exploring the blindspots that each introduces.

First: *deduction*. In creating ST, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde developed a 'tight core around the key concept' of securitisation.[23] They then applied it to several empirical 'sectors'. The empirical studies of those sectors that followed sought, simply, to identify security speech acts and corresponding extraordinary measures to confirm, retrospectively, that securitisation had taken place. In other words, securitisation theory originally embraced a deductive method. That method was, of course, influenced by contextual events 'in the world', but thereafter, became a minimalistic framework to be 'tested' over multiple cases. One consequence of this, Wæver suggested, was that some scholars and practitioners have 'trivialised' the concept of securitisation by broadening its scope to such a degree that they 'see security' everywhere through a failure to understand the original theory as describing an ideal-type of securitisation in quite narrow conceptual terms.[24] There is a deductive failure, in other words, to appreciate that ST's original articulation was strictly 'ideal' in its formulation, and certainly not intended to reflect the 'reality' of security speak in every instance. This has led to a degree of theoretical rigidity over the meaning of terms like 'securitisation' vs 'desecuritisation' that has precluded a systematic revision of their conceptual underpinnings. And this rigidity has been further buttressed by the employment of a methodologically 'collectivist' approach to analysing basic units within ST. This approach sees scholars aggregate those units into particular 'sectors' and is explicit in Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde's words that:

> To say precisely who or what acts is always tricky, because one can disaggregate any collective into subunits and on down to individuals … . But to disaggregate everything into individuals is not very helpful, because much social life is understandable only when collectivities are seen as more than the sum of their 'members' and are treated as social realities (methodological collectivism).[25]

In other words, Buzan et al. believe the greatest theoretical leverage can be found in aggregated social realities, rather than an ontological view (see below) that embraces in-unit complexity. There is good reason to take this approach. But, again, it often leaves us blind to phenomena like the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves.

ST's second methodological bias relates to a problem of case selection or, rather, *selection bias*. Generally, ST has favoured enquiring into *clearly* successful or failed cases of securitisation. For example, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde advise looking for 'successful instances of securitisation … because they constitute the currently valid specific meaning of security'.[26] While this is a useful strategy for revealing common patterns at the early stages of theory making, it also narrows the focus of the approach problematically.[27] This bias also operates 'in-case' because scholars, when observing a particular case, tend to ignore evidence contradicting successful securitisation narratives. Indeed, it is debatable whether any 'pure' instance of a successful or failed instance of securitisation or

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[23] Ole Wæver, 'Politics, security, theory', *Security Dialogue*, 42:4–5 (2011), p. 468.

[24] Ibid.; Johan Eriksson, 'Observers or advocates?', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 34:3 (1999), pp. 311–30.

[25] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 40.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Balzacq, *Securitisation Theory*, p. 39; Stefano Guzzini, 'Securitisation as a causal mechanism', *Security Dialogue*, 42:4–5 (2011), pp. 329–41.

desecuritisation could ever be identified. Because the original theory created quite strict requirements for identifying securitisation – a security grammar found in textual artefacts, an issue presented as an existential threat pushing all other issues aside, the use of 'exceptional measures', and audience acceptance – any such 'full' securitisation or desecuritisation would always likely have been itself an exception in security politics. Interestingly, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde do suggest that partially successful securitisations might be interesting for offering insights into 'social attitudes on security', but – nonetheless – this was generally given short shrift in ST as it developed.[28] The ultimate effect of this selection bias, however, has been to discourage an awareness of the possibility of the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves within the self-same case.

Finally, alongside selection bias, the methodology of ST has been strongly influenced by its wider normative claim that the post-Cold War spread of security discourse was a worrying phenomenon. Indeed, as with any theory, many biases within ST are a consequence of its own genealogy: concerned by a growth in 'security speak', scholars focused on how successful securitisations were occurring and, then, cognisant of their normative opposition to this, began developing theories of desecuritisation as a secondary field of interest considered in quite separate terms. As Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde bluntly put it, 'basically, security should be seen as negative' and 'desecuritisation is the optimal long range option'.[29] It is thus, indeed, that Balzacq and Stefano Guzzini have commented that desecuritisation was always the 'end in itself' for ST.[30] The methodological problem that has evolved from this, however, was its eventual instantiation of a *division of labour* whereby some scholars analysed securitisations others analysed desecuritisation. That division of labour has made it more difficult to see the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves because, quite simply, very few scholars are looking for both at the same time. While, of course, scholars have always been sensitive to the inter-relations between these two processes in particular empirical cases, they have rarely, if ever, *theoretically* considered them in a holistic fashion while studying their cases. And this difficulty has only been compounded, we will now see, by the way this division of labour has impacted upon the understanding of the *temporalities* of (de)securitising moves.

Bias #2: Temporality

The methodological division of labour between studies of securitisation and desecuritisation has also help aggravate a second *temporal* bias within ST. This bias encourages a view that security grammars possess an essentially *linear* temporality. As Lene Hansen once summarised:

> Desecuritisation is derivative of securitisation semantically (modified through 'de'), and in terms of the political modality, the concept identifies: *desecuritisation happens 'away from' or 'out of' securitisation.*[31]

This conceptualisation can be read spatially, but also, temporally: something happening 'out of' something implies it coming *after*. Most (de)securitisation studies – whether originating in the first or second generation of the theory – follow this linear narrative. They begin from a non-securitisation stage and move towards a securitisation stage and, vice versa, from a securitisation to a desecuritisation stage.[32] This idea that desecuritisation is 'derivative of securitisation' has, of course, been bolstered by the aforementioned

[28] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 39.
[29] Ibid., p. 29.
[30] Balzacq and Guzzini, 'What kind of theory'.
[31] Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation', p. 530.
[32] See, for example, Wæver, 'Securitisation and desecuritisation', p. 98; Odysseas Christouand Constantinos Adamides, 'Energy securitisation and desecuritisation in the New Middle East', *Security Dialogue*, 44:5–6 (2013),

reading of the logic of securitisation itself that binarily counterposes a moment of *exception* or *emergency* to that of 'normal' politics. That reading was based on a focus on *illocutionary* speech acts, counterposed to the (performative) *perlocutionary* act. As Judith Butler describes it, aside from their ontological distinctions, the *illocutionary* act is distinct principally in its temporality: 'illocutionary speech acts produce effects *without any lapse of time* … the saying is in itself the doing … they are one and another simultaneously'.[33] By contrast, normal politics – that which desecuritisation is expected to represent the resuscitation of – has always been considered in linear processual terms (the lapsing of time) – a moment of political debate – to be properly achieved. It is thus that Hansen argues, for instance, that there is 'not, strictly speaking, "a" desecurity speech act'.[34] Because desecuritisation involves 'process' – normal politics – it comes *after* the decisionist moment of securitisation that occurs at a moment of temporal exception. While second generation ST did muddy this focus on the *illocutionary* act as 'magically' conjuring a security scene, it generally did *not* remove this temporal distinction between securitisation and desecuritisation, but rather, simply introduced a more processual understanding of securitisation itself and – most notably – the interactions between a securitising agent and its audience. In both cases, the distinction between 'normal' and 'exceptional' politics introduces a temporal blockage to seeing the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves). Nonetheless, our view is that – *pace* Hansen – cases like those in Table 1 do show desecurity speech acts (verbal or not) *simultaneously* enacted at the very moment of securitisation itself: without lapse of time and, so, demonstrating a very different temporality.

The bias towards linear temporality has also been buttressed by the normative underpinnings of ST, discussed earlier. If desecuritisation should, ideally, represent a transformatory 'rearticulation' of security speak into something that bridges the gap between the Self and the Other, through whatever means, then this requires a temporal window of opportunity through which normatively minded actors can engage in what Aradau described as those fundamentally 'different kinds of speech acts'.[35] Any desecuritising rearticulation of the divisions that made securitisation possible in the first place requires a move away from the actors – principally States – who engage in moments of Schmittian decisionism. Again, however, the possibility for such different normatively minded actors to engage in 'different speech acts' depends on ST setting up a linear temporality between securitisation and desecuritisation in which those actors have the time and space to intervene. This issue creates an internal necessity within ST to employ linear temporalities for, in their absence, it becomes more difficult (though not impossible) to distinguish the normative difference between the two concepts (see below).

Bias #3: Ontology

ST was originally premised on the development of an 'ideal-type' security grammar that, with great skill, combined relatively 'critical' understandings of social reality with an empirical research programme. It was thus instrumental in countering the positivist social scientific models to studying security that had come before it. One of the unintended consequences of turning ST into an ideal type was, however, giving the impression that ST units – the referent object, subject, and audience – were homogeneous entities. Indeed, few grey units were ever theorised in the ontologies of ST, at its origins, for at least two key reasons.

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    pp. 507–22; Faye Donnelly, 'The Queen's speech', *European Journal of International Relations*, 21:4 (2015), pp. 911–34.

[33] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 17.

[34] Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation', p. 538.

[35] Aradau, 'Security and the democratic scene', p. 393.

First, and as we have already seen above, securitisation and desecuritisation were predefined as conceptual 'twins' with the latter coming to life only after the former in the literature.[36] This 'twins' metaphor has ontological implications in its expression of two predefined states (securitisation and desecuritisation) that cannot easily be seen as potentially being co-imbricated within the same case. As long as this conceptual metaphor remains in place, it is difficult to perceive the simultaneity of (de) securitising processes in action.

Second, ST's early described tendency to embrace a methodological collectivism presents phenomena (for example, securitisation, desecuritisation) as explanatorily prior to any facts about individual actors or units, under the maxim that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. However, when we let these parts speak in our empirical research, security politics gets far messier, and the ontologies of those units far more complex. The methodological collectivist choice unnecessarily narrows our sight to predefined homogeneous units with a narrow set of social roles: a securitisation actor, a referent object, a referent subject, and an audience accepting or refusing the speech act. There is now 'fuzziness' available, in these units, and so little possibility of seeing how the simultaneity of (de) securitising moves may attempt to 'split' up such units into various shades of grey.

Of course, as it has developed, ST has long acknowledged that this 'thin' ontological understanding was problematical. In fact, it is interesting to note that while Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde – in their founding text – did utilise the image of different security 'sectors' as an analytical heuristic that might seem to reinforce a 'thin' ontology of units, they also clearly warned against 'cutting the world into sectors'.[37] Their recognition here was a broad ontological one: no domain of social life is an island unto itself, but rather is co-imbricated with others. Later, the emergence of a sociological strand of ST can be seen, to some degree, to take these words far more seriously and to provide a far better understanding of security politics.[38] In our view, however, one critical gap remains within this work: a continually limited understanding of the ontology of referent *subjects* (that which threatens), in particular. As we will see below, the lack of reflection on how the ontology of the threat itself effects (de)securitising processes is one of the key issues that must be remedied to appreciate how, when, and why securitising and desecuritising moves are often enacted at the self-same moment, again and again.

Possible ways out

We have seen how ST incorporates a set of biases that work to preclude the possibility of recognising the presence and potential importance of the simultaneous enaction of securitising and desecuritising moves within a single case. In what follows, we will now symmetrically present our alternative perspective on the methodologies, temporalities, and ontologies of ST, while detailing how they theoretically 'make sense of' this phenomenon. In doing so, we draw throughout on the five empirical examples listed in Table 1.

Towards abductive methodologies

Understanding the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves 'in practice' in particular cases requires a shift away from the deductive methodological collectivism of ST towards a *dual* methodological practice that combines elements of *dis*aggregation and *re*aggregation. We term such a process

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[36] Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation'.
[37] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 168.
[38] Thierry Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitisation', *European Journal of International Relations*, 11:2 (2005), pp. 171–201; Balzacq, *Securitisation Theory*.

a methodologically *abductive* stance to ST.[39] We agree with Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde that 'collectivities' must be seen as more than the sum of their 'members' parts, but also believe that in order to get consistently at what that 'something more' is we must move constantly back to those parts in order to appreciate the ambiguities within them that may affect the actual contours of any (de)securitising processes in action. We advocate for this move because only by abductively shifting between aggregation and disaggregation can we consistently identify how the 'splits' that seem to intend to be effected by the desecuritising moves of securitising actors are inherently *artificial* in form and being *externally* imposed by those actors upon a referent subject. It is always necessary to avoid taking the aggregated conceptualisation of a particular actor – which frequently represents merely a dominant discursive trope (for example, the idea that Iran is inherently divided between 'hardliners' and 'moderates') – at face value and, instead, to delve into the details to see whether this aggregation in fact holds water (see below).

Indeed, as we will see shortly, such a methodological oscillation between the whole and its parts can in fact already be found in the empirical analysis of security 'sectors' carried out by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde. Importantly, however, we should also note here that this general methodological issue – which was first addressed by Bill McSweeney – has been more fully taken into account by the 'sociological' version of ST that was originally popularised by Balzacq.[40] Within this sociological turn, securitising actors are understood as anyone or anything that makes a difference to (de)security speech acts on the one hand, and on securitisation processes at large, on the other hand. Some second-generation scholars have expanded this to include non-human agents, such as an algorithm, that might work 'behind the scenes' of a security speech act.[41] We agree that this disaggregation of all units of analysis within ST is central to successfully understanding any greater aggregated 'whole' and – below – attempt thus to expand this focus into a greater discussion of referent *subjects* (the threats themselves). Ultimately, our methodological suggestion is, however, a very simple one. We advocate an abductive movement, yes, between the aggregation and disaggregation of all units analysed in ST, and a consistent attention to the ambiguities and flux of security politics on the hard empirical ground of security as it is enacted in practice. Doing so, we suggest, moves us away from the problems of methodological collectivism and selection bias and opens up new horizons on understanding (de)securitising practice.

Towards non-linear temporalities

In 2001 George W. Bush remarked quite simply that:

> I want to speak directly tonight to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme in the name of Allah. The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends.[42]

Here Bush is *simultaneously* issuing securitising and desecuritising moves. He appeals to 'moderate' Muslims to reject 'evil' while declaring the 'terrorists' to be traitors to Islam itself (thus de facto appealing for a local securitisation against them). In doing so, he conjures a kind of grey zone, where

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[39] Thora Margareta Bertilsson, 'The elementary forms of pragmatism', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 7:3 (2004), pp. 371–89.

[40] Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[41] Jef Huysmans, 'What's in an act', *Security Dialogue*, 42:4–5 (2011), pp. 371–83.

[42] George W. Bush, 'President Bush addresses to the nation', *The Washington Post* (20 September 2001).

many Muslims fall 'in-between' these labels (the 'moderate' vs the 'terrorist') and so can neither be fully securitised nor fully desecuritised. As wider Euro-American discourses of terrorist threat have amply demonstrated, the demand thereafter becomes to 'prove' one's 'moderate' status to the wider world, and so earn the 'right' to be desecuritised. Importantly, there is *no* temporal division in the ways Bush's speech enacts securitising and desecuritising moves. Instead, his words fit with Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde's description of the most important internal conditions of any security speech act.[43] To repeat, these acts must 'follow the security form, the grammar of security, and construct a *plot* that includes an existential threat, point of no return, and a *possible way out*'.

Especially interesting now in Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde's phraseology is the use of the word *plot*. Security discourses are, in effect, *narratives* enunciated to *audiences* with more or less illocutionary or perlocutionary force. Those narratives are grounded on the 'two *predictions*' of any 'security argument': 'what will happen if we do *not* take "security action" (the threat) and what will happen if we do (how is the submitted security policy supposed to work?).'[44] Bush's simultaneously enacted securitising and desecuritising moves are necessary in order to holistically communicate the content of these two 'predictions' to particular audiences. Stressing that 'the enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends' connects to the need to describe 'what will happen if we *do*' take security actions (we will target only 'terrorists') or, more precisely, what will *not* happen if we do: the homogenised securitisation of an entire civilisation. Critically, this description must be enunciated *at the very moment* of securitisation or else the internal grammar of effective security speech acts will not be adequately articulated. It is this *pre*scription of the enunciated security 'plot' that closes the temporal window of opportunity that securitisation scholars previously sought to find between securitisation and desecuritisation. And, we discuss later, it is this *pre*scriptive quality of desecuritising moves enacted alongside securitising moves that has the potential to cause great violence by *demanding* the 'splitting' of socio-political identities.

That this atemporal relationship between securitisation and desecuritisation has not previously been theorised at length reflects a general lack of reflection on the concept of time in IR. Indeed, we can nuance our claims here by drawing on the non-linear conceptualisations of time that have been developed in social theory over the last few decades. In particular, we can begin by taking Gilles Deleuze's principle of the *virtual*.[45] The nature of the *plot* being constructed through security speech acts will inevitably appear in narratively linear terms when presented to audiences (if we do X then we will reach Y), but, and this is critical, at the moment of the narrative being spoken, its predicted contents are entirely *virtual*.[46] This virtuality can be taken in the all too literal English sense of the term, given that Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde prefigured their remarks on this 'possible way out' with the words that security arguments 'are about the *future*- [and] always hypothetical'. The narratives constructed by security actors evoke imaginary worlds (predictions) that most often *already* suggest possible ways in which we will 'get out' of this situation through eventual desecuritisation. However, beyond this very basic interpretation, (de)securitising moves are more substantially *virtual* in the Deleuzian sense.

For Deleuze, the virtual ((de)securitising *pre*diction) is a naturally *ideal* aspect of reality that, in spite of this, remains real: it produces effects. This correlates clearly with the 'magic' described by Balzacq *vis-à-vis* speech act theory: words (ideas) make realities real. However, Deleuze's conception

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[43] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 33.
[44] Ibid., p. 30.
[45] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergonism* (New York: Zone, 1966).
[46] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, 'Macrosecuritisation and security constellations', *Review of International Studies*, 35:2 (2009), p. 270; Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation', p. 538.

goes beyond Austin's speech act theory (and its intrinsic linearity) by combining the *virtual* with the *actual*. The virtual is identified with *multiple* possible actualisations by containing a set of potentialities that are in persistent flux and so something is virtual 'in so far as it is actualized, in the course of being actualized, it is inseparable from the *movement* of its actualization'.[47] The word *movement* is central here: virtuality, for Deleuze, is not a linear, but rather, a multiplistic and continuous process. What is important to draw from Deleuze is then the fact that the virtuality of desecuritising moves (the fact of them being 'predictions') enacted alongside and simultaneous to securitising moves means that in the pragmatics of their grammar they seek the conversion of the *virtual* into *real (effects, actualizations)* or, in Harold Garfinkel's terms, the conversion of possible worlds into operative worlds.[48] Desecuritising moves are simultaneously operative or in a state of being actualised at the same time as securitising moves due to this capacity for the virtual to 'have effects' in spite of not yet being real.

To simplify such theoretical abstractions: the importance of theorising time *vis-à-vis* the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves rests on how it nuances our understanding of the splittings that these speech acts effect. While, clearly, Bush's words effected a successful (that is, 'accepted') *securitisation* of terrorists and/or the wider Middle East post-9/11, his combination of those securitising moves with desecuritising moves also produced real effects. While a full desecuritisation of the *broad* referent subject in question ('the Arab World') was not yet possible, his desecuritising *moves*, those gestures towards 'Muslim friends' and 'Arab friends' – nonetheless had very real if virtual effects *at the same time as securitisation was occurring*. We discuss the full nature of those effects below, but – here – it is simply important to appreciate that seeing (de)securitisation in terms of non-linear temporalities makes the phenomenon we are discussing far less paradoxical. Indeed, to put our claims here in different terms: we are arguing that desecuritising moves are *pre*assembled ('virtually') alongside securitising moves, at the self-same moment. These preassembled propositions can be considered in the terms of a recipe that contains *ingredients* and *instructions* (the procedure for the combination of ingredients). The *ingredients* are a multitemporal and heterogeneous set of elements that are virtual in their potentiality (they could be combined in multiple ways to produce distinct effects), whereas the instructions represent a temporally linear description of how particular combinations are to proceed, ideally. Securitisation theory has thus far focused on the description of ideal-type and temporally linear *instructions* for these combinations without considering the full theoretical implications of the *pre*scription of, at the very least, the ingredients. The ingredients described by securitisation theory (referent object, referent subject, securitising speech act, etc.) are, of course, non-specific conceptual placeholders. However, in each and every case one wishes to speak security, one requires the content of those ingredients to be filled in *in advance*. This view is – again – entirely compatible with ST in any of its 'classical' forms – whether the original articulation by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde or the more 'sociological' variant laid out later. As will be becoming clear, however, the key ingredient of relevance to *de*securitising moves, which has received only minimal discussion in the literature, is that of the referent *subject* (the threat) itself. Indeed, while Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde did recognise that 'a study of the features of the threat itself is' vital to understanding security politics, we now wish to radically expand this claim by moving beyond mere 'features' (as understood by securitising actors and/or their audiences) towards developing a broader *ontology of the referent subject* and its relationship to the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves in action.[49]

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[47] Deleuze, *Bergonism*, pp. 42–3.
[48] Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), p. 97.
[49] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 32.

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Towards complex ontologies

We have now suggested that understanding the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves requires an (abductive) disaggregated focus on the referent *subject* of any (de)securitising move. Specifically, we need to complexify the *ontology* of the referent subject in order to appreciate that there is far more going on here than a simple *strategic* identification of 'friends' (for example, 'moderate Muslims' or 'Soviet citizens') and 'enemies' (for example, 'terrorists who are Muslims' or the 'Soviet leadership') that occurs in a more or less 'objective' manner. Surprisingly, however, the status of this referent *subject* of securitisation has received perhaps the least attention of any unit of relevance to ST. Instead, most focus has been placed on the interaction between a securitising actor and her audience. Typically, what these 'existential threats' actually *are* and what they *are not* has received minimal discussion, although their precise 'nature' has been argued to vary by sector in a largely 'objective' manner.[50] Of course, there has always been a subtle understanding that referent subjects are rarely homogenous, both within ST itself and within wider public and political debates over the nature of specific threats. Buzan and Wæver, for example, wrote *vis-à-vis* the securitisation of the so-called 'War on Terror' that:

> One interesting sub-theme to this overall pattern [of the 'macro-securitisation' of the war on terror] is the moves taken by many Western leaders to stop the *general securitisation* of the GWoT from taking the form predicted by Huntington of a clash of civilisations between the Islamic world and the West … The idea that 'all terrorists are Islamists' had to be countered by the strong assertion that this did not mean that all followers of Islam were therefore terrorists.[51]

Here, Buzan and Wæver are implicitly pointing to the phenomenon we are discussing: the simultaneous enaction of securitising and desecuritising moves seen in attempts to divide a 'Muslim' identity into threatening and non-threatening elements. For them, however, this was only an 'interesting sub-theme' that they have not since theorised. By contrast, we argue that appreciating this more complex ontological picture of the referent subject (and other ST units) is absolutely central to gaining a fuller picture of the effects of both securitisation and desecuritisation. Indeed, examples like those shown in Table 1 represent similar attempts to 'split' a referent subject into more or less threatening elements that require more or less extraordinary measures. The frequency of such examples, we believe, indicates their theoretical importance and, in particular, the critical relevance of unpacking the ontology of the referent subject further hereafter.

In order to achieve this, take another example: that of the 'Danish cartoon controversy'. Here, Danish newspapers published offensive images of the Prophet Muhammad, prompting widespread protests from Muslim communities, and then public debate over the nature of freedom of expression and the status of minorities in Euro-American states. Lene Hansen brought this case into analytical light via ST by describing how the use of offensive images and texts by newspapers in Denmark worked to construct a single 'impenetrable "Muslim" subject' that could be securitised against.[52] However, if we return again to Table 1 and dissect the words of the newspaper *Jyllands Posten* that first published these images alongside incendiary editorials, we see the newspaper specifically claiming that 'secular society is rejected [only] *by some Muslims*' and the further suggestion that these offensive 'cartoons are *including*' Muslims into the Danish tradition of satire. Against Hansen,

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[50] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*.
[51] Buzan and Wæver, 'Macrosecuritisation and security constellations', p. 273.
[52] Hansen, 'Theorizing the image for security studies'.

the words of *Jyllands Posten* itself indicate that they could indeed 'think' a non-homogenous Muslim subject and, more than this, that they were specifically working to *construct* such a non-homogenous subject by 'splitting' up the Muslim community into different, more or less 'threatening', elements. They carried out those processes simultaneously: enacting both securitising and desecuritising moves. But what is particularly interesting in this case can be seen in the historian Faisal Devji's words that:

> The scenario envisaged by *Jyllands-Posten* was of a poor immigrant minority being 'tested' for its tolerance by an entrenched and wealthy majority … Having gone on to fulfil the newspaper's prediction by failing its test, this wretched minority could then be accused of threatening the liberal constitution.[53]

Desecuritising moves enacted simultaneously with securitising moves are, indeed, a kind of 'test' thrown out to particular elements of a broader referent subject (for example, the 'moderates' of 'Iran', whomever they are). These are *preconditions* for a 'full' desecuritisation. And very frequently these preconditions *cannot be met*. Why? Because the specific 'splits' being enacted by these desecuritising moves at the moment of securitisation are – to go back to our introduction – *externally imposed* and *artificial in form*. These splits represent the crude 'image' of a 'threat' and its constitutive – as well as *potentially related* – elements as constructed within the mind of an outside political community. But they in no way reflect the 'real' ontology of a specific unit of analysis and, hence, it is very frequently impossible for the targeted political community to meet these conditions. To return to the example of Ronald Regan in the Cold War: the demand here is that citizens of the Soviet Union *split themselves* from their governance structures, irrelevant any affective, emotional, familial, or other ties they may have with their polity. The demand is for an absolutely clean break: a rejection of elements of the Self.

Susan Leigh Star once described the kinds of 'split' subjectivities (whether individual or collective) that we are discussing here as existing within 'high tension zones', which are the points of ambiguity (the 'slashes') lying in the space between dichotomies such as male/female, east/west or, indeed, friend/enemy.[54] Such points of ambiguity and tension are evident even in 'hyper' securitised issues such as terrorism.[55] Take, for example, US General David Petraeus dividing 'terrorists' into 'reconcilable terrorists' that can be dealt with diplomatically and 'irreconcilable' terrorists that must be exterminated.[56] The objective of such splittings is, ultimately, to open up conditions for the desecuritisation of a security issue *as far as is possible* by conjuring particular 'subsectors', we might say, within a referent subject (an 'Other') when full-scale ('emancipatory') desecuritisation is not feasible due to distrust, trauma or the sedimentation of securitisation. But these efforts are indeed zones of *tension*: any such effort to 'split' an external population is always fraught, delicate, and violent, as we will discuss at length in the final section of this article: it is never easy to divide up the world.

As will become clear, our argument in this article is particularly – perhaps only – relevant *vis-à-vis* (de)securitising processes that occur in the 'societal sector'. Indeed, Hansen has astutely suggested that desecuritisation processes are likely to differ by sector[57] and Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde

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[53] Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 179.

[54] Susan Leigh Star, 'Power, technology and the phenomenology of conventions', in John Law (ed.), *A Sociology of Monsters* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[55] Barry Buzan, *The United States and the Great Powers* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity, 2004).

[56] David Petraeus in Octavian Manea, 'Reflections on the "counterinsurgency decade"', *Small Wars Journal* (2013).

[57] Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation', p. 546.

also argued that these processes might be more ambiguous in the societal sector.[58] In any society, they observe, 'it is extremely difficult to establish hard boundaries that differentiate existential from lesser threats'.[59] The societal sector seems, indeed, the most likely space in which to observe instances of the simultaneous enaction of securitising and desecuritising moves given the heterogeneity and flux of such fundamentally 'human' ideational constructs, as opposed to the more ontologically 'fixed' realm of, say, the environmental sector.[60] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde did discuss, for example, the consequences of 'overlapping' identities – such as 'Muslim' and 'Arab' in the Middle East – and argued that such overlapping identities might play 'contradictory roles' given that 'they can be seen as threatening to, and as threatened by, attempts to construct specific national identities and as useful in mobilizing on the international level'.[61] The securitisation of some agents based on their identity *X* ('Muslim', 'Communist', etc.) can occur simultaneously with their desecuritisation based on their identity *Y* ('Secular', 'Moderate', 'Wealthy', etc.). *Both* 'normal or everyday' political bargaining processes *and* extraordinary measures become possible means of interacting with this Other because, simply, every referents subject's ontology is complex.

Two issues are thus coming to light here. Firstly, the complex ontology of any referent subject within itself can make the desecuritising *demands* enunciated alongside securitising moves very difficult to acquiesce to and implies a great degree of violence (which is discussed at length in the following section). Secondly, the complex ontology of the referent subject allows securitising actors themselves to 'strategise', to some degree, in how they deal with the 'threat' facing them. Such 'strategising' is, however, subtle in form, and far more than a mere 'divide and rule' strategy. To see this, we can turn first to Wæver's early words that when it comes to politics:

> There will remain conflicts and risks – and the question of how to handle them. Should developments be securitised …? Often, our reply will be to aim for de-securitisation … but occasionally the underlying pessimism regarding the prospects for orderliness and compatibility among human aspirations will point to *scenarios sufficiently worrisome that responsibility will entail securitisation in order to block the worst.*[62]

Wæver's nuance here, which suggests (against ST's general inclination) that securitisation may sometimes be desirable, is furthered by our description of the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves, which might, indeed, be read as the means by which actors attempt to achieve a balance between security and politics 'as normal'. As Donald Trump has recently discovered, attempting to securitise against entire populations (viz. the 'Muslim Ban') is a frequently ineffective strategy within liberal democratic states. Too much politics as 'normal' is sacrificed in such securitisations in favour of 'security' in the eyes of many. Indeed, it seems to us that the simultaneous enaction of securitising and desecuritising moves within liberal democratic states often relates to this need to preserve a self-identity uncorrupted by the excesses of unrestrained security politics. Indeed, in particular, and even in cases where particular leaders may favour greater securitisation, the simultaneity of (de) securitising moves may be pragmatically necessary for leaders to find acceptance from their public audiences for these actions. Such a claim links our argument to the second (sociological) generation

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[58] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 23.
[59] Ibid., p. 23.
[60] Ole Wæver, 'Securitising sectors?', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 34:3 (1999), pp. 334–40.
[61] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 132.
[62] Ole Wæver, 'The EU as a security actor', in Morten Kastrup and Michael C. Williams (eds), *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 285.

of ST, which provides tools through which to unpack the complex negotiations or 'translations' of security.[63]

Second generation ST, indeed, placed great attention on the role of audiences in security politics.[64] This generation of theory insisted that we move away from positing that securitising moves had a *single* target audience towards understanding the role of multiple audiences. As Sarah Leonard and Christian Kaunert observe, there exist different audiences who may each read the same speech act in entirely different terms.[65] For instance, Iran's foreign minister, advised his interlocutors during his negotiations with the United States:

> *You cannot pick and choose your audience* … When Secretary Kerry talks to the US Congress, the most conservative constituencies in Iran also hear him and interpret his remarks.[66]

Wendy Sherman, the then US Undersecretary of State, expressed the same sensitivity by relying on the metaphor of a Rubik's cube to express the twists and turns required to make security policy acceptable to several audiences.[67] While modern ST would have little difficulty with this notion, it has not been noted how the multiplicities of target audiences will often lead to the necessity of simultaneously balancing securitising and desecuritising moves: the process can work to reconcile divergent concerns by, indeed, 'splitting' referent subjects into distinct elements. Frequently, this process comes into clearer view only when we follow – again with the sociological variant of ST – the *practices* involved in making and unmaking security more closely, and avoid remaining at the discursive ('speech act') level. Take, for example, the practice of diplomatic negotiations, the iterative process of which often leads to the patching together of different, even entirely contradictory statements within a single narrative so as to satisfy divergent organisational interests and the complex concerns of audiences.[68] From within these organisational contexts, the simultaneity of (de) securitising moves becomes an entirely logical solution to the problems posed by controversial or polarising contexts such as rapprochement processes with the USSR or Iran (see Table 1).

Beyond a focus on the strategic perspective of an audience or securitising actor *vis-à-vis* a particular referent subject (threat), sociological variants of ST also have the potential to help us push the implications of studying the simultaneous enaction of securitising and desecuritising moves further. Indeed, if we move beyond a 'strategic' understanding of this process, we can appreciate that many 'selves' are embedded in each and every individual person. Star, for instance, notes how any individual might simultaneously be a voter, a mother, an investor, and a diplomat.[69] The multiplistic nature of these 'selves' might lead actors towards – consciously or unconsciously – balancing (de) securitising moves in order to satisfy their own internal complexity as social actors. Star suggests,

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[63] Stritzel, *Security in Translation*.

[64] Sarah Leonard and Christian Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience in securitisation theory', in Balzacq (ed.), *Securitisation Theory*; Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitisation'; Balzacq, *Securitisation Theory*; Stritzel, *Security in Translation*.

[65] Leonard and Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience in securitisation theory'.

[66] Mohammad Javad Zarif in Robin Wright, 'Exclusive: Iran's foreign minister says sanctions would kill nuclear deal', *Time* (9 December 2013).

[67] Wendy Sherman in David Sanger, 'Obama's chief negotiation in Iran nuclear talks plans to depart after deadline for deal', *New York Times* (27 May 2015).

[68] Iver Neumann, 'A speech that the entire ministry may stand for', *International Political Sociology*, 1:2 (2007), pp. 183–200; Finn Stepputat, 'Knowledge production in the security–development nexus', *Security Dialogue*, 43:5 (2012), pp. 439–55.

[69] Star, 'Power, technology and the phenomenology of conventions'.

methodologically, that we thus always unveil the multiplistic ontologies of social actors by, first, refusing a 'heroic' narrative that attributes, say, securitisation to a (state) executive acting 'alone'. It is always necessary to assess how, for example, a state leader's speech act is connected to other actors (subordinates, experts, etc.). Secondly, one should be sensitive to all the multiplistically 'real' selves of any agent.[70] This may reveal marginalities or points of contradiction that require the simultaneous use of securitising and desecuritising moves in order to be adequately reconciled. Embracing these tenants, alongside a non-linear temporal understanding of security politics, would, we suggest, allow ST to move forward in understanding the ontologies of this phenomenon at a more profound level as research proceeds in this area.

Reconsidering normativity in ST

Having discussed the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves conceptually, we now consider the consequences of our restructuring of the relationship between securitisation and desecuritisation. Doing so is important given our claim is not simply that the complexity of contemporary security threats requires a more nuanced perspective, which is something all ST scholars would agree with. No, our broader claim is that appreciating the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves radically repositions the usually 'positive' ethico-political status attributed to desecuritisation in ST and in so doing sheds potential light on previously unseen forms of global political violence that, in some cases, may lie at the root of protracted conflicts and/or security dilemmas.

In order to explain this latter claim, let us return to Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde's earlier quoted words that ultimately 'security should be seen as negative'.[71] For them, *de*securitisation was therefore the 'optimal long range option'.[72] However it was conceptualised, 'getting away' from security was the goal. Gradually, *most*[73] of ST has embraced this view that desecuritisation should be considered in binary terms to securitisation and, much more than this, be considered a normatively 'good' or even 'emancipatory' form of politics.[74] We argued above that this shift from an endorsement of desecuritisation in the founding texts of ST towards a full-fledged coming-together around desecuritisation as a positive force in the research community's later development has worked to introduce a problematical set of methodological, temporal, and ontological biases into the theory. In our view, the (perhaps increasingly) common empirical phenomenon of the simultaneous enaction of securitising and desecuritising moves makes this normative division between securitisation and desecuritisation rather more ambiguous than previously thought. Let us know unpack this claim thoroughly.

The normative content of the process we are describing relates to the ways in which the simultaneous enaction of desecuritising moves with securitising moves can work to *predefine conditions for 'real' desecuritisation*. If we return to Table 1, then we see how Reagan, Assad, Bush, and *Jyllands Posten* are all making *demands* under which desecuritisation will become possible. By making these

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[70] Jonathan Luke Austin, 'Torture and the material-semiotic networks of violence across borders', *International Political Sociology*, 10:1 (2016), pp. 3–21; Jonathan Luke Austin, 'We have never been civilized: Torture and the materiality of world political binaries', *European Journal of International Relations*, 23:1 (2017), pp. 49–73.

[71] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 29.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Nyman, 'What is the value of security?'.

[74] Roe, 'Securitisation and minority rights'; Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation'; Aradau, 'Security and the democratic scene'.

demands at a temporally synchronous moment to issuing a securitising speech act this process works to set the conditions for future political debate. As we noted earlier, positive ethico-political views of desecuritisation rely on the notion that the 'agents of desecuritisation should not be the self-same agents of securitisation'.[75] But the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves severely delimits this possibility and implies that any move into 'normal politics' will be structured by these *predefined* conditions: by the demands that a (powerful) actor has already long-before issued. These demands are addressed to individuals or groups (for example, ordinary Iranians) who are said to be *related* to the 'broad' referent *subject* of any securitisation (that which is supposed to threaten; that is, the Iranian 'hardliners') and those addressees face the 'choice' of either complying with these conditions or being securitised against. Both choices involve violence. The violence of securitisation may often be more physically overt, but the violence of laying out these desecuritising preconditions is equally acute, simply distinct in form. The violence involved relates to notions of *purity*. Security has previous been described 'as a new church, as the way faith is practised in the West' and central to that faith are the rituals of sometimes violent purification that Mary Douglas described in her *Purity and Dirt*.[76] The simultaneous enaction of desecuritising moves with securitising moves works to similarly embrace 'purity' as the end-goal of security politics: while the totality of any referent subject may not be threatening, those potentially non-threatening elements must purify themselves by expelling the threat and splitting themselves away from any and all contact with it. But, as we saw when discussing the ontology of referent subjects, this demand may simply be impossibly painful or violent to meet.

The pain of the splitting speech acts evoked by the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves can be best appreciated through psychoanalytical insights. Indeed, splitting is a well-known psychological mechanism described by Melanie Klein as resting on the division of the world into 'good' and 'bad' parts. Wilfred Bion summarised the effects of such 'splitting processes' as 'violent' and intended:

> To produce minute fragmentation and deliberately aimed at effecting separations which run directly counter to any natural lines of demarcation between one part of the psyche, or one function of the psyche, and another.[77]

Here we can thus come to see securitising agents in psychoanalytical terms as adopting paranoid-schizoid modes of functioning that see 'splitting as a defense'.[78] But, importantly, this understanding of splitting can be usefully coupled, through the psychoanalytical perspective, with another common term therein – desire – which moves our explanation for the predominance of splitting speech acts in societal-ideational securitisations beyond mere pragmatics. Indeed, though much of ST has focused on the implication of the Schmittian friend/enemy dichotomy and its creation of 'meaningful antitheses' through which violence practices are manifested, psychoanalytical perspectives foreground the tensions within such dichotomies by stressing innate elements of desire for the Other.[79] As Jacques Lacan puts it, the Other is not only a figure to be feared but there exists rather, a complicated and contradictory 'desire of the Other'[80] in all its forms, 'desire for the Other, desire to be desired by the Other, and, especially, desire for what the Other desires'.[81] The desires of concern

[75] Roe, 'Securitisation and minority rights', p. 286.

[76] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Ark, 1984); Bulent Diken and Carsten B. Laustsen, 'We two will never twin', *Global Society*, 20:2 (2006), p. 200.

[77] Wilfred Bion, *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1967), p. 69.

[78] Ibid., p. 118.

[79] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 35.

[80] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (London: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 689.

[81] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Zed, 1999), p. 74.

here may be pragmatically economic (immigration), ideologically driven (Marxist, Capitalist), (civil) religiously motivated (the Islamic *umma*), or simply sexual (burqas/harems). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's own understanding of desire, Roxanne Doty notes, however, that desire has a tendency to 'displace its own limits' (transgress, in Mary Douglas' terms, societal boundaries) and as such must always provoke a self-imposed inhibition on its scope.[82] These limits are reflected in how the desecuritising moves that are enacted alongside securitising moves set conditions or, rather, *demands* that seek to make the Other similar to the Self as far as is possible: by privileging the so-called 'moderates' over the 'radicals', for example. But to go back to Bion, that process is always violent: it produces those 'minute fragmentations' that very often 'run directly counter to' the multiple ontologies of any referent subject. These are *forced choices* that – in their predefinition at the moment of a commencement of an 'exceptional' moment of security – work to preorder what any emergence into a 'normal' state of political debate and negotiation might mean: they shape a future.

More than simply causing psychological violence to particular individual or collective subjectivities, however, the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves might be read as provoking greater political conflict or somatic violence in particular locales. Rather than, say, encouraging an internal debate within certain political communities that may give birth to threats (for example, the 'Arab World' or the 'USSR', etc.), the setting of these desecuritising preconditions at the moment of securitisation can often work to effect concrete splits within societies that may become irreconcilable. This will be especially true when the foreign policies of securitising actors intervene to actively – militarily, politically, economically, etc. – support what they define as certain 'moderate' elements of a referent subject against others. And what will become particularly clear here is that the worrying normative questions we are raising all relate to the imbalances in *power* that frequently exist between actors engaged in disputes over security. It is the weak – the wretched of the earth – who will be affected by the splitting speech acts implemented at any moment in which securitising and desecuritising moves are simultaneously enacted, not the powerful. And so the paradox becomes that a process – desecuritisation – that has been described as potentially emancipatory, may in fact become deeply oppressive.

In sum, for those who take desecuritisation as a positive political project, the idea that this picture may be more 'fuzzy' than previously considered will be disappointing. But, crucially, our argument is simply a return to the roots of ST theory as a *practically* derived set of theories: there was never any 'abstract' ST, we would suggest, but rather a set of concepts derived from the world and applied to the world in turn. The theory we have sketched herein simply takes us *back in time* to a point when ST recognised that we must accept:

> The task of trying to manage and avoid spirals and accelerating security concerns, to try to assist in shaping the … [world] in a way that creates the least insecurity and violence.[83]

These are Ole Wæver's words and they reflect an understanding that what ST is essentially advocating for is the negotiation and production of a balanced symbiosis in society that limits the use of violence to a minimum. By nuancing ST with an understanding of the simultaneity of (de)securitising moves, we would suggest, we are able to assist in the achievement of such a symbiosis by recognising that there is no panacea in turning to desecuritisation: quite the contrary, we must be as suspicious of that process as securitisation itself.

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[82] Roxanne Doty, 'Racism, desire, and the politics of immigration', *Millennium*, 28:3 (1999), p. 592.
[83] Wæver, 'The EU as a security actor', p. 285.

Conclusion

The emergence and popularisation of ST in the 1990s represented a paradigm shift in security studies. And while the world has changed since then, the research programme of ST has remained relevant through its constant revision. In this article, we contributed to this tradition by making sense of the common phenomenon of the simultaneous enaction of securitising and desecuritising moves by security practitioners. We argued that this phenomenon has previously gone unnoticed given a set of methodological, temporal, and ontological biases that have developed within ST. Demonstrating how these biases can be overcome – and even reconciled with the seminal texts of ST – by drawing on work from within social theory and elsewhere, we argued that the frequent simultaneity of (de) securitising moves most urgently requires us to reconsider the normative status of desecuritisation within ST. Although desecuritisation has traditionally been viewed as normatively positive, we argued that its temporally immanent enaction alongside securitising moves might introduce more violence into security politics and, in fact, exacerbate protracted conflicts. Ultimately then, we have made the normative ambitions of some within ST more opaque. Desecuritisation is not a shortcut to the ethical-political good within ST. Any move in that direction will require, indeed, far more research. And, while this may disappoint, we would return to the early claims of ST founders that there remains within ST 'the basic merit of conceptualizing security as a labelling for which actors can be held responsible'.[84]

Acknowledgements

Biographical information

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[84] Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 212.

sociology of knowledge in defence organisations building on the transnational diffusion of design thinking. He previously developed an approach raising awareness on confirmation biases involved in the relationship between theory and practice based on the Iranian nuclear crisis from the American and Russian perspectives to be published by Routledge's *New International Relations* Series. Beaulieu-Brossard's work is also available in the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* (2017), *International Relations* (2015), and the *International Studies Journal* (2014), to name a few.