

State-Centric not only in its Findings – How the Securitization Framework is still held Hostage by Methodological Nationalism

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Comments welcome

Abstract

Until today, the state plays an important role in International Relations and Security Studies. *Ulrich Beck* criticizes that its dominant position is often not merely an empirical fact but stems from a distinctively *methodological* nationalism. The *Copenhagen School's* securitization framework has played an important role in overcoming such methodological nationalism in Security Studies. Nevertheless, it has been subject to various criticisms. The paper starts off with the thesis that much of this criticism can be met by disclosing and removing residual traces of methodological nationalism still inherent to the framework.

The paper argues that methodological nationalism is inscribed into the securitization framework in two distinct ways, related to two of the ‘key components’ of the Copenhagen School’s work: emergency action, guided by the logic of security, and the relevance of inter-unit relations. The first component implies action; when taking a closer look, however, it turns out that the Copenhagen School’s logic of security cannot account for such action. Moreover, there is no theoretical entity which adopts emergency action and thus breaks the rules which would otherwise bind. The paper introduces the theoretical concept of a ‘securing actor’ to account for this shortcoming. It shows how the securitization framework is dependent upon this concept, where it is implicitly situated, and how its existence fosters methodological nationalism. Moreover, it argues that the reference to the ‘unit’ brings the CS dramatically close to the theoretical work of Kenneth Waltz. To resolve these shortcomings, the paper proposes an alternative definition of securitization, designed to overcome methodological nationalism and keep the conceptual rigor of the CS's original approach.

I. Introduction

International Relations and Security Studies have been state-centric endeavors for the longest part of their history. Although a variety of alternative strands of theory have evolved since Neorealist dominance and the heydays of the Neo-Neo debate, the state still plays a dominant role in these disciplines.¹ For the Sociologist *Ulrich Beck* this dominant position is not merely an empirical fact but stems from a distinctively *methodological* nationalism. In Security Studies, particularly the debate of the 1980s and 1990s was characterized by questioning the position of the state as a natural unit of analysis. Within the context of this debate, the *Copenhagen School's* (CS) securitization framework has emerged and has provoked an innovative theoretical discussion on the meaning of security in political practice.² Despite the CS's contribution to overcoming methodological nationalism in Security Studies, *McDonald* criticizes that the school has presented a still too narrow conception of security. This is normatively problematic, he argues, since securitization has emerged as shorthand for the construction of security in the eyes of many scholars.³ Many worthwhile elaborations of the securitization framework have attempted to overcome this narrowness; often by questioning the metatheoretical grounding of securitization in speech act theory.⁴ Unfortunately, however, such endeavors have repeatedly thrown the conceptual baby out with the normatively problematic back water.

To avoid such 'going beyond' the framework, the present paper operates at the level of concrete theoretical concepts.⁵ It starts off with the thesis that much criticism can be met by disclosing and removing residual traces of methodological nationalism still inherent to the framework. The CS has explicitly stated its academic interest in *international* security.⁶ Nevertheless, they regard the prominent position of the state in their work merely as an empirical matter. Other scholars, however, have called it the result of theoretical confusion⁷ or a normative commitment.⁸ The present paper's critique goes deeper than these charges by arguing that the central position of the state is *conceptually* inscribed into the framework in

¹ (cf. Carlsnaes, Risse and Simmons 2002; Hellmann, Wolf and Zürn 2003).

² For the original idea see Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998). For major contributions to the respective debate see e.g. Balzacq (2005), Stritzel (2007), McDonald (2008) and Vuori (2008).

³ (cf. McDonald 2008).

⁴ Balzacq (2005) and Stritzel (2007) argue that Austin's speech act theory is incapable of carrying the metatheoretical weight put on it by the CS. Vuori (2008) broadens the metatheoretical basis of securitization within speech act theory as such.

⁵ Considering Waever's leaning towards the theory of theory of Waltz (1979:Ch. 1; Waever 2009) this appears as a more appropriate way of critique (also see footnote 51).

⁶ (Buzan et al. 1998:21).

⁷ (Knudsen 2001; also see Smith 2005).

⁸ (McDonald 2008).

very concrete terms. This, in turn, provides the opportunity to overcome methodological nationalism by modifying these very concepts.

The paper looks at these concepts from two perspectives. First, it investigates the environment in which the CS has emerged and of which it has drawn in elaborating their ideas, this is the debate on re-defining security. Discussing where securitization comes from is important since theoretical concepts “roughly correspond to the ways in which human affairs are organized in *particular times and places*. They may, accordingly, appear to be increasingly arbitrary when practices change.”⁹ The paper will thus reconstruct the road Security Studies have taken after departing from an utterly state-centric conception of the discipline. It will highlight the prominent role occupied by the CS on this journey towards a less methodological nationalist concept of security. Beck's work on methodological nationalism will thereby serve as a guiding principle. It will, secondly, show that, the securitization framework still suffers from a substantial degree of methodological nationalism and thus participates in reproducing an overly state-centric conception of global politics.

The paper pursues two main lines of argument concerning two of the three key components of the securitization framework: “existential threats, emergency action, and effects on inter-unit relations by breaking free of rules” (1998:26). Emergency action, guided by the CS's logic of security, is argued to foster methodological nationalism by its reliance on the breaking of rules and the CS's tendency to tie these rules to a national-political context. Moreover, there is no theoretical entity which adopts emergency action and thus breaks the rules. The paper introduces the theoretical concept of a ‘securing actor’ to account for this shortcoming. It shows how the securitization framework is dependent upon this concept, where it is implicitly situated, and how its existence fosters methodological nationalism. Second, the concept of ‘unit’ will be investigated. It is argued that the tacit connection of securitization to a ‘unit’ brings the CS dramatically close to the theoretical work of Kenneth Waltz.

Finally, the paper argues for abandoning the ‘unit’ and for introducing a ‘securing actor’ into the framework. The securing actor's relationship to the other conceptual parts of the framework – the securitizing actor, the audience and the referent object – will be spelled out. The inclusion of the securing actor and the conceptualization of its relationship to the other conceptual parts are capable of relaxing several problems highlighted by other treatments of the framework and, finally, to also propose an alternative logic of security better suited for comprehending contemporary political practice.

⁹ (Cox 1985:204, *emph. added*).

II. Security Studies on its Way beyond Methodological Nationalism

This section will first give a brief overview over what methodological nationalism exactly means. It will then investigate how the debate on re-defining security has helped Security Studies to escape methodological nationalism. Since this debate is well known,¹⁰ the paper will only make brief references to it. It will furthermore be shown how the CS has incorporated the debate's achievements and how it has gone further down the road. Thereafter, the limits of the framework will be addressed.

What Methodological Nationalism means

The notion of methodological nationalism has emerged within the context of a broader research agenda of *Ulrich Beck* on world risk society and reflexive modernization.¹¹ The major theme of this agenda is the conceptualization of present political dynamics as provoked by the unintended consequence of a continuous development and expansion of industrialized state-centric modernity. New political struggles, over for example newly emerging risks, are signs of a reflexive modernization in which existing socio-political orders are challenged and national borders are transcended.

Beck wants this upheaval of industrial modern certainties to be understood as encompassing all spheres of social conduct. Accordingly, he argues that conventional social scientific theories evolved within the context of and are thus deeply attached to industrial state-centric modern certainties. As a result, theories often take the nation state as their natural unit of analysis for granted. Beck terms this methodological nationalism:

“Max Weber's 'iron cage' – in which he thought humanity was condemned to live for the foreseeable future – is to me a prison *of categories and basic assumptions* of classical sociology (and the cultural, social and political sciences). We have to free ourselves from these categories in order to find out about the unknown post-Cold-War world. [...] Conventional social sciences, I therefore want to argue, even if they are conducting highly sophisticated theoretical and empirical research programs, are caught up in a circular argument. By using the old categories (like class, family, gender roles, industry, technology, science, nation-state, and so on), they take for granted what they actually try to demonstrate; that we still live, act and die in the normal world of nation-state modernity.”¹²

It is thereby however not only the explicit reference to the state, which can make concepts problematic; it is also the state's implicit necessity for a theory to function. The latter “is the

¹⁰ See e.g. Buzan and Hansen (2009).

¹¹ See e.g. Beck (1994, 1999) and Beck and Lau (2005). For a discussion on Beck's and other notions of methodological nationalism see Smith (2008). For a critical assessment regarding the scope of methodological nationalism in IR see Albert (2007).

¹² (Beck 1999:133).

case when the *practice* of the argument or the research presupposes that the unit of analysis is the national society or the national state or the combination of both”.¹³ It is important to emphasize the difference between categories of practice and categories of analysis. Beck does not call for the end of the nation-state in empirical terms. Empirical research – despite new concepts and tools – might still result in having the nation-state in a central position, since it still is a very important category of practice. Analytical concepts, however, have to allow for the emergence of other forms of social organization and practice as important or even primary. Methodological nationalism forecloses this possibility since it “adopts categories of practice as categories of analysis”.¹⁴

To adequately capture new developments, social sciences have to rethink their conceptual and theoretical foundations. For Beck, this task is of “historical importance”.¹⁵ For a theoretical approach, free of methodological nationalism, it is first of all important to develop analytical concepts sufficiently abstract to be applicable beyond the nation state. Beck furthermore points at a second dimension of growing importance. In reflexive modernization, old certainties fade away and political actors are challenged to continuously (re-)produce of their life worlds. As a consequence, social science’s task of fixing analytical concepts becomes questioned, since it is in everyday political practice that concepts are constructed. In other words, while industrial modern social sciences displayed a tendency to commit *acts* of essentialization, Beck opts for an analytical shift toward *observing* essentializations committed in political interaction.¹⁶ For IR, this has major consequences: Ontologically, reflexive “[m]odern society is defined by process rather than structure”¹⁷ and analytical concepts become dynamized.¹⁸

Taken together, escaping methodological nationalism then entails four concrete steps: critically investigating the conceptual framework of security and disclosing its concrete elements; establishing a variety of legitimate conceptualizations for these elements beyond the state; capturing the variety by a sufficiently abstract concept; dynamizing the elements by handing over the power of definition to political actors. The elements of 'security' will hereafter be referred to in the form of concrete questions – *Security from what?*, *Whose security?*, *Security by which means?*, and finally *Who secures?*.¹⁹

¹³ (Beck and Sznaider 2006:3).

¹⁴ (Ibid. 2006:4).

¹⁵ (Ibid. 2006:5).

¹⁶ On acts and the observation of essentialization see Poliout (2004).

¹⁷ (Rasmussen 2002:328).

¹⁸ (Albert 1998).

¹⁹ For a similar approach see Baldwin (1997). Also see Buzan and Hansen (2009).

Cracking 'Security'

Traditionally, security has been all about the state.²⁰ It was most prominently conceptualized by *Kenneth Waltz* as the survival of a sovereign unit in an anarchic system, consisting of a multitude of like units and it was ultimately to be defended by military means.²¹ In more practical terms: states were threatened by states and the major mode by which security was acquired as well as threatened was the military potential of states. Consequentially, Security Studies were widely acknowledged as being about, to speak with the well known words of *Stephen Walt*, „the study of threat, use, and control of military force.“²² Security policy and Security Studies, both represent textbook examples for the methodological nationalism outlined by *Beck*. With the Cold War coming to an end, international and academic environments changed substantially. In Security Studies, the well known debate on re-defining security had been conducted since the late 1970s. The debate was characterized by what *Krause* and *Williams* have termed a widening and a deepening of the security agenda.²³ Regarding the former, the question *Security from what?* was loosened from its traditional answer – security from other states – and put on the table for debate. Regarding the deepening of security, the newly emerging question was as follows: *Whose security?*. In both cases the attachment of the respective questions to the state was loosened and a variety of alternative answers was invoked.

Within this context, the CS presented its securitization framework. Even before, *Barry Buzan* had been an important figure in the debate on widening security.²⁴ The CS adopted *Buzan's* idea of security sectors which was originally aimed at locating different security threats in military, political, economic, societal and environmental sectors.²⁵ Within the Copenhagen context, sectors were extended to referent objects; a concept sufficiently abstract to capture a broad variety of concrete representations of “that 'thing' whose security is at stake”²⁶ beyond the state. The CS, in other words, fastened the initial developments of the widening and the deepening agenda conceptually.

In an ongoing debate on re-defining security, yet another question was opened to debate.

²⁰ ‘Traditional’ means: in the sense of the modern discipline of Security Studies and IR which reflects upon political practice since the congress of Vienna and particularly in times of the Cold War (cf. Wæver 1997). This time frame corresponds with the emergence of what Beck has termed first modernity. Before, ‘security’ appeared to incorporate distinctively different meanings (Rothschidt 1995).

²¹ (Waltz 1979).

²² (Walt 1991:212).

²³ (Krause and Williams 1996).

²⁴ (Buzan 1991).

²⁵ (Ibid. 1991:19).

²⁶ (Knudsen 2001:362).

Particularly scholars of Critical Security Studies (CSS) also posed the questions of *Security by which means?*²⁷ The maybe most comprehensive of such endeavors was conducted by those critical scholars dealing with environmental security, which have outlined comprehensive accounts of a new understanding of security practices.²⁸ Similar to many theorists concerned with questions of widening or deepening 'security', the CS is rather critical about this body of work. Without granting any further consideration to CSS's conceptualization of security practices, the CS limits its critique to comments on critical security scholars' attempts to establish new referent objects. Regarding the work of Ken Booth and his concept of "emancipation",²⁹ which sees the individual as ultimate referent object of security practice, the CS criticizes that this is nothing more than a securitizing move in favor of the individual.³⁰ The relevance of this criticism becomes more obvious in the next section.

Conceptual Elements on the Move

Efforts to open security conceptually were criticized fiercely. Most criticism was based on an understanding of security as an analytical concept. From that perspective, the inclusion of, for example, environmental hazards into security definitions would merely dilute the analytical value of the concept.³¹ Despite these attempts to defend the traditional meaning, re-defining security became "something of a cottage industry"³² and serious conceptual uncertainties emerged. It is in overcoming this deadlock of analytical uncertainty where the CS's contribution is even greater. By integrating the concept of securitization, the CS conceptualized security as a thick signifier with "performative rather than a descriptive force".³³ In the eyes of the CS, for being considered a security issues, phenomena have to be securitized, i.e. they have

"to be staged as existential threats to a referent object by a securitising actor who thereby generates endorsement of emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise bind."³⁴

Because securitizing moves have to be accepted by an audience, securitization is an

²⁷ For an overview on CCS see e.g. Booth (2005).

²⁸ e.g. Barnett (2001), Dalby (2002).

²⁹ (Booth 1991).

³⁰ (Buzan et al. 1998:39).

³¹ (Walt 1991, Levy 1995).

³² (Baldwin 1997:5).

³³ (Huysman 1998b:232).

³⁴ Buzan et al. (1998:5).

“essentially intersubjective process.”³⁵ As a consequence of this definition, the power to define what security actually means – in terms of threat and referent object – is handed over to political actors. Attention shifts from discovering the essence of threats and referent objects to observing processes of securitization. This shift is only partial, however, since the CS preserves an objective core of security: Being asked *Security by which means?*, its proponents respond ‘by means that break rules that would otherwise bind.’ The CS thereby cuts off the debate on the question *by which means?* and takes one specific category of practice – represented by the logic of security – as a category of analysis.

	Traditional position	Opening up to alternative but concrete options	Capturing the variety by means of new concepts	Dynamize by allowing for definition by political actors
<i>Security from what?</i>	states	Widening debate	e.g. Buzan (PSF) as threats by with ultimate reference to the state	CS
<i>Whose security?</i>	states	Deepening debate	CS as referent objects	CS
<i>By which means?</i>	Mainly military	Critical Security Studies	CS only limited by its logic of security	-

In sum, first steps in overcoming methodological nationalism in Security Studies were already achieved by the discussion on re-defining security. The CS's contribution lies in providing a conceptual apparatus which has facilitated naming and thus systematically comparing threats and, particularly, referent objects. The even greater contribution, however, consists of conceptualizing security not as an issue of exact definition or analytical concept but as a thick signifier. Although, the CS's framework has gone a long way down the road towards overcoming methodological nationalism in Security Studies, it demonstrates significant shortcomings. Most notably, the CS's logic of security still takes a rather rigid form. For an approach, claiming to have empirical findings doing the major work in explaining phenomena, anchoring a particular logic of security in conceptual definitions is theoretically inconsistent.³⁶ Consequentially, this point has been a constant point of criticism.³⁷ Knudsen for example has argued that the logic reflects empirical facts, too closely entangled with politics in the Cold War and is thus empirically out-dated.³⁸ Huysman has furthermore criticized that the logic is too closely related to Euro-American traditions of security.³⁹ Empirical investigations of the post-Cold War era have indeed shown that the logic of security

³⁵ (Ibid. 1998:30).

³⁶ (Huysman 1998a).

³⁷ (e.g. Eriksson 2001, McDonald 2008)

³⁸ (Knudsen 2001:359).

³⁹ (Huysman 1998a:500).

differs across social contexts⁴⁰ and has changed over time.⁴¹ The following section will link this criticism to the initial charge of persisting methodological nationalism. For doing so, the concept of ‘securing actor’ will be introduced.

III. A Closer Look at the Securitization Framework

Buzan and Waever acknowledge that their framework is “often somewhat state-centric in its findings”.⁴² They argue however, that this represents a concrete empirical reality and does not arise from theoretical predispositions. In contrast to this position, the following will show that the framework indeed is *methodological* nationalist. It is so implicitly, since the practice of the argument necessitates that the state emerges as major unit of analysis. Methodological nationalism derives from the failure to ask yet another question in relation to ‘security’ – *Who secures?*. Consequentially, the respective conceptual element of ‘security’ remains hidden and implicitly related to its traditional referent – the state. For conceptually grasping a greater variety of potential answers to this question, the paper introduces a ‘securing actor’, which shall be defined as *the actor who adopts extraordinary measures in an attempt to secure a referent object*. It is argued that the securitization framework is not only implicitly dependent on this securing actor but also that it is designed as to favoring securitizations conducted by and aimed at securing the securing actors; it is thus ‘securing actor-centric’.

The framework indirectly advantages the state over other securitizing actors and referent objects. As Knudsen writes in his criticism of the CS's position on the state: “Finally, when it comes to performing collective tasks on a large scale, the state is the most potentially effective organizing instrument across an almost limitless range of objectives. Security among them.”⁴³ As a consequence of these capabilities to secure, the state does almost naturally take the position of a securing actor in securitization analysis. To support these claims, two different but closely related arguments will be put forward. The first concerns the CS's logic of security, The second deals with the securitization framework's use of the term ‘unit’ and the resulting proximity to the work of Kenneth Waltz.

Inconsistent at the Margins

The CS's logic of security indirectly excludes referent objects distant to the securing actor from being considered worthwhile referent objects of security. This exclusion does not take the form of precise results. Empirical findings are, however, often ambiguous and thus

40 (Rasmussen 2002; Richert 2009).

41 (Rasmussen 2001, Trombetta 2008).

42 (Buzan and Waever 2003:71).

43 (Knudsen 2001:363).

threatened to be overseen when sectoral analyzes are put back together and an overall picture of security is formed. The most remote set of potential referent objects, when looking from a traditional state-centric perspective, is to be found in the *environmental sector*. If *Buzan et al.* claim to provide a coherent framework, this framework has to be capable of grasping developments within this sector conclusively. Recapitulating the meaning of securitization: If a securitizing actor succeeds in convincing a significant audience to perceive a certain referent object as being existentially threatened, this shared perception legitimates an endorsement of extraordinary measures which break the rules that otherwise bind. Has this been the case in the environmental sector? In *Regions and Powers* Buzan and Waever state that:

“A few – very high-profile – cases of *securitised environmental issues* are global or at least transregional: [...] *global warming* (climate change)”

and at the very same page, however, they assert that

“despite considerable help from Hollywood, *global warming* and other global environmental threats [...] have *not been successfully securitised*.”⁴⁴

Without further qualification, these statements leave the reader clueless and invoke the impression of severe inconsistencies. One plausible explanation, however, might be given when they are related to the theoretical steps of securitization as recapitulated above. Then, it could be argued, securitization has been successful since it has had an effect in terms of establishing a threat. No rules have been broken, however, and thus the conditions of securitization have not been fulfilled. Inconsistency is even worse though, since the CS states that most securitizing attempts in the environmental sector have ended up in measures which are “part of ordinary politics”.⁴⁵ The occurrence of political measures, however, contradicts the CS's original idea of security. Waever negates the possibility of these findings, since “transcending a security problem by politicizing it cannot happen through thematization in security terms, only away from such terms”.⁴⁶

From this short discussion it becomes clear, that the CS's logic of security is too undifferentiated to account for real world political developments. Nevertheless, it is problematic for the CS to simply abandon the original logic of security, since for them it represents the essence of security. There is no clear strategy how to cope with this dilemma:

⁴⁴(Buzan and Waever 2003:465, *emph. added*).

⁴⁵(Buzan et al. 1998:73; Buzan and Waever 2009).

⁴⁶(Waever 1995:56).

In *Security* it is suggested that securitization “is not fulfilled [...] solely by existential threats (which can lead to nothing) but by cases of existential threats that legitimize the breaking of rules.”⁴⁷ Here, the extraordinary quality of measures is clearly prioritized over threat construction (with no or other effects). In contrast to this move, however, Waever also considers a shift away from the logic of security towards threat construction when he notes that “[p]robably, it will be helpful in the future if the criteria to apply in specific instances [...] rather [is] the threat construction as such and the argument about necessity.”⁴⁸

The fixed nature of the logic of security thus represents a considerable theoretical challenge for the CS. In its current form, the framework ignores securitizing moves – even if they result in referent objects conceived as being existentially threatened, and even if this insight provokes political action – as long as the occurring action does not break the rules that otherwise bind. This line of argumentation leads to inquiring for the exact definition of *rules*. The next section argues that this term is, on a rather anecdotal level, directly connected to the state and, on a deeper conceptual level, inseparably related to the securing actor concept.

There are Rules but No One who breaks them

While discussing the shortcomings of the CS's logic of security has given an impression that referent objects distant to the state are excluded, it takes us only half way regarding the question why this is the case. A closer examination of 'the rules that otherwise bind' will take the discussion closer to the deeper conceptual shortcomings of the framework; this is its methodological nationalism. In *Security*, Buzan et al. specify these rules in terms of empirical examples, rather than conceptually. They refer to the rules as the political rules in liberal-democratic societies and then, slightly more abstract, state

“in other societies there will also be 'rules,' as there are in any society, and when a securitizing actor uses a rhetoric of existential threat and thereby takes an issue out of what under those conditions is “normal politics,” we have a case of securitization.”⁴⁹

Although this statement might seem a plausible specification of the CS's understanding of rules, it is problematic in two ways. First, it openly ties the concept of rules to the nation state. Rules appear to be bound to a society in a particular context which, in turn, is defined by a particular form of ‘normal’ political conduct; this is a certain form of government. This impression is enforced by the scholars writing that “[t]he security act is negotiated between securitizer and audience – that is, *internally within* the unit [...]”.⁵⁰ When the inside of this

⁴⁷ (Buzan et al. 1998:25).

⁴⁸ (Waever 2003:27). He thus moves into the direction of Eriksson's (2001) “Threat Politics”.

⁴⁹ (Buzan et al. 1998:24f).

⁵⁰ (Ibid., 1998:26, *emph. added*).

unit consists of the audience, which is in turn specified as being a national society, the unit itself turns out being a nation state. In other words, the CS's conception of the rules is bound to internal structures of a national society distinctly differentiated from the outside (more on this below). This clearly reinforces what Beck calls the container model of social sciences and is thus clearly methodological nationalist. Nevertheless, this first argument might be countered by arguing that it gives too much theoretical weight to what was only intended as empirical clarification.

The second problem is more severe, however, since it proves the methodological nationalism of the framework on a more conceptual level. The starting point here is to ask a question already introduced above: *who secures?*. In the above statement, it seems that it is the securitizing actor breaking the rules and thus also adopts securing action. However, this interpretation turns out to be problematic. To make this clear, a closer look at the CS's understanding of the securitizing actor's role within the framework is necessary. The CS states:

“We do not push the demand [for a successful securitization] so high as to say that an emergency measure has to be adopted, only that the existential threat has to be argued and just gain enough resonance for a platform to be made from which it is possible to legitimize emergency measures or other steps that would not have been possible had the discourse not taken the form of existential threats, point of no return, and necessity.”⁵¹

This qualification puts into perspective the validity of the CS's treatment of political events. As it has been outlined above, for example, the CS has considered the securitization of climate change resulting in political *action*. Following the above statement, however, action as such is not part of a (more or less) successful securitization and thus beyond the scope of the framework. None of the framework's central theoretical 'players' actually secures. There is no securing actor.⁵² Despite this theoretical shortcoming, the CS has called emergency *action* one of its 'key components'. If the CS wants to talk about the adoption of political or security measures, it has to give an answer to the question *who secures?* – it then needs the theoretical concept of a securing actor, whether this is present explicitly or implicitly.

How the Securing Actor got lost and where it is (implicitly) situated today

A closer look at the framework's development reveals that, in earlier works, securing action was associated solely with the state.⁵³ For Waever, even if individual people or a society

⁵¹(Buzan et al. 1998:25).

⁵² The concept of a securing actor does not necessarily represent another 'real live entity' distinct from the securitizing actor or the referent object. Rather it is another role in the security game (cf. Buzan et al. 1998:42).

⁵³ (Waever 1995).

might feel threatened, “‘our’ people will need its state to act on this [threat].”⁵⁴ When the CS presented a more theoretically guided framework for analysis in 1998, the securing actor disappeared. A theoretically explicit shift away from the state only occurred in terms of threat (*security from what?*) and referent object (*security for whom?*). The last step of what Waever had previously called the “sequence security-threat-defense”,⁵⁵ in contrast, fell silent. The question *who secures?* has not been asked.

Not openly posing the question *who secures?* does not mean that the framework abstains from implicitly providing an answer. The ambitions to account for ‘emergency action’ necessitate its implicit existence. The CS has therefore tended to assign the function of a securing actor to other elements of its framework. Despite the exclusion of securing action from the securitizing actor role, the CS writes: “If [...] the securitizing actor has managed to break free of procedures of rules *he or she would otherwise be bound by*, we are witnessing a case of securitization”.⁵⁶ The function of a securing actor is, at least in this case, attributed to the securitizing actor. This further fosters methodological nationalism. Equating securitizing actor and securing actor implies the expectation that securitizing actors are generally capable to also adopt the respective securing action. The capability to adopt action thus constitutes an implicit facilitating condition. Securitizing actors which cannot themselves adopt securing action, on the other hand, are excluded. Moreover, even securitizing actors which are capable to secure a referent object and to break the rules which would have otherwise bound their action are potentially ignored since, as argued above, their action is judged, not by their success to break the rules binding them, but by their success to break the rules binding nation states’ governments.

The securitizing actor is however not the only theoretical ‘place’ where the role of securing actor can be found. The CS also places the burden to secure on the ‘unit’, mentioned above: “In a securitized situation, *a unit* does not rely on the social resources of rules shared intersubjectively among units but relies instead on its own resources”.⁵⁷ It is thus also or alternatively this unit which acts upon a securitization. The next part will concentrate on this ‘unit’.⁵⁸ Although neglected by previous critics, this conceptual entity is of great importance since it provides the second entry point for methodological nationalism into the framework.

⁵⁴(Waever 1997:33).

⁵⁵(Waever 1997:30).

⁵⁶(Buzan et al. 1998:25, *emph. added.*).

⁵⁷(*Ibid.* 1998:26, *emph. added*)

⁵⁸The increasing of ‘the unit’ is surely a consequence of relating securitization to Buzan’s regional security complex theory (RSCT). Although shifting from investigating inter-state relationships towards investigating inter-unit relationships might be a step away from methodological nationalism for the RSCT, it is a major setback for overcoming methodological nationalism in Security Studies by means of the securitization framework. Also see Wilkinson (2007:14-15).

Discussing the role of the unit will provide the 'outside-story', supplementing the 'inside-story' told so far.⁵⁹

IV. The Unit – Waltz still Inside

The 'outside' can be depicted by focusing on the 'unit'. Units enter the framework by the backdoor; they do so forcefully though. While they are not part of the basic definition, the CS measures the overall importance of securitizations in terms of “likely effects on interactions with other units“.⁶⁰ It has already been shown that, securitizing actor and audience have no stake in this inter-unit interaction since they are interacting ‘internally within the unit’. The outside world of inter-unit conduct, in contrast, appears to be the realm of physical force: in case of a successful securitization, units, as already mentioned above, rely on their own resources instead of the social resources.⁶¹ Furthermore, resources – or capabilities – are the only outside functional characteristic of units.

This picture of the unit in the securitization framework bears many similarities to *Kenneth Waltz's Theory of International Politics*. In both cases, the measure of what is important in international politics is provided by inter-unit behavior. In both cases, units are functionally undifferentiated. The part of inter-unit behavior, which is captured by both theories, is determined by capabilities and the application of emergency measures (i.e. the consequence of successful internal securitizations). The outside world thus appears to be an anarchic world. Moreover, this outside is clearly differentiated from the inside of units. Sub-units are excluded from inter-unit behavior. In the case of Waltz, the domestic sphere is ordered hierarchically and domestic actors are functionally differentiated. In the CS's account, domestic players take clearly differentiated roles such as securitizing actor and audience.

Similarities also appear regarding methodological nationalism: It would be too easy calling either of these theories outright state-centric, since both are not explicitly referring to the state but to units. In both cases, states only enter the picture when real political events are considered. In applying Waltz's theory, states almost naturally take on the position of the

⁵⁹ In the following, it is argued that this brings the CS close to Waltz's Theory of International Politics. Beyond Waltz's conception of international anarchy, however, the CS also hints at possibility of social resources shared among units. Although this brings the CS closer to Wendt's understanding of international structure, this does not touch the argument of methodological nationalism, which has also been criticized in Wendt's work (cf. Wendt 1999; for criticism of this position see e.g. Guzzini and Leander 2006).

⁶⁰ (Buzan et al. 1998:206).

⁶¹ Highlighting capabilities to secure brings in the question of materialism once again (cf. Balzacq 2005). Waever's explicit neglect of “brute force” appears to limit the scope of the framework, since whenever (material) security action is taken, securitization shuts its eyes. On the other hand, Waever leans towards the understanding of theory put forward by Waltz (see Waever 2009, Waltz 1979:Chapter 1). Waltz, however, does not claim any ontological status for his theory and actually negates the idea of theories relating to any idea of what the world is 'really' made of in general (cf. Dessler 1998, Wight 2002).

units, since they are the only players in the international environment fulfilling what Waltz considers essential for survival: sufficient capabilities to defend themselves. Although his theory is therefore not state-centric in itself, it is – to once again refer to a statement previously mentioned – 'somewhat state-centric in its findings'. Therefore, in both cases, methodological nationalism is present implicitly. Both theories include a concept which presupposes the state to be in the center empirical analysis since it entails characteristics – capabilities to secure – merely or at least mostly at hands of states. While Waltz's theory is unit-centric,⁶² the securitization framework is securing actor-centric. Beyond this, however, in the case of the securitization framework methodological nationalism is implicit twofold. While Waltz's concern is to *explain* the concept and environment of the unit, the CS merely *implies* these theoretical elements. It fails on elaborating the respective concept – the securing actor.

Following Waltz, his theory is not designed for explaining the exact way by which a leaf is falling to the ground, since “[a] theory at one level of generality cannot answer questions about matters on a different level of generality.”⁶³ The level of generality, Waltz's theory is situated at, is concerned with the fact that the leaf is falling in the first place. The securitization framework works on a different level of generality. It therefore adds more detail about how the leaf is falling. Nevertheless, it neither breaks with watching leaves nor does it question Newtonian physics. In other words: The CS is not breaking with the neo-realist methodologically nationalist world view as such. The CS's preference for international security thus goes far deeper than being merely an academic preference.⁶⁴ The differentiation in domestic and international politics is built into the framework itself, with securitization merely focusing on domestic processes of assessing security threats.

V. Integrating the Securing Actor – Merits, Consequences and Challenges

It has so far been argued that methodological nationalism is anchored in the securitization framework in two different ways. First, it is present in form of the logic of security, since this logic is related to the breaking of rules and the CS implicitly relies on a securing actor to break these rules. Second, the ‘unit’ introduces the weight of Waltz's theoretical inheritance into the framework. The latter can be dealt with rather easily: The CS should let go off the unit, thus allowing for a more flexible and open investigation of security. The former,

⁶² For a critique on Waltz's account of structure and his ultimate reliance on the unit see e.g. Meyer et al. (1997) or Wendt (1999).

⁶³ (Waltz 1979:121).

⁶⁴ (Buzan et al. 1998:21).

however, is not dealt with that easily, since in this case methodological nationalism derives from the very architecture of the framework. An integration of the securing actor, however, can substitute the state as category of practice, as it is still implicitly present in the framework, for a category of analysis, thereby opening it up for empirical investigation. An alternative definition of securitization, designed to overcome methodological nationalism and keep the conceptual rigor of the CS's original approach might thus read:

For being considered a security issues, a phenomenon has to be staged as existential threats to a referent object by a securitizing actor who thereby *urges a securing actor to adopt, in accordance with an audience significant to her/him, emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise (1) determine the relationship between securing actor and referent object and, in an extreme case, (2) bind the securing actor as such.*”

This definition obviously includes the role of a securing actor. It thereby transfers the accomplishments of the CS's framework to an additional, hitherto neglected, element of 'security' – clarified by the question *Who secures?*. Including the securing actor also allows clarifying the rules and putting the audience in a more prominent and theoretically more satisfactory position. A third element of this definition anticipates a potential modification of the CS's logic of security which would allow for a better appreciation of empirical findings and at the same time maintain the CS's original essence of security. This third addition will be discussed at the end of this part. Before, however, it is necessary to critically assess the 'bandwagoning' of concepts in the original framework and, consequentially, to explicate the relationship between the securing actor and its other theoretical elements. This exercise bears potential to clarify several issues which have arisen in the theoretical debate on the securitization framework.

The concepts of the securitization framework are neatly situated on the securing actor's 'bandwagon': the audience is clearly situated within a unit. The securitizing actor is so too. On the other hand, the unit and the securitizing actor are both held to perform securing action, and thus appear to be largely synonymous in this important regard. One might go as far as understanding the securitizing actor in terms of the securing actor's representation at the 'inside', dealing with the audience, while the outside-representation, the unit, deals with politics among units. This 'bandwagoning' is reinforced by the rhetorical structure of the CS's security argument which entails “survival, priority of action and urgency, [and arguing]

‘because if the problem is not handled now it will be too late, and *we* will not exist to remedy our failure’”.⁶⁵ This articulation places the threat firmly apart from all relevant categories and subsumes the bandwagon as a ‘we’ inside the referent object. In the following, this implicit ‘bandwagoning’ shall be substituted for a more concrete elaboration of the conceptual element’s relationships.

Securing and Securitizing Actor – Explicating Power Relations

Uncoupling the securing actor from the securitizing actor and outlining the exact relationship between these entities allows overcoming a great deal of methodological nationalism. One major avenue for doing so is referring to Stritzel’s elaboration on the tension inherent to the framework between and internalist reading, highlighting the act of doing security by uttering the words, and an externalist reading, focusing on intersubjective processes of securitization. For Stritzel, these readings are ultimately “based on two separate meta-theoretical convictions.”⁶⁶ Stritzel’s internalist reading is rooted in speech act theory. Vuori, however, has shown that speech acts theory does not necessitate success in terms of the strict criteria demanded by the CS. He thereby opens space for a more flexible account of securitization within speech act theory.⁶⁷ If speech act theory can, as Vuori argues, account for a greater variety of outcomes, the reason for conceptualizing securitization, in the way Waever has done, is not merely necessitated by meta-theoretical commitments.⁶⁸

Instead, Waever’s tendency of privileging the speech *act* of securitization over an interpretation of securitization as a more open ended process, obtains a more normative dimension. Conceptualizing securitization as an act means prioritizing one particular form of securitizing moves; those conducted by actors “placed in positions of power by virtue of being generally accepted voices of security, by having the power to define security”.⁶⁹ In this case, the process of securitization is heavily pre-determined by the power position of the speaker and therefore appears as an act when watched from the outside. Calling securitization an act, in other words, merely prioritizes one extreme case at the upper end of a gradual scale of possible (a)symmetric power relations. In asking what determines the power positions of a speaker it is worthwhile referring to Balzacq, by stating that “[t]he power involved in securitization requires the decision of the securitizing agent to produce its effects”.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ (e.g. Buzan and Waever 2003:10; also see Buzan et al. 1998 and Buzan and Waever 1997; *emph. added*).

⁶⁶ (Stritzel 2007:359).

⁶⁷ (Vuori 2008).

⁶⁸ It is not clear if Vuori’s reading of speech act theory turns out to be sufficiently flexible to account for the following interpretation. It is, however, likely to be captured by a reading of speech act theory with a focus not on *speech* acts but on underlying *conventions* (cf. Austin 1975).

⁶⁹ (Buzan et al. 1998:31).

⁷⁰ (Balzacq 2005:196, footnote).

Capabilities to security appear as a major facilitating condition. The further apart securing and securitizing actors are, the harder it will be for the securitizing actor to successfully utter 'security'.

This insight opens up the framework twofold. First, several scholars have accused the CS for rendering invisible the social exclusion of underprivileged voices.⁷¹ Differentiating between securing and securitizing actor is a first step to make this exclusion visible. It is possible to say, “securitizing actor A attempted to securitize a certain issue but the securing actor B did not react”. Moreover, putting the power position of the securitizing actor in perspective this way deprives the audience of its innocence in processes of securitization. Given the CS’s call for avoiding securitization, it appeared as basically a good thing when the audience denied success of a securitization. When, however, less powerful securitizing actors enter the scope of the framework, the audience’s potential to block securitizations becomes more controversial. It is not exclusively associated with a mindful handling of important issues alone, but might also be an expression of ignorance. In the latter case, a securitizing move from an underprivileged position stays an “expression of existential fear”.⁷² Second, it reinforces Williams' claim for a potentially fruitful collaboration between the CS and institutionalist approaches for these might have to say a lot about the two way process of making securitization happen – this is convincing the securing actor and/or pressuring the securing actor by persuading the audience.⁷³ Moreover, above considerations obligate traditional applications of the framework to be more frank concerning the limits of their empirical focus. An analysis of regional security dynamics, for example, then can be criticized, from within the framework, to merely investigating those securitizations, where securing and securitizing actor are closely integrated. As an overall result, securitization is more openly conceptualized as a struggle for the capabilities of a securing actor. It does not merely assume that such a struggle is won – it also explicates who loses.

Securing Actor and Audience – Why is it Significant?

In the original framework, the audience is connected to the framework by anecdotal reference rather than by theoretical rigor. McDonald even argues that the audience, in last consequence, stays outside the framework since it is not clear, when the audience is persuaded, “how we

⁷¹ (Hansen 2000, McDonald 2008).

⁷² Floyd (2007:41).

⁷³ (Williams 2003). On the other hand, securitization might as well serve as a means to liberate these approaches from methodological nationalism.

know when it happens and what the implications are when it does not”.⁷⁴ Introducing the securing actor allows to fully integrate the audience and to answer these questions. Above, it has been argued that the CS has determined the audience-rules-securing actor relationship from the audience side: By situating the concept of audience with national societies and specifying rules by referring to governmental systems, the securing actor was implicitly defined as the state. To overcome this form of methodological nationalism and to arrive at a theoretically satisfactory inclusion of the audience into the framework, it is more promising defining the respective relationship by starting from the securing actor's side. Whenever securing action is taken, the securing actor has to choose which audience is significant, this is for whose legitimation he or she is striving.⁷⁵ What this legitimacy entails becomes most apparent when considering an illegitimate application of securing action. A democratic leader, for example, would surely risk re-election or impeachment when breaking rules without legitimation. The legitimacy, in other words, is essential because the audience holds particular powers vis-à-vis the securing actor – the power to existentially threaten the securing actor. This is what makes the audience significant. Consequently, whether a persuasion has happened can, in the most cases, only be assessed *ex post*: If a democratic leader is impeached, he has undoubtedly failed to persuade the audience. In the case of a non-democratic regime such non-persuasion can result in, as Vuori suggests, “active passivity and resistance”.⁷⁶

This argument has two consequences. First, it puts into perspective the Schmittian character of the CS's logic of security.⁷⁷ The CS states that a securitized issue “overflows the normal political logic of weighing”⁷⁸ and thus allows for the breaking of rules. If, however, the breaking of rules as such entails the process of weighing the potential significance of audiences, securitization cannot put any issue beyond weighing. This relaxes the extraordinary quality of the CS's logic of security and thereby potentially opens up ground for discussion with approaches, concerned with other forms of 'security' and risk.⁷⁹

Second, it provides another perspective on the scope and the construction of the audience. Concerning the latter, the power of defining the audience is handed over to political actors; to securing actors more precisely. Furthermore, the argument extends the scope of this process of definition. It is not enough to consider concrete societies or particular power elites within a

⁷⁴ (McDonald 2008:572).

⁷⁵ (Waeber 1997).

⁷⁶ (Vuori 2008:70).

⁷⁷ (Williams 2003).

⁷⁸ (Waeber 1997:33; Buzan et al. 1998:24).

⁷⁹ (C.A.S.E. 2006).

state.⁸⁰ Neither it is sufficient to hint at various or parallel audiences.⁸¹ Indeed, deciding upon the significance of potential audiences becomes a process of structuring the securing actor's *entire* social environment. This implies a particular form of social exclusion: Not only that individuals or groups can be excluded in the way that their potential securitizing moves are not heard, they can also be excluded by not being taken seriously as an audience. In such a case, a securing actor does not regard the opposition of the respective individuals or groups as important. While defining significance renders potential audiences insignificant, it has the opposite effect towards the inside: Who is significant to be heard? Pursuing this question might turn out as providing a first step towards a more dynamic conception of identity within the framework.⁸²

Securing Actor and Referent Object – Whose Survival?

Securing actor-centrism is also enforced by the securing actor/referent relationship, as argued in discussing the 'bandwagoning' of the CS's concepts. Although, the CS claims to loosen the referent object from the state, it stays closely connected to the securing actor; and thus indirectly with the state. In the end, it is the securing actor's survival which counts. The argument specific to 'security' reads 'because if the problem is not handled now it will be too late, and *we* will not exist to *remedy our failure*'. Even if the particular referent object might be flexible, the indicated reference to 'we' emphasizes that not only the referent object might be gone forever, but also the audience and the securitizing actor. Moreover, the reference to securing action – 'to remedy our failure' – places the securing actor in the position of an *ultimate referent object*, since it is the only one capable of remedying any failure. As Buzan et al. emphasize, security is about survival. More specifically, as seen here, security is about survival of the securing actor. If the CS wants to account for security in a non-methodological nationalist way, the necessity of a 'we' should be discarded. This reference might be important in practice, incorporated into theory; however, it fastens methodological nationalism in the way outlined above.

Approaching the Logic of Security

The paper started out by considering the deeper conceptual consequences of the CS's logic of security. The investigation of the securing actor/referent object relationship brings us back to this point, since it holds potential to overcome the initial criticism of the logic of security. In its current form, the CS does not allow for other measures than extraordinary ones to be part

⁸⁰ (Vuori 2008).

⁸¹ (Vuori 2008:72; Stritzel 2007:363).

⁸² For criticism regarding the CS's position on identity see e.g. Albert (1998) and McSweeney (1996).

of a successful securitization. The extraordinary quality of measures is, in turn, related to the breaking of rules between securing actor and audience. Significance is granted to this audience thanks to its power to existentially threaten the securing actor. Successfully securitizing an existential threat to a referent objects other than the securing actor therefore necessitates that the securing actor applies action which would existentially threaten him/herself if no specific legitimation is obtained. In other words, the securing actor has to take the ‘other’s’ survival as serious as its own. All actions directed at other referent objects, which do not fulfill this criterion do not count at all.

Consequentially Buzan et al. argue that peace-keeping operations have nothing to do with security.⁸³ For them these operations are part of normal politics, regardless whether 'security' has contributed to legitimizing them. While this argument excludes important aspects of the social power of 'security', it moreover entirely neglects the perspective of the referent object. For a state, supported by peace-keeping operations, this issue surely is extraordinary. In short, while sending troops for peace-keeping might be a part of normal politics in Denmark it is definitely breaking the rules of what Denmark would normally do for/in other countries. It thus breaks the rules which normally determine the relationship between securing actor and referent object. A comprehensive approach to 'security' should be able to account for such a situation.

One way of overcoming this overly restricted position is the breaking of rules as already outlined above. Accordingly, an issue is considered a security issue when, a securitizing move results in emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise (1) determine the relationship between securing actor and referent object and, in an extreme case, (2) bind the securing actor as such. Although this suggestion allows the securitization framework to account for a variety of additional political developments related to 'security', it does not dilute the original understanding of security put forward by the CS. Since it still differentiates between ‘security for the self’ and ‘security for others’. The latter way of breaking rules will most likely result in politicization from the securing actor's perspective. It covers those cases of “‘security’ leading to political measures” which have so far not been adequately captured by the CS.

VI. Conclusion

By tying itself to the unit and fixing a particular logic of security, the CS has ironically adopted the very theoretical framework which has starkly enforced the search for more

⁸³ (Buzan et al. 1998).

adequate conceptions of security in the first place;⁸⁴ the search which has, in turn, laid the groundwork for the idea of securitization. The paper has attempted to loosen the framework's 'Westphalian straightjacket'⁸⁵, however, not by going beyond concepts but by enhancing the conceptual framework as such. In the course of the argument it has been shown that the CS has built onto and has substantially advanced the debate on redefining security. At the same time, however, it has fallen short of incorporating the debate's advances regarding the question *Security by which means?* and has instead put forward its logic of security. Moreover, this logic has contributed to obscuring a question which had not been prominently posed within the early debate on redefining security: *Who secures?*. It is the failure of not asking this question which makes the position of the state in the framework so problematic. As a consequence, the securitization framework is still starkly methodological nationalist in an implicit way: The practice of its arguments presupposes that the state emerges as major unit of analysis. It is therefore, in contrast to what Buzan and Waever assert, *not* "left for history to decide whether states are the most important referent objects for security or, say, the environment."⁸⁶ The securitization framework is securing actor-centric, since the securing actor's capabilities turn out to be a major facilitating condition for securitizing moves. This securing actor-centrism is reinforced by a persistent inside/outside distinction and a 'bandwagoning' of concepts. Introducing the concept of a securing actor will not change reality by reducing the significance of the state in practice. It does, however, allow for more openness in theory and therefore makes possible 'seeing' practical changes when they happen. Specifying the relationship of the securing actor to other roles in the theory has opened up avenues for addressing several points of criticism.

One issue remains to be discussed, which is the normative implication of what has been said. It can be argued that keeping the second set of rules – concerned with the securing actor/audience relationship – inside the framework implies a normative bias towards the original logic of security. Although this peril indeed exists, abandoning these rules would obscure many interesting dynamics such as securing actor's structuring their social environment in terms of significance. A partial solution might be to introduce a more gradual and dynamic understanding of rules based on the acknowledgement that both dimensions are, to varying degrees, present in every securitization. Without doubt, the account outlined in this paper does not accommodate the entire range of criticism launched at the CS. However, in accepting the terms of the theory, one will never arrive at a genuinely post-structural

⁸⁴ (see e.g. Keohane 1985).

⁸⁵ (Wilkinson 2007).

⁸⁶ (Buzan and Waever 2004:44-45).

understanding of securitization.⁸⁷ Theoretical frameworks, such as that of the CS, should be judged in terms of usefulness, not by the expectation to get everything right at once. It thus remains the hope of the author to have provided some useful ideas for a further development of the CS's treatment of 'security'.

⁸⁷ (Balzacq 2010)

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