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## **Securitization as Discursive (Re)Articulation: Explaining the Relative Effectiveness of Threat Construction**

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This paper develops a poststructuralist framework for the analysis of the process of threat construction or securitization. Taking on-going debates in securitization theory about the securitizing process, the paper draws on the poststructuralist discourse theory of the Essex School to theorize what makes some securitizing moves (attempts to securitize a certain issue) more effective than others, which remains a persistent and crucial gap in the current literature.

Keywords: securitization; threat construction; poststructuralism; discourse theory; Essex School; Laclau, Ernesto

### **Introduction**

Why is terrorism commonly considered the most important security threat in 'Western' democracies although the actual risk of dying in a terrorist attack is minute?<sup>1</sup> Why do governments fail to take climate change seriously (or, some at least, to even accept its

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<sup>1</sup> See most recently John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, "Terrorism and Bathtubs: Comparing and Assessing the Risks". *Terrorism and Political Violence*, online first (2018), doi: 10.1080/09546553.2018.1530662. The scare quotes are to indicate that 'the West' is itself discursively produced.

existence), although there is universal agreement among the scientific community that it presents a significantly greater danger to human health?<sup>2</sup> This paper sets out to provide an answer to these and similar questions by proposing a theoretical model of processes of threat construction. Although the issue has received attention by a number of different theoretical ‘schools’ in International Relations (IR), this paper primarily engages with the so-called Copenhagen School of securitization theory, which stands out due to its systematic and sustained focus on the process by which threats are constructed.<sup>3</sup> Since the concept of securitization was first formulated in the 1990s,<sup>4</sup> securitization theory has developed into an exceptionally successful framework, so much so indeed that securitization has become an “analytical shorthand for the political construction of security” in general.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Solomon et al., “Irreversible Climate Change due to Carbon Dioxide Emissions”, *PNAS* 106, no. 6 (2009): 1704-09; Martin McKee, Scott L. Greer and David Stuckler, “What Will Donald Trump's Presidency Mean for Health? A Scorecard”, *The Lancet* 389, no. 10070 (2017): 748-54.

<sup>3</sup> For recent overviews of the field, see Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Léonard and Jan Ruzicka, “‘Securitization’ Revisited: Theory and Cases”, *International Relations* 30, no. 4 (2015): 494-531; Didier Bigo and Emma McCluskey, “What Is a PARIS Approach to (In)securitization? Political Anthropological Research for International Sociology”, in *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*, ed. Alexandra Gheciu and William C. Wohlforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198777854.013.9; Roxanna Sjöstedt, “Securitization Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis”, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, ed. William R. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.479.

<sup>4</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Matt McDonald, “The Failed Securitization of Climate Change in Australia”, *Australian Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 4 (2012): 581.

This paper's starting point is the observation that, important theoretical contributions and a plethora of empirical studies notwithstanding, the process of securitization remains under-theorized. More specifically, securitization theory is still lacking a clear theoretical framework that can explain how some "securitizing move[s]", *i.e.* attempts to construct certain issues as security threats,<sup>6</sup> manage to become widely accepted, while others fail.<sup>7</sup> That is, securitization theory still has to develop an explanation for "why particular representations resonate with relevant constituencies" and others do not.<sup>8</sup> Drawing on the poststructuralist discourse theory (PDT) of the Essex School as proposed by Laclau and Mouffe,<sup>9</sup> this paper develops a framework that can account for different securitizing moves' effectiveness.

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<sup>6</sup> Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Matt McDonald, "Securitization and the Construction of Security", *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 4 (2008): 563-87.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*; Sarah Léonard and Christian Kaunert, "Reconceptualizing the Audience in Securitization Theory", in *Understanding Securitisation Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, ed. Thierry Balzacq (London: Routledge, 2010), 57-76; Edwin Ezeokafor and Christian Kaunert, "Securitization Outside of the West: Conceptualizing the Securitization–Neo-patrimonialism Nexus in Africa", *Global Discourse* 8, no. 1 (2018): 83-99.

<sup>9</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Verso, 2001); Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005), *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (London: Verso, 2014). To be sure, PDT and securitization studies have not been entirely out of touch (e.g., Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, "Macrosecritisation and Security Constellations: Reconsidering Scale in Securitisation Theory", *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 253-76). However, the reception of PDT has been either highly selective or rather superficial, falling way short of utilizing the theory's full potential, with the notable exception of Delf Rothe, *Securitizing Global Warming: A Climate of Complexity* (London & New York: Routledge, 2015).

The article proceeds as follows. I begin with a brief discussion of the previous literature on securitization, focusing specifically on the theorization of effectiveness in the securitizing process. Following that I will outline how securitization can be conceptualized from a PDT perspective. Given that PDT's overall framework has already been outlined in the introduction to this symposium,<sup>10</sup> the discussion will be brief and limited to those parts of the framework directly relevant to securitization. The subsequent section illustrates the theoretical added value of PDT using a case study of the construction of so-called "new" threats like mass migration, armed conflict, terrorism and environmental destruction in the German post-Cold War security discourse. The empirical study is based on a comprehensive discourse analysis of German parliamentary debates between 1987 and 2013.

### **Explanatory Approaches to the Securitizing Process: Remaining Lacunae**

The Copenhagen School's main argument is that rather than objective phenomena, security threats should be understood as produced in discourse. Thus, securitization theory directs our attention to "the process through which issues *become* security issues."<sup>11</sup> In its classical (or conventional) version,<sup>12</sup> the theory conceptualizes security as a speech act, in which something becomes a security issue through the process of naming it as such, thus legitimizing the use of extraordinary means.<sup>13</sup> The process can be separated into three steps (see figure 1 below): (1) the securitizing move, which,

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<sup>10</sup> Stengel and Nabers, this issue.

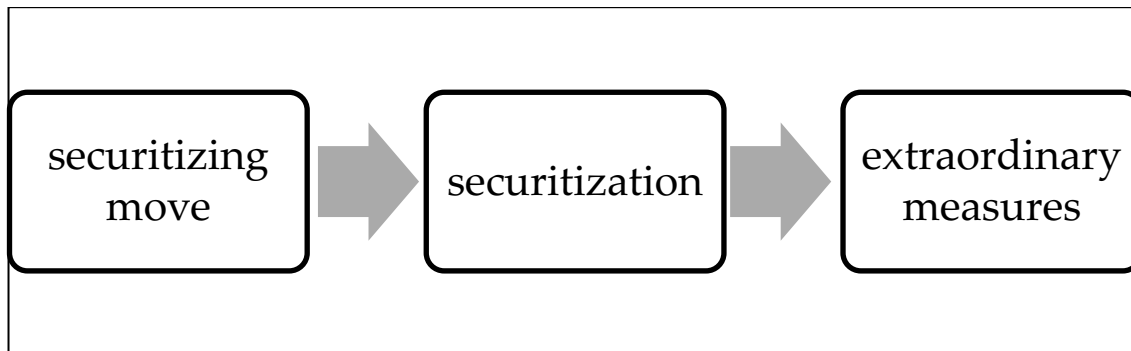
<sup>11</sup> McDonald, "The Failed Securitization," 581, italics in original.

<sup>12</sup> Buzan and Wæver, "Macrosecuritisation".

<sup>13</sup> Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*.

original poststructuralist influences notwithstanding, is conceptualized as an isolated speech act; (2) its transformation, through acceptance by a relevant audience, into a successful securitization; and (3) the translation of a successful securitization into specific policies, *i.e.*, the application of extraordinary or emergency measures.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 1. The securitization process



*Source: author's illustration*

Of particular interest with respect to the process of securitization are (1) the question of how securitizing moves turn into securitization and (2) how securitizations are linked to extraordinary measures. With respect to the first question, the classical version of securitization theory points to “facilitating conditions,” most notably (1) that the speech act follow the “grammar of security”, that is, construct a story that “includes existential threat, point of no return and a way out”, (2) “social conditions” like the social capital of the securitizing actor and (3) the characteristics of the alleged threat, that is, whether it is something generally considered threatening or not.<sup>15</sup> Note that the exact link between securitization and the application (or legitimation) of extraordinary means is not clearly developed in the classical version. Rather, the assumption here is

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 25f.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

that by “framing” a specific issue as a security threat,<sup>16</sup> it is moved into the realm of security policy, which itself is characterized by undemocratic procedures, extraordinary measures and often militarization.

Critics have pointed to a number of problems with this articulation, most notably a too narrow focus on isolated speech acts, an insufficient incorporation of the audience, context and power and a simplistic conceptualization of the securitization-policy link, in which the application of extraordinary means follows from successful securitizations in a quasi-mechanistic fashion.<sup>17</sup> In addition, empirical studies have

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<sup>16</sup> For a systematic discussion of commonalities between securitization and the framing literature, see Scott D.

Watson, “‘Framing’ the Copenhagen School: Integrating the Literature on Threat Construction”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 40, no. 2 (2012): 279-301.

<sup>17</sup> Thierry Balzacq, ed., *Understanding Securitisation Theory* (London & New York: Routledge, 2010); Adam Côté, “Agents without Agency: Assessing the Role of the Audience in Securitization Theory”, *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 6 (2016): 541-58; Rita Floyd, “Extraordinary or Ordinary Emergency Measures: What, and Who, Defines the ‘Success’ of Securitization?”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2016): 677-94; Stefano Guzzini, “Securitization as a Causal Mechanism”, *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4-5 (2011): 329-41; Jef Huysmans, “What’s in an Act? On Security Speech Acts and Little Security Nothings”, *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4-5 (2011): 371-83; McDonald, “The Failed Securitization”; Heikki Patomäki, “Absenting the Absence of Future Dangers and Structural Transformations in Securitization Theory”, *International Relations* 29, no. 1 (2015): 128-36; Paul Roe, “Actor, Audience(s) and Emergency Measures: Securitization and the UK’s Decision to Invade Iraq”, *Security Dialogue* 39, no. 6 (2008): 615-35; Juha A. Vuori, “Illocutionary Logic and Strands of Securitization: Applying the Theory of Securitization to the Study of Non-Democratic Political Orders”, *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 1 (2008): 65-99; Julie Wilhelmsen, “How Does War Become a Legitimate Undertaking? Re-engaging the Post-structuralist Foundation of Securitization Theory”, *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 2 (2017): 166-83; Michael C. Williams, “Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics”, *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2003): 511-31.

shown that real life securitizing processes are often much more complex, contradictory and contested than the classical version of securitization theory would suggest.<sup>18</sup>

Newer generations of “post-Copenhagen”<sup>19</sup> securitization scholars have responded to the limitations of the classical framework in a number of ways, the most useful of which however only provide a partial solution to the problem outlined above. I will discuss three particularly helpful strands of contemporary securitization theory: the Paris School, Stritzel’s “discursive constructivist” version of securitization theory, and recent attempts to recover poststructuralist arguments.<sup>20</sup> A particularly prominent strand among contemporary securitization theory is the Paris School, whose proponents the classical version’s focus on speech acts in favor of what they call a “sociological” approach,<sup>21</sup> which is primarily focused on everyday social practices of security professionals, such as security controls at airports.<sup>22</sup> Although advocates of the Paris School are certainly right that routinized social practices play an important role in the reproduction of securitizations, they do not offer a solution to the problem of how

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<sup>18</sup> See Philippe Bourbeau and Juha A. Vuori, “Security, Resilience and Desecuritization: Multidirectional Moves and Dynamics,” *Critical Studies on Security* 3, no. 3 (2015): 253-68; McDonald, “The Failed Securitization”; Roe, “Actor, Audience(s) and Emergency Measures”; Hubert Zimmermann, “Exporting Security: Success and Failure in the Securitization and Desecuritization of Foreign Military Interventions,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11, no. 2 (2017): 225-44.

<sup>19</sup> Olav F. Knudsen, “Post-Copenhagen Security Studies: Desecuritizing Securitization,” *Security Dialogue* 32, no. 3 (2001): 355-68.

<sup>20</sup> Holger Stritzel, “Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond,” *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 3 (2007): 359.

<sup>21</sup> Thierry Balzacq, “The ‘Essence’ of Securitization: Theory, Ideal Type, and a Sociological Science of Security,” *International Relations* 29, no. 1 (2015): 103-13.

<sup>22</sup> Balzacq, *Understanding Securitisation Theory*; Balzacq, “The ‘Essence’ of Securitization”.

to theoretically account for the relative effectiveness of different securitizing moves. Moreover, in their shift away from linguistic to social practices, the Paris School not just abandons speech acts but also discourse, which is understood as limited to linguistic phenomena. This is not unproblematic because, as Patomäkki points out, the Paris School itself has to assume that linguistic practices matter, even if the speech act itself is insufficient.<sup>23</sup>

This is a problem that also Stritzel's discursive constructivist reformulation of securitization theory, which combines securitization theory with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), suffers from, if however in a less pronounced fashion.<sup>24</sup> Like the Paris School, Stritzel turns away not only from speech act theory but also from poststructuralist elements in the classical version of securitization theory.<sup>25</sup> Stritzel rightly argues that securitization should be analyzed within wider discursive contexts, and stresses intertextuality, translation and the need to adapt securitization moves to different locales.<sup>26</sup> As a consequence, his approach is much better able to incorporate audience and context than the classical version. However, neither Stritzel develops a theoretical account of how and under which conditions securitizing moves succeed but instead advocates an empirical reconstruction how securitization happens (or fails) on

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<sup>23</sup> Patomäki, "Absenting the absence of future dangers".

<sup>24</sup> Stritzel, "Towards a Theory of Securitization," 359.

<sup>25</sup> In earlier works Stritzel seems to conflate poststructuralism with speech act theory (ibid.), which however relies (at least implicitly) on precisely the kind of essentialist understanding of security that is entirely incompatible with poststructuralism. In later works Stritzel provides a much more precise discussion of poststructuralism. See Holger Stritzel, *Security in Translation: Securitization Theory and the Localization of Threat* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), ch. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Stritzel, *Security in Translation*.



a case-by-case basis. That is, he does not offer a theoretical solution to the problem formulated above.

In addition, by relying on CDA, Stritzel also imports theoretical problems that a rigorous poststructuralist approach could avoid. Like the Paris School, CDA conceives of discourse as purely linguistic. Moreover, in CDA discourse takes a back seat to extra-discursive social factors. In Stritzel's words, discourse is understood as "embedded in, and thus related to, but ultimately *subordinate* to, social practices".<sup>27</sup> This conception of discourse leads to a somewhat awkward separation between discourse and context, and brings up the question to what extent his explanation is really discursive at all. This could have been avoided had Stritzel seriously considered PDT, which conceptualizes social practices as internal to discourse and thus could at least theoretically bridge the gap between the Paris School and the classical version. Unfortunately, Stritzel is quick to dismiss PDT on account of the theory's "high degree of conceptual specificity" which according to him makes the theory less "transferable".<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, both the Paris School and Stritzel end up throwing out the poststructuralist baby with the speech act bathwater.

Only recently have securitization scholars made attempts to recover the theory's poststructuralist roots. Here, in particular the contributions by Rothe and Wilhelmsen are noteworthy, which propose to reconceptualize securitization as the result of discursive struggles in which different discourses compete for hegemony.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>29</sup> Rothe, *Securitizing Global Warming*; Wilhelmsen, "How does war become a legitimate undertaking?".

Primarily drawing on IR poststructuralism and Judith Butler, Wilhelmsen asks how war is legitimized through the construction of threats. Wilhelmsen proposes to conceptualize securitizations as “produced over time through multiple texts that *represent* something as an existential threat” instead of through isolated speech acts.<sup>30</sup> By employing a poststructuralist framework, Wilhelmsen can avoid having to fall back on extra-discursive factors, thus raising doubt as to the explanatory power of the discursive framework itself. Nevertheless, despite her overall important contribution, Wilhelmsen’s main theoretical argument in regards to effectiveness rests on iterability: Put simply, securitizing moves become accepted through repetition.<sup>31</sup> That however leaves open the question of whether any representation has the same chance as any other to become accepted, as long it is repeated often enough. As current debates about potential collusion between the presidential campaign of Donald Trump and Russia illustrate, however, whether certain claims become accepted depends not merely on repetition but also on whether they are convincing for a specific audience. Trump’s repeated claims that there was “no collusion” and that the whole Russia investigation was a “witch hunt” notwithstanding,<sup>32</sup> public opinion is firmly split on the issue along

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<sup>30</sup> Wilhelmsen, “How does war become a legitimate undertaking?”, 167.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>32</sup> Donald Trump, “The Mueller Probe Should Never Have Been Started in That There Was No Collusion and There Was No Crime. It Was Based on Fraudulent Activities and a Fake Dossier Paid for by Crooked Hillary and the Dnc, and Improperly Used in Fisa Court for Surveillance of My Campaign. Witch Hunt!,” tweet, @realDonaldTrump, 17 March 2018, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/975163071361683456>.

party lines. According to a recent poll, 87% of Democrats respond that the Trump campaign colluded with Russia, 88% of Republicans deny that.<sup>33</sup>

In what to my knowledge is the only systematic attempt to connect PDT and securitization theory, Rothe develops a theoretical model of threat construction based on the discourse theoretical notion of hegemony.<sup>34</sup> Moving in the exact opposite direction of Balzacq and Stritzel, Rothe calls for a dissolution of what he calls “the unholy conjunction of speech act theory and poststructuralism”.<sup>35</sup> Essentially, Rothe proposes to see successful securitizations as the result of discursive hegemony, that is, as the result of the construction of hegemonic projects that seek to create acceptance by (1) articulating a number of demands as going hand in hand (equivalence), (2) clearly identifying an obstacle standing in the way of their realization (a radical, antagonistic Other) and (3) the provision of a symbol with which different subjects can associate their demands (an empty signifier). Combining PDT with Hajer’s discourse coalitions framework, Rothe argues that what happens during a hegemonic process is that new discourse coalitions are formed that “bring together a variety of social demands by articulating security as an empty signifier that unites them”.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to previous studies, Rothe sets out to provide a rigorous poststructuralist model that can account for the differences in the effectiveness of securitizing moves that does not have to fall back on extra-discursive factors.

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<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Agiesta, “CNN Poll: Almost Everyone Wants a Public Report on Mueller’s Findings,” CNN Online, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/07/politics/cnn-poll-russia-mueller-report-release/index.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Rothe, *Securitizing Global Warming*.

<sup>35</sup> Rothe, *Securitizing Global Warming*, 28.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

This study builds on Rothe's work but also moves beyond it in mainly two respects. First, it seeks to clarify some remaining conceptual ambiguity in Rothe's account. Thus, although Rothe sets out to explain securitization as a result of discursive hegemony, at times it appears as if he explains hegemony in terms of securitization. In principle, Rothe argues that understanding the relative success of securitizing moves requires to analyze how a hegemonic project is formed through the articulation of an equivalential chain out of previously disparate demands, the construction of an antagonistic frontier and the provision of an empty signifier (namely security). However, at times he seems to suggest that antagonism is the result of securitization, when he argues that hegemonic projects draw on "the construction of a political antagonism *and securitization represents the discursive strategy behind such constructions*".<sup>37</sup> Strictly speaking, this argument is at least partially tautological. Moreover, the insufficient distinction between antagonism and securitization points to a larger problem in much IR poststructuralist research, namely the tendency to conflate physical security threats with ontological ones, as a consequence invoking the impression that identity formation necessarily requires securitization.<sup>38</sup> However, an understanding of how threat construction and identity formation – or, if you will, physical and ontological security – hang together requires to analytically separate them in the first place.

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<sup>37</sup> Rothe, *Securitizing Global Warming*, 46, emphasis added.

<sup>38</sup> Bahar Rumelili, "Identity and Desecuritisation: The Pitfalls of Conflating Ontological and Physical Security", *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18, no. 1 (2015): 52-74.

Second, Rothe seems to suggest that securitization always is the result of the construction of a hegemonic project. Laclau and Mouffe's central concern in developing the notion of hegemony was to explain relatively large-scale social change, such as the formation of social movements, revolutions or the replacement of whole discursive orders (*i.e.*, dominant discourses).<sup>39</sup> And while Rothe is certainly right that securitization can, and often does (the 'war on terror' discourse being just one example),<sup>40</sup> happen as part of a much larger rearticulation of a wider security discourse, I would argue that securitization does not necessarily have to involve the transformation of the entire security order, *i.e.*, the dominant discourse around which the security policy of a given country organized,<sup>41</sup> as part of a hegemonic project but can also take place *within* a given security order.

### **Unpacking the Process of Threat Construction: Rethinking Securitization as (Re)Articulation**

In its broadest sense, a PDT approach conceptualizes securitization as the contingent, context-dependent and temporary result of power-laden discursive struggles,

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<sup>39</sup> David Howarth, "Demands, articulation and radical democracy", *Contemporary Political Theory* 15, no. 3 (2016): 306-12.

<sup>40</sup> Stuart Croft, *Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Dirk Nabers, "Filling the Void of Meaning: Identity construction in U.S. foreign policy after September 11, 2001", *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5, no. 2 (2009): 191-214.

<sup>41</sup> That is, the primary function of security orders is to formulate grand strategy. On grand strategy, see, e.g., Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Stacie E. Goddard and Ronald R. Krebs, "Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy", *Security Studies* 24, no. 1 (2015): 5-36.

renewing Buzan et al.'s original argument that "the way to study securitization is to study discourse".<sup>42</sup> From a PDT perspective, a securitizing move would be understood as a specific form of articulation, *i.e.*, the contingent and temporary product of articulatory practices that establish "a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice".<sup>43</sup> Securitization specifically rearranges (at least) two discursive elements, the (soon to be) threatening object and the referent object, in such a way that one is articulated as an existential threat to the other's physical security.<sup>44</sup> Importantly, this is achieved not through the invocation of certain buzz words like 'threat' or 'danger' but through the differential arrangement of moments within a given discourse, and by becoming moments within a common discourse, both the identity (*i.e.*, the meaning) of the threatening object and the referent object is transformed.<sup>45</sup> For instance, the securitization of 'climate change' would be the effect of how that signifier is related to other signifiers like floods, desertification, famine, mass migration, stability, etc. within a wider network of relations (*i.e.*, a

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<sup>42</sup> Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, 25; also Rothe, *Securitizing Global Warming*; Wilhelmssen, "How does war become a legitimate undertaking?"

<sup>43</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 105. This is made possible because discourses are always to some extent dislocated, see Nabers, Stengel and Nabers in this issue.

<sup>44</sup> To be sure, since meaning is the product of the differential arrangement of discursive elements, technically any articulation always involves the discourse as a whole – they question only is to what extent the meaning of individual moments in a discourse and of the discourse as a whole change.

<sup>45</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 106; Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 69.

discourse).<sup>46</sup> That also means that securitization always involves some degree identity change (but not necessarily *vice versa*) – whith identity being understood as the meaning a specific discursive element ('American-ness,' for instance) assumes in a specific context. At the same time, as the (now) threatening object becomes reduced to a moment within a specific discourse, potential alternative understandings (as non-threatening, for instance) are excluded.<sup>47</sup>

But let us get back to the larger question of how to understand different securitizing moves' effectiveness. Here it makes sense to analytically differentiate between two different types of securitization, depending on whether (1) they are part of a larger hegemonic project to transform the wider security order (the dominant security discourse) or (2) whether something is securitized *within* a given security order. To begin with, new threats can be constructed as part of a wider project to implement a new security discourse. One example is the 'war on terror' discourse. That discourse not only constructed terrorism as an existential threat to the United States but also formulated a new U.S. grand strategy,<sup>48</sup> understood as the "theory about how

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<sup>46</sup> The differential construction of meaning also means that from a methodological point of view there is no way around a careful contextual and in-depth analysis of how different signifiers are articulated in relation to other signifiers to determine whether something is being securitized.

<sup>47</sup> Similarly Wilhelmsen, "How does war become a legitimate undertaking?", 169.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen M. Walt, "Beyond bin Laden. Reshaping U.S. Foreign Policy", *International Security* 26, no. 3 (2001/02): 56-78. To be sure, the argument here is not that there are no elements of continuity between pre- and post-'9/11' U.S. foreign policy, see, e.g., Roxanna Sjöstedt, "The Discursive Origins of a Doctrine. Norms, Identity, and Securitization under Harry S. Truman and George W. Bush", *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3, no. 3 (2007): 233-54; critical Dirk Nabers, *A Poststructuralist Discourse Theory of Global Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[the U.S.] can best 'cause' security for itself".<sup>49</sup> Here, the securitization of terrorism was embedded in a much wider dynamics of discursive transformation. Although securitization often takes place within larger dynamics of change, it does not necessarily have to. Thus, previously not securitized issues can become articulated as threats without a far-reaching overhaul of the existing security order. One example here is the construction of Iraq within the 'war on terror' discourse. As opposed to the shift from the pre-'9/11' discourse to the post-'9/11' discourse the securitization of Iraq did not involve the construction of a new discourse but only a rearticulation of Iraq within that discourse by linking the Iraqi regime to terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Importantly, although both types of securitization can be theoretically grasped as the result of articulatory practices, arguably the rearticulation of an entire security order will likely face greater obstacles than a more moderate amendment. The reason is that the former will require the questioning of a larger set of taken for granted assumptions. If we take the claim seriously that discourses limit what can legitimately be said and done,<sup>50</sup> more far-reaching attempts at rearticulation will likely face greater resistance. Thus, while I agree with Rothe that the replacement of an entire security order (the dominant security discourse) requires the formulation of a hegemonic project around equivalence, antagonism and representation to garner support, I argue

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<sup>49</sup> Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Michel Foucault, "Orders of discourse", *Social Science Information* 10:2 (1971): pp. 7-30; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).



that more modest forms of securitization that simply amend the existing security order do not.

Although Laclau is primarily concerned with large-scale social change, he also offers some general arguments in regards to the question of why individual articulations resonate with certain audiences and others fail. Central in this context is the notion of credibility, which depends on an articulation's compatibility with sedimented discursive practices, that is, the "basic principles informing the organization of a group".<sup>51</sup> Both, individual articulations and larger hegemonic projects have to be credible to become accepted by a certain audience, both in terms of content and form. First, the contents of an articulation have to be credible in light of sedimented discursive practices. This includes both, what is commonly considered to be morally right and what is commonly held to be factually true among a certain group (see table 1 below) – which themselves are contingent results of past discursive struggles.<sup>52</sup> For example, from a PDT perspective the reason that "ripe tomatoes, which visitors to Valencia can experience as a weapon once a year, never appear as a general security threat in our intelligence statistics,"<sup>53</sup> is not that they share an essence which makes them objectively harmless but that it is widely held to be true that tomatoes are

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<sup>51</sup> Ernesto Laclau, "New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time", in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, ed. Ernesto Laclau (London: Verso, 1990), p. 66.

<sup>52</sup> Ernesto Laclau, "Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics", in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, ed. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek (London & New York: Verso, 2000), 82.

<sup>53</sup> Guzzini, "Securitization as a causal mechanism", 330.

nothing to worry about.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the compatibility of articulations with sedimented practices is itself not an objective fact but is itself produced in discursive struggles.<sup>55</sup>

Table 1. Types of sedimented practices

Type of sedimented practice	Examples
Form/authority to speak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker/subject positions</li> <li>• Regulations of interaction in a discursive arena</li> </ul>
Content (normative/epistemic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normative framework</li> <li>• Accepted truth claims</li> </ul>

*Source: author's illustration*

Importantly, just like articulations can fail because they clash with sedimented practices, so can they gain credibility when they resonate, and actively draw on, sedimented discursive practices. For instance, as feminist and postcolonial scholars have pointed out, part of why arguments for ‘humanitarian’ interventions are often successful is because they draw on gendered and racialized constructions of the non-Western Other and map onto the “older binary between colonizer and colonized”.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the notion of sedimented practices also helps us understand why

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<sup>54</sup> Here, a discourse theoretical approach links back to the original formulation of securitization theory, which also stressed that it is easier to securitize an issue “if certain objects can be referred to that are generally held to be threatening”. Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, 33.

<sup>55</sup> For instance, the compatibility or incompatibility of out-of-area operations with antimilitarism has been, and continues to be a subject of debate in the German Bundestag.

<sup>56</sup> Uday Chandra, “The Case for a Postcolonial Approach to the Study of Politics”, *New Political Science* 35, no. 3 (2013): 485; see also Cristina Masters, “Femina Sacra: The “War on/of Terror”, Women and the Feminine”, *Security Dialogue* 40, no. 1 (2009): 29-49; Laura J. Shepherd, “Veiled References: Constructions of Gender in the Bush Administration Discourse on the Attacks on Afghanistan Post-9/11”, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no. 1 (2006): 19-41.

securitization is such a “powerful discursive weapon,” as Rothe put it.<sup>57</sup> The reason is not some ‘essence’ of security but that security has acquired a special status in past discursive struggles.

Second, the credibility of articulations depends on the conditions under which they are made.<sup>58</sup> Discourse is far from a level playing field, and not all subjects are equally authorized to speak.<sup>59</sup> For instance, above all particular members of government – in most countries mainly the head of government, the defense and foreign ministers – are authorized to speak on matters of security. In addition, credibility depends on other factors like the rules that structure interaction within a given discursive arena (e.g., parliamentary procedures and regulations). Moreover, also informal rules matter, such as gendered expectations in regards to the form and style of debate, including emotional detachment, professionalism, clothes, posture, tone of voice, etc.<sup>60</sup> Informal authority also includes the personal standing of a given subject among a certain group. For example, due to it being the successor of the former ruling party of the German Democratic Republic, arguments by members of the left-wing party *Die Linke*, in particular those that are concerned with violence and

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<sup>57</sup> Rothe, *Securitizing Global Warming*, 46.

<sup>58</sup> Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, 33.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., David Campbell, *Politics without Principle: Sovereignty, Ethics, and the Narratives of the Gulf War* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner, 1993).

<sup>60</sup> See, e.g., Carol Cohn, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals”, *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987): 687-718; Charlotte Hooper, *Manly States: Masculinities, International Relations, and Gender Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

authoritarianism, are often dismissed out of hand by members of the established parties in the German Bundestag.<sup>61</sup>

Credibility is the single most important factor that helps understand the effectiveness of securitizing moves seeking to amend an existing security order without challenging its basic foundations,<sup>62</sup> like integrating Iraq into the war on terror discourse. Thus, above all, the securitizing move itself has to be compatible, both in form and content, with the sedimented practices that structure the discursive terrain, including most importantly the security order itself. For example, the construction of non-state actors as an existential threat during the Cold War would have likely failed because it would literally have made no sense to people preoccupied with the threat of nuclear annihilation.

A different case are securitizing moves that are embedded within a larger hegemonic project to replace the existing security order with a new one. Such a project, which challenges the dominant order, unavoidably clashes with at least some (sub)set of sedimented practices and as a consequence it requires a significantly larger amount of work to garner broad support. To be sure, this is not to say that credibility does not matter for hegemonic projects. It certainly does. If there is one thing that will provide the kiss of death for any hegemonic project it is if it fails to integrate deeply

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<sup>61</sup> See for example Theodor zu Guttenberg, 16<sup>th</sup> legislative period, 49<sup>th</sup> session, 19 September 2006: p. 4816. In the following, citations from German parliamentary protocols are provided in the form of short citations according to the following template: name of the speaker, legislative period/session number, date: page. All translations from the German language are, if not otherwise indicated, the author's.

<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that this is itself subject to interpretation.

sedimented discursive practices (such as American exceptionalism or German antimilitarism) or directly openly clashes with them.<sup>63</sup>

A hegemonic project usually begins with the dislocation of an old order as a result of events that it literally cannot make sense of.<sup>64</sup> It seeks to replace what its advocates commonly argue is a failed, outdated way of doing things, and that necessarily also entails a direct challenge to (some of) the old ways. One core element of any ideal-typical successful hegemonic project is what Laclau calls a “radical discontinuity with the dislocation of the dominant structural forms”.<sup>65</sup> What this means, put simply, is that any successful hegemonic project has to “learn from the failure of previous discourses”.<sup>66</sup> This is admittedly a rather obvious point, but it is still relevant. If a project does not claim to radically break with the old dislocated order it cannot convincingly claim that it will fare any better in the future. At the same time, hegemonic projects are seldom built from scratch but usually involve a combination, and rearticulation, of old and new discursive elements in a form of discursive

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<sup>63</sup> Nabers, *A Poststructuralist Discourse Theory*; Dirk Nabers and Frank A. Stengel, “Sedimented Practices in Trump’s Foreign Policy”, in *Populism and World Politics: Exploring Inter- and Transnational Dimensions*, ed. Frank A. Stengel, David B. MacDonald and Dirk Nabers (Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 103-35.

<sup>64</sup> Although dislocation is an ontological feature of the social (see Nabers, this issue), I presume that discursive orders can be more or less disrupted at different times, as a result of which they are more or less naturalized and vulnerable to rearticulation. Laclau, “New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time,” 39f, 66.

<sup>65</sup> Laclau, “New Reflections”, 67.

<sup>66</sup> Nabers, “Filling the Void of Meaning,” 197.

“bricolage,” and this is also how hegemonic projects are made credible despite challenging the old, established ways of doing things.<sup>67</sup>

Aside from radical discontinuity and credibility, in particular the three ‘design features’ of equivalence, antagonism and representation contribute to a project’s overall appeal.<sup>68</sup> First, a successful hegemonic project has to construct a chain of equivalent demands, claiming that previously disparate or even contradictory demands (in the case of securitization the demand for security is crucial) actually go hand in hand. Equivalence also helps understand how securitization and ‘extraordinary’ means are linked.<sup>69</sup> A PDT, and more generally a poststructuralist, approach would dissolve the linear conception of securitization, in which extraordinary means follow a successful securitizing process. In fact, threat constructions usually appear in discourse in conjunction with demands for certain policy measures.<sup>70</sup> For extraordinary measures to become accepted, demands for these measures – surveillance, military operations, etc. – have to be (credibly) incorporated into the chain of equivalent demands. Importantly, from a PDT perspective this is far from automatic and can be highly contested, as the discussion of the German case below will illustrate.

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<sup>67</sup> Giovan Francesco Lanzara, “Self-Destructive Processes in Institution Building and Some Modest Countervailing Mechanisms”, *European Journal of Political Research* 33, no. 1 (1998): 1-39.

<sup>68</sup> See Stengel and Nabers, this issue.

<sup>69</sup> The distinction between extraordinary or normal is itself the contingent and temporary result of on-going discursive struggles.

<sup>70</sup> See also Wilhelmsen, “How does war become a legitimate undertaking?”.

At the same time, sedimented practices also show how the breadth of a chain of equivalence can be a double-edged sword. For the broader the chain of equivalent demands the greater the chance that the incorporation of some demands as equivalent will not be credible for everyone. For example, a chain that includes both capitalists and workers as equivalent – as in the German social market economy<sup>71</sup> – might offer subject positions for a broad group of people to identify with, but it will likely be unconvincing to classical Marxists because according to Marxist orthodoxy capitalists and workers are locked in opposite sides of a class struggle.<sup>72</sup>

Second, the construction of equivalence is closely related to the articulation of social antagonism through the exclusion of a radical Other, which is constructed as blocking (1) the realization of demands (2) the Self's achievement of a full, uninterrupted identity.<sup>73</sup> It is only through the articulation of a radical Other that previously disparate demands appear equivalent. Simply put, the advocates of certain demands are united (only) in overcoming that which blocks the realization of these demands. To be sure, a hegemonic process can also involve the simultaneous construction of the radical Other as an existential threat, but it does not necessarily have to. A simultaneous

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<sup>71</sup> See Martin Nonhoff, *Politischer Diskurs und Hegemonie. Das Projekt "Soziale Marktwirtschaft"* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> See Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Band 1. MEW Band 23 (Berlin: Dietz, 1962).

<sup>73</sup> I am limiting my discussing here to the ontic level of concrete discursive struggles while ignoring antagonism as an ontological feature of discourse. See Nonhoff's (unfortunately German-language) discussion on the matter, Martin Nonhoff, "Antagonismus und Antagonismen – hegemonietheoretische Aufklärung", in *Ordnungen des Politischen. Einsätze und Wirkungen der Hegemonietheorie Ernesto Laclaus*, ed. Oliver Marchart (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2017), 81-102.

securitization can certainly add urgency to hegemonic processes by raising the stakes. However, if the aim is to explain how previously disparate groups are forged into a common movement, what matters is not that the radical Other is constructed as a physical threat but as the obstacle that needs to be overcome to realize unfulfilled demands and to achieve a fully constituted identity. Thus, antagonism is much closer to the notion of an ontological threat than a physical one.<sup>74</sup>

Third, successful hegemonic projects require that one particular demand empties itself of its particular content to such a degree that it can function as a “a surface for inscription able to register a series of demands and interests much broader than its initial form of articulation” – a symbol with which different subjects can identify and with which they can associate their demands.<sup>75</sup> In contrast to Rothe’s argument I would argue that, although in the context of security discourses ‘security’ often functions as an empty signifier, it does not necessarily have to.<sup>76</sup> Anything else would mean to fall back on some form of essentialism.<sup>77</sup> Which signifier comes to represent the overall chain of equivalences remains to be determined during an actual empirical analysis.

If a project can combine these different elements it is likely that subjects will identify with it, as a result of which it will succeed to establish a certain security discourse as the new hegemonic security order. This becomes visible in the discourse

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<sup>74</sup> Rumelili, “Identity and desecuritisation”.

<sup>75</sup> David Howarth, *Discourse* (Buckingham & Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2000), 173.

<sup>76</sup> The ‘war on terror’ is an example here, see Nabers, *A Poststructuralist Discourse Theory*.

<sup>77</sup> See also the discussion in Jef Huysmans, “Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier,”

*European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 2 (1998): 226-55.



mainly by an increasing number of subjects reproducing the discourse as well as its institutionalization, for instance through codification in legal and policy documents. Successful securitization does not mean that extraordinary means will automatically follow, however.<sup>78</sup> A certain discursive construction does not 'cause' specific actions. Rather, it makes some policy actions seem more appropriate, rational, and moral, while excluding others as improper unworkable, immoral or irrational.

### **The Discursive Construction of the "New Threats" in the German Security Discourse**

In the following, I will briefly illustrate the theoretical added value of bringing a PDT approach to bear on processes of threat construction, focusing on the emergence of so-called "new threats" (like mass migration, armed conflict, terrorism and others) in post-Cold War German security discourse. Before we move on, it is worth noting that due to the limited scope of this article, I will largely neglect two aspects that would otherwise warrant extensive discussion, namely contestation, which the classical version of securitization theory does not pay sufficient attention to,<sup>79</sup> as well as inconsistencies, breaks and contradictions in securitizing processes.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> In that sense, a PDT approach to securitization does not define success as the implementation of extraordinary measures but, rather, the hegemonization of a certain security discourse, of which specific threat articulations are a part. See also Floyd, "Extraordinary or Ordinary Emergency Measures".

<sup>79</sup> Williams, "Words, Images, Enemies".

<sup>80</sup> See also McDonald, "The Failed Securitization"; Roe, "Actor, Audience(s) and Emergency Measures"; Zimmermann, "Exporting Security".

What makes construction of the new threats in German security discourse after unification particularly useful as an illustrative case is that it provides an example of both types of securitization: the transformation of an entire security order and the amendment of an existing security order through the articulation of additional issues as security threats. I will address both in turn, beginning with the establishment of the new German security order after the end of the Cold War, which for convenience's sake I refer to as the project/discourse of networked security. In a nutshell, the discourse of networked security claims that after 1990, the old Soviet threat has been replaced by a plethora of new threats, such as armed conflict, mass migration, environmental problems and terrorism, against which, due to their globalized nature, the old instruments of security policy, most notably conventional deterrence, do not work anymore. German security policy had to adapt to this changed security situation by taking a more active stance, addressing potential problems early on and at the place of their origin. That is, German security policy had to become more preventive and (in a broad sense) interventionist. Moreover, such a security policy had to be "networked" or "comprehensive",<sup>81</sup> as it was originally called during the 1990s, combining civilian and military means of different state and non-state actors in a coordinated and unified approach.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Over time, a number of different terms in addition to networked security have been in use, including comprehensive security, a networked or comprehensive approach, and others. For simplicity's sake, I will use comprehensive and networked security interchangeably throughout this paper, although the latter term was introduced into German discourse only in 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Frank A. Stengel, and Christoph Weller, "Action Plan or Faction Plan? Germany's Eclectic Approach to Conflict Prevention," *International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 1 (2010): 93-107

The securitization of the new threats begins with the dislocation of the then dominant Cold War security order that constructed the Warsaw Pact as the dominant existential threat to Germany and 'the West' more generally, and advocated conventional deterrence (in addition to the U.S. nuclear umbrella) as the primary way to ensure German security. At that time, German foreign policy was characterized as following an ideal-typical model of a "civilian power", placing emphasis on antimilitarism, multilateralism, and Western integration.<sup>83</sup> This discourse came under increasing pressure through the emergence of new conflicts (most notably in Kuwait, Somalia and Yugoslavia) and the end of the Cold War. In the wake of new conflicts, increasingly demands for German participation in multinational peace operations were voiced, which challenged the equivalence of antimilitarist and multilateral sedimented practices.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, with the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union the West's constitutive Other had vanished and German grand strategy was suddenly outdated.

The specifics of the so-called "out-of-area debate,"<sup>85</sup> which took place during the 1990s and concentrated on German participation in multinational peace operations, need not concern us here, primarily because German security was only of secondary

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<sup>83</sup> Sebastian Harnisch and Hanns W. Maull, eds., *Germany as a Civilian Power? The Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

<sup>84</sup> See also the discussion in Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>85</sup> Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, *Germany, Pacifism and Peace Enforcement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 2; Kerry Longhurst, *Germany and the Use of Force* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 3; see also Rainer Baumann and Gunther Hellmann, "Germany and the Use of Military Force: 'Total War', the 'Culture of Restraint' and the Quest for Normality", *German Politics* 10, no. 1 (2001): 61-82.

concern at the time. However, at the end of the 1990s, a new hegemonic project emerged, then still under the name of comprehensive security, that sought to formulate an overarching vision for post-Cold War German conflict prevention policy. This was what would after '9/11' evolve into the project of networked security. In a nutshell, the project called for a comprehensive approach as a response to the continued lack of peace that persisted against initial expectations that the end of the Cold War would usher in an era of world peace. This was most clearly put by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's in November 1998:

"Berlin is [...] also the city that had for decades been split by the East-West conflict. As happy as we Germans are about it [the Cold War] having been overcome, as aware are we also [of the fact] that the end of the Cold War has not by a long shot [*noch lange nicht*] brought world peace.

The world political upheaval has triggered new instabilities and violent conflicts in many regions, also on our doorstep in Europe. [The] misery of refugees, scarcity of resources and ecological destruction in the countries of the South are dangerous breeding grounds for these and new conflicts.

In light of such risks, but above all in light of the chances of international cooperation, the world expects of us more than ever that we do justice to our obligations within the framework of our alliances. We remain reliable partners in Europe and in the world" (Schröder, 14/3, 10 November 1998: 63).

Here, Schröder articulated what he called "new instabilities" (and what others would refer to as the "new threats") as an obstacle to world peace.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, because new

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<sup>86</sup> A number of different terms are used in the German security discourse, including "new hazards" (Kohl, 12/5, 30 January 1991: 67), "new challenges and risks" (Kohl, 12/53, 6 November 1991: 4366), "novel dangers" (Kolbow, 12/70, 16 January 1992: 5882), the "threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Merkel, 14/187, 19 September 2001: 18326) or "new threats" (Meckel, 15/172, 21 April 2005: 16074).

armed conflicts – or “crises,” as they were broadly referred to by members of the Schröder government<sup>87</sup> – after the end of the Cold War were linked to other policy problems like the “misery of refugees,” resources scarcity and others, these different problems were articulated as a *common* radical Other standing in the way of the international community constituting itself as inherently peaceful. Also additional policy problems were articulated as “causes” of conflicts, including “hunger, underdevelopment, terror and hatred between population groups”<sup>88</sup> as well as authoritarian regimes, among others.<sup>89</sup> Importantly, these problems were articulated as *causally linked* to armed conflict. The result is the emergence of the new threats as a common radical Other jointly responsible for the continued lack of peace.

However, before ‘9/11’ the new threats (or “new challenges”, as they were than mainly called)<sup>90</sup> were articulated primarily as obstacles to peace, not as existential threats. References to Germany’s security remained vague, with discourse participants arguing that the new threats could somehow “affect ‘national interests’ of the Federal Republic and its security”.<sup>91</sup> Also military operations were mainly justified with

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<sup>87</sup> Scharping, 14/3, 10 November 1998: 113. In the context of the German security discourse of the 1990s “crisis” functions as somewhat of a catch-all term broadly referring to any (risk of the) occurrence of mass violence see, e.g., Federal Government, *Action Plan “Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peace-Building”* (Berlin: Federal Government, 2004).

<sup>88</sup> Scharping, 14/3, 10 November 1998: 114.

<sup>89</sup> Schröder, 14/35, 22 April 1999: 2762.

<sup>90</sup> See Schröder, 14/35, 22 April 1999: 2764.

<sup>91</sup> Nachtwei, 13/135, 7 November 1996: 12149.

Germany's "international responsibility".<sup>92</sup> Thus, at the time they presented more a case of pacification than securitization.<sup>93</sup>

This changed with the September 2001 terrorist attacks ('9/11'), after which terrorism was articulated as a direct and existential threat to Germany and the "civilized world" as such. Shortly after '9/11,' members of the SPD/Green government, including Chancellor Schröder, pointed out that '9/11' was "not only an attack on the United States of America; they are a declaration of war against the entire civilized world", including Germany.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, on 19 September 2001 Schröder argued that the at the time still unfolding 'war on terror' was essentially about "the future viability of our country in the midst of a free world".<sup>95</sup> At the same time, terrorism was also articulated as a radical, antagonistic Other threatening not just Germany's physical security but also its very essence. For example, a week after the attacks, Chancellor

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<sup>92</sup> See for instance Stoltenberg, 12/27, 5 June 1991: 2033; Kohl, 12/5, 30 January 1991: 67; Genscher, 12/6, 31 January 1991: 137. For a detailed discussion of the notion of responsibility in the German security discourse, see, e.g., Frank A. Stengel, "Légitimer l'armée en operation: les interventions extérieures de la 'nouvelle Bundeswehr' dans la rhétorique du gouvernement rouge-vert", *Allemagne d'aujourd'hui* no. 192 (2010): 25-34; Anna Geis and Hanna Pfeifer, "Deutsche Verantwortung in der „Mitte der Gesellschaft“ aushandeln? Über Politisierung und Entpolitisierung der deutschen Außenpolitik", in *Politik und Verantwortung: Analysen zum Wandel politischer Entscheidungs- und Rechtfertigungspraktiken*, ed. Christopher Daase, et al. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), 218-43; Bernhard Stahl, "Verantwortung – welche Verantwortung? Der deutsche Verantwortungsdiskurs und die Waffenlieferungen an die Peschmerga", *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 27, no. 4 (2017): 437-71.

<sup>93</sup> Amir Lupovici, "Pacification: Toward a Theory of the Social Construction of Peace", *International Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (2013): 204-28.

<sup>94</sup> Schröder, 14/187, 19 September 2001: 18301.

<sup>95</sup> Schröder, 14/187, 19 September 2001: 18302.

Schröder claimed that '9/11' represented a "faceless and also ahistorical barbaric terrorism" aiming to destroy "the inheritance of European Enlightenment":

"These values of human dignity, of liberal democracy and of tolerance are our great strength in the fight against terrorism. They are what binds our community of peoples and states, and they are what the terrorists want to destroy. These values, ladies and gentlemen, are our identity, and that is why we will defend them, with vigor, with decisiveness, but also with prudence" (Schröder, 14/187, 19 September 2001: 18304f, italics added).

Terrorism not just threatened Germany's physical security but it actually sought to undermine the West's core values (implicitly presumed to be identical with the world's values).<sup>96</sup>

Importantly, from the beginning terrorism was articulated as an integral part of the new threats. Thus, the pre-'9/11' discourse of comprehensive security provided a ready-made interpretive framework that not only helped make sense of terrorism but that also provided a (grand) strategic blueprint for German security policy in the age of terrorism. Discourse participants emphasized that terrorism was inherently linked to other phenomena already familiar from the discourse of comprehensive security that were said to function as "breeding grounds" (*Nährboden*) for terrorism.<sup>97</sup> These included "conflicts, poverty, ignorance and disease",<sup>98</sup> "social misery and hurt pride,"<sup>99</sup> "environmental destruction, hunger and violence",<sup>100</sup> "lack of participation" and

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<sup>96</sup> This articulation is obviously Eurocentric, although limited space does not permit a detailed discussion here.

<sup>97</sup> Schröder, 14/186, 12 September 2001: 18294.

<sup>98</sup> Zapf, 14/189, 26 September 2001: 18399.

<sup>99</sup> Struck, 14/187, 19 September 2001: 18308.

<sup>100</sup> Dzembitzki, 14/189, 26 September 2001: 18423.

authoritarian regimes,<sup>101</sup> organized crime,<sup>102</sup> the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and state failure, among others.<sup>103</sup> Through their articulation as equivalent with terrorism, these policy problems were also articulated (at least indirectly) as security threats. The result of the overall articulation is an emerging antagonistic chain of equivalences that poses a common obstacle to the realization of a terrorism-free, perfectly secure world:

*... ≡ terrorism ≡ armed conflict ≡ poverty ≡ ignorance ≡ fanaticism ≡ tyranny  
≡ lack of participation ≡ hurt pride ≡ social misery  
≡ environmental destruction ≡ refugee movements ≡ migration  
≡ disease ≡ organized crime human trafficking ≡ drug trade  
≡ corruption ≡ uncontrolled financial flows ≡ WMD proliferation  
≡ state failure ≡ ...*

The flipside of the construction of the new threats was the construction of a unified project out of previously disparate demands. Already before '9/11', conflict prevention, development policy and other policy goals and entire policy fields were articulated as equivalent. After '9/11', the equivalential chain was expanded, including new demands like counterterrorism, the fight against organized crime, the prevention of WMD proliferation, the fight against diseases, corruption, human trafficking, among others, breaching the boundaries that separated previously distinct discourses (like the health

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<sup>101</sup> Hendricks, 14/199, 9 November 2001: 19531.

<sup>102</sup> Schröder, 14/187, 19 September 2001: 18303.

<sup>103</sup> Schockenhoff, 15/73, 7 November 2003: 6297; Bury, 15/172, 21 April 2005: 16084; von Klæden, 16/64, 10 November 2006: 6319; Merkel, 16/214, 26 March 2009: 23122.



discourse or discourses on financial regulation) from the security discourse.<sup>104</sup> As a consequence, the project could incorporate an even wider range of demands, further broadening its appeal. Importantly, through the incorporation of terrorism, which was articulated as a direct security threat, also the demand for German security could be incorporated into the overall project, which allowed the project to become a contender in the struggle over the hegemonization of the security discourse.

In addition to demands for certain policy goals to be realized, the project also included from the start demands for certain policy measures, for instance participation in military operations. Although this is only hinted at in the quote above (with Schröder calling on Germans to “defend” Western values), the German security discourse is ripe with demands for Germany to “face” the challenge presented by, for instance, terrorism, including with “military means”.<sup>105</sup> The important point here is that threat articulations are usually directly linked in discourse to demands for policy measures.

The project also offered an empty signifier. Already during the 1990s, comprehensive security was articulated as a universal remedy that, contrary to a traditional, military policy, could overcome not just individual policy problems like poverty or armed conflict but the entirety of the new threats and, by extension, realize all equivalent demands. As Chancellor Schröder argued in April 1999,

“[a]fter the overcoming of the East-West conflict what holds today more than ever is [that]: security can less and less be achieved by military means alone. A modern

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<sup>104</sup> This is what Nonhoff calls a superdifferential boundary, see Nonhoff, *Politischer Diskurs und Hegemonie*, 230f.

<sup>105</sup> Fischer, 14/189, 26 September 2001: 18394, 18395.

security policy has to think about peace and economic-social development together. That is what I understand efficient crisis management and effective crisis prevention to be about".<sup>106</sup>

Similarly, also after '9/11' comprehensive or networked security, as it was called from 2006 onwards, was presented as the means by which the new threats, now including terrorism, could be overcome. Thus, on 19 September 2001 Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping claimed that:

*"In light of this threat [of terrorism], which is not new but whose quality, extent and effectiveness have now become horribly visible, it will become more understandable what NATO's heads of state and government have already formulated in 1999, namely that crisis prevention, comprehensive security policy and, included in it, the fight against international terror are common tasks".<sup>107</sup>*

The quote above most aptly illustrates the argument made here: Not only was terrorism not a radically new threat but it only demonstrated what advocates of comprehensive security had known all along (and adopted NATO's strategy accordingly), namely that comprehensive security was the appropriate response to today's security environment.<sup>108</sup> Comprehensive security emerged thus as an empty signifier promising the realization of the entirety of equivalent demands and symbolizing the vision of a peaceful and perfectly secure world.

Importantly, in calling for a comprehensive, civil-military approach to conflict prevention, the project also rearticulated previously contradictory demands as

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<sup>106</sup> Schröder, 14/35, 22 April 1999: 5764, emphasis added.

<sup>107</sup> Scharping, 14/187, 19 September 2001: 18324, emphasis added.

<sup>108</sup> See also for instance Beer, 14/204, 28 November 2001: 20129; Merkel, 14/187, 19 September 2001: 18326.

equivalent. Most notably, the project incorporated demands for civilian conflict prevention – the application, as early as possible, of non-military means to prevent or end armed conflicts, for instance through diplomatic negotiations, peace pedagogy, development aid or other measures.<sup>109</sup> Importantly, when ideas for civilian conflict prevention were originally formulated by the peace movement and peace researchers, it was explicitly articulated as a “political alternative program [*Kontrastprogramm*]” to the “neo-military-interventionist orientation” of the West.<sup>110</sup> That is, it was not articulated as equivalent with but as a *competing* project to military peacekeeping. The project of comprehensive security took up these demands but rearticulated them as equivalent with military peace operations, thus *de facto* checkmating civilian conflict prevention as a potential competing project.

Moreover, the appeal of the overall project was further strengthened by the credibility of its advocates. Thus, one important point why comprehensive security seemed immediately appealing was precisely because it was proposed by members of the SPD and Green party, both of which had been notable for their once critical stance on military operations.<sup>111</sup> If even former pacifists argued in favor of military operations, they could not possibly be wrong. On the flipside, the main critics of military operations have been, aside from very few exceptions, members of *Die Linke*, which is commonly seen as untrustworthy by other parties in the Bundestag, both due

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<sup>109</sup> Stengel and Weller, “Action Plan or Faction Plan”.

<sup>110</sup> Andreas Buro, “Weichenstellung ziviler Konfliktbearbeitung in Europa”, in *Frieden als Zivilisierungsprojekt*, ed. Wolfgang R. Vogt (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1995), 81.

<sup>111</sup> Nina Philippi, *Bundeswehr-Auslandseinsätze als außen- und sicherheitspolitisches Problem des geeinten Deutschlands* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997).

to the party's past and what policymakers and academics alike argue is the party's populist leanings.<sup>112</sup>

One additional strength of the project of networked security was its flexibility. Thus, after the project had already gained widespread acceptance among members of the Bundestag, the category of the new threats was further expanded, including new policy problems. This is the second type of securitization. One example is piracy, which only (re)emerged as a security problem in the mid to late 2000s, when sporadic incidents turned into more organized forms and raids of trade vessels significantly increased in number, primarily off the Somali coast.<sup>113</sup> From the beginning, piracy was argued to be deeply intertwined (i.e., equivalent) with the new threats, including state failure, organized crime and even terrorism. For instance, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier linked piracy to state failure as it threatened "the last remnants of order [...] on which the people in Somalia depend".<sup>114</sup> Similarly, FDP MP Rainer Stinner argued that terrorism could "often not be separated from organized crime and piracy".<sup>115</sup> Thus, new phenomena like piracy were articulated as inherently linked to the new threats and thus became part of the overall threat construction. What made these new additions credible was not an entirely new project, though, but simply that

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<sup>112</sup> Frank Decker and Florian Hartleb, "Populism on Difficult Terrain: The Right- and Left-Wing Challenger Parties in the Federal Republic of Germany," *German Politics* 16, no. 4 (2007): 434-54

<sup>113</sup> Stephen Anning and M. L. R. Smith, "The Accidental Pirate: Reassessing the Legitimacy of Counterpiracy Operations", *Parameters* 42, no. 2 (2012): 28.

<sup>114</sup> Steinmeier, 16/195, 17 December 2008: 21057f.

<sup>115</sup> Stinner, 16/185, 4 November 2008, 19756.

the category of the new threats allowed them to be made sense of within the dominant security order.

Nevertheless, neither the construction of the new threats nor the incorporation as an equivalent demand of military operations was uncontested. Thus, discourse participants continued to struggle over, for instance, the relationship between terrorists and pirates,<sup>116</sup> the adequateness of military means for the purpose of fighting terrorism<sup>117</sup> or the compatibility of military and civilian instruments<sup>118</sup> or the moral acceptability of military operations.<sup>119</sup> Thus, a PDT approach directs our attention to on-going discursive struggles where the classical version of securitization theory would presume the matter to be settled.

## **Conclusion**

This paper had made the case for a PDT approach to securitization, which conceptualized securitization as the contingent, temporary and context-dependent product of power-laden discursive struggles. Any explanation of the effectiveness of different securitizing moves depends on whether they are part of a larger hegemonic project seeking to establish a new security order or whether they simply amend an existing one. In the latter case, effectiveness is best explained in terms of individual securitizing moves' credibility in light of sedimented practices. In contrast to that, the

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<sup>116</sup> Bodewig, 16/197, 19 December 2008: 21345.

<sup>117</sup> Gysi, 16/139, 24 January 2008: 14640.

<sup>118</sup> Vogler, 17/121, 8 July 2011: 14342; see also Hänsel, 16/74, 15 December 2006: 7466

<sup>119</sup> E.g., Lederer, 12/70, 16 January 1992: 5887; Lafontaine, 16/233, 8 September 2009: 26305; van Aken, , 17/3, 10 November 2009: 77.

chance of success of securitizing moves that are part of a larger project above all depends on whether the overall project can garner support as a result of the interplay of equivalences, antagonism and representation.

Future research on securitization will have to pay more attention to how individual securitizing moves are embedded in larger dynamics of discursive change in order to understand why certain articulations resonate with specific audiences and others fail. In this context, paying attention to sedimented practices is crucial. The notion of sedimented practices also provides a possible path toward integrating more thoroughly insights from feminist and postcolonial studies into securitization studies. Examining more thoroughly than has been possible here how established gendered and racialized discursive patterns contribute to securitization remains an important point for future research.<sup>120</sup> In addition, future research should direct attention to contestation, inconsistencies, breaks and contradictions in securitizing processes. This paper has only been able to touch upon these issues in the most cursory fashion, but the German case provides ample evidence that at times securitization is far from a straightforward process.

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<sup>120</sup> Lene Hansen, "The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000): 285-306.

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