

How Securitization Theory Can Benefit from Psychology Findings

Robin Jan Lucke

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Abstract:

Securitization Theory has been applied and advanced continuously since the publication of the seminal work “Security – A New Framework for Analysis” by Buzan et al. in 1998. Various extensions, clarifications and definitions have been added over the years. Ontological and epistemological debates as well as debates about the normativity of the concept have taken place, furthering the approach incrementally and adapting it to new empirical cases. This paper aims at contributing to the improvement of the still useful framework in a more general way by amending it with well-established findings from another discipline: Psychology. The exploratory article will point out what elements of Securitization Theory might benefit most from incorporating insights from Psychology and in which ways they might change our understanding of the phenomenon. Some well-studied phenomena in the field of (Social) Psychology, it is argued here, play an important role for the construction and perception of security threats and the acceptance of the audience to grant the executive branch extraordinary measures to counter these threats: availability heuristic, loss-aversion and social identity theory are central psychological concepts that can help us to better understand how securitization works, and in which situations securitizing moves have great or little chances to reverberate. The empirical cases of the 9/11 and Paris terror attacks will serve to illustrate the potential of this approach, allowing for variances in key factors, among them: (point in) time, system of government and ideological orientation. As a hypotheses-generating pilot study, the paper will conclude by discussing further research possibilities in the field of Securitization.

Introduction

Securitization Theory has been applied and advanced continuously since the publication of the seminal work “Security – A New Framework for Analysis” by Buzan et al. in 1998. Various extensions, clarifications and definitions have been added over the years. Ontological and epistemological debates as well as debates about the normativity of the concept have taken place, furthering the approach incrementally and adapting it to new empirical cases. This paper aims at contributing to the improvement of the still useful framework in a more general way by amending it with well-established findings from another discipline: Psychology. The field of Social Psychology, from which the concept of Social Identity Theory is adapted in this paper, operates at the cross-roads between sociological and psychological research, as “[b]oth intra-individual and the social context influence and are influenced by individual behavior” (DeLamater 2006, x-xi). Interdisciplinarity is thus already embedded within the field itself, and it seems predestined to lend its findings to other disciplines as well, since it is concerned with social and cognitive processes that are central to a number of fields in the Social Sciences (decision-making, social identity formation, and many others). Of course, this also includes Economics, where the sub-field of Behavioral Economics has emerged as a major contributor to knowledge in the discipline. In Political Science, it is the interdisciplinary field of Political Psychology that incorporates and combines psychological and political research.¹ Instead of looking deeper into the fields in which Psychology has already become vital, I will limit myself to one particular theoretical approach within the field of Security Studies in which the full potential to benefit from psychological findings seems to have not been tapped: Securitization.

The exploratory article will point out what elements of Securitization Theory might benefit most from incorporating insights from Psychology and in which ways they might change our understanding of the phenomenon. Some well-studied phenomena in the field of Psychology, it is argued here, play an important role for the construction and perception of security threats and the acceptance of the audience to grant the executive branch extraordinary measures to counter these threats: availability heuristic, loss-aversion and social identity theory are central psychological concepts that can help us to better understand how securitization works, and in which situations securitizing moves have great or little chances to reverberate.

¹ From an outside perspective at least, the field seems to be focused more on individual psychology (leadership trait analysis, for instance) than on social psychology.

The empirical cases of the 9/11 and Paris terror attacks will serve to illustrate the potential of this approach, allowing for variances in key factors, among them: (point in) time, system of government and ideological orientation. As a hypotheses-generating pilot study, the paper will conclude by discussing further research possibilities in the field of Securitization.

The relevance of the article is clear: securitization processes often deal with or touch upon issues of war or conflict, especially when the securitization in question is considered 'successful'. By all means, such successful securitizations enable extreme measures, which, under normal circumstances in absence of an existential threat would be deemed unacceptable (and often undemocratic). I will not delve into the theory debate on the normativity of securitizations here in detail (for such a discussion, see, for instance Taureck 2006). Yet it is important for the basic utility of this article to state that I agree with Buzan et al.'s basic assumption that securitization, in most cases, should be considered as rather negative or at least problematic, most of all because it draws on authoritarian traits and tends toward "panic politics" (Buzan et al. 1998, 29; 34; see also: Hayes 2013, 15).² Therefore it is crucial to understand the process in detail and to identify factors or situations that increase a securitization's likelihood of success. Becoming aware of such factors can help us in deconstructing the process and reveal why, sometimes, certain issues are easily constructed as existential threats whereas others fail in that regard. As to the 'lessons learned' of practical policy advice that might ensue as a result of a clearer picture of securitization, one should however, retain a skeptical viewpoint. After all, being aware of biases and heuristics does not even prevent experts from committing the same errors in intuitive thinking time and time again (Kahneman 2012, 417).

Securitization Theory

State of the Art

Securitization Theory continues to be an extremely dynamic research area. Since Buzan et al.'s 1998 book the field of securitization studies seems to be growing exponentially. With a still manageable amount of publications in the first decade after the original

² This is just a general assumption which does not preclude the possibility that in some cases, securitization can prove beneficial to tackle big problems in a decisive manner. Public health issues such as the Ebola pandemic come to mind, where successful securitizations can be pivotal to open the casket to the large sums of public funds that are often necessary to counter specific threats without prior long-lasting debates.

study, geographically centered in the West (for many: Williams 2003; Stritzel 2007; Taureck 2006; McDonald 2008; Roe 2008), the field has since then contributed numerous studies with special foci on either empirical cases, theoretical advancements or methodological questions to meta-theoretical considerations. It is remarkable in this regard that Securitization seems to have overcome the status of a niche theory with a clear European foothold and is now an approach which is not only applied to cases outside the West, but also by non-Westerners and in the more peripheral regions of International Relations (IR) study (for a detailed discussion on the latter, see Bilgin 2011).

More recently, the research area of Security Studies increasingly seems to have opened up to further refinements from other fields of research. In an article initially published in *Foreign Policy*, Kahneman and Renshon (2007; 2009) explore “Hawkish biases” in conflict situations by bringing cognitive and social psychological research into the field of IR. Strikingly, they state that “we find, almost without exception, that the biases recently uncovered by psychological research favor hawkish decisions in conflict decisions” (Kahneman & Renshon 2009). Of the social-psychological phenomena discussed in their article, I will take up the concepts of “loss-aversion” and “risk seeking in losses” and illustrate their implications for Securitization. Also relatively recently, *International Organization* published an article on “Emotional Beliefs” (Mercer 2010), which draws on psychological research and neuroscience to question widely spread understandings of actor rationality that are fundamental for important IR schools of thought. Mercer explores the role of emotions; more precisely, he claims that “[e]motion is part of reasoning and not a distraction upsetting a coldly rational process” and demonstrates “how emotion and cognition co-produce beliefs” (Mercer 2010, 5).

At the conjunction of Social Psychology and Securitization Theory Kinnvall (2004; see also Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking 2012) makes a very important argument concerning increased human insecurity, social identity theory and securitization; yet by concentrating on the first two elements and also by using a very broadly defined version of the theory (see also Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking 2010), she leaves room for spelling out the consequences for specific research on Securitization. I will try to spin out her thought in that regard. Hayes (2012; 2013) has made an important contribution to explicitly linking Securitization with Social Psychology by combining social identity theory with the Copenhagen School. His overall objective is, however, different from the one laid out in this paper, as he uses the two approaches to develop a comprehensive

IR security theory that can explain in a coherent way how the democratic peace really works. In contrast, the purpose of this paper is of course much narrower, as it tries to enlighten how particular aspects of Securitization Theory can be understood more thoroughly. Notwithstanding, the insights provided by him with view to how social identity theory can explain why securitization becomes possible in some instants but not in others, are central to the third argument made in this article. Specifically taking on the issue of emotions in Securitization Studies, Van Rythoven (2015) criticizes that “securitization scholars have oddly paralleled their rationalist counterparts in their neglect of emotions and have created an unrealistic reality – technical discourse which is alien to the everyday experience of security (ibid., 459). Although this claim seems to be overblown, since analyzing securitizing moves often includes a focus on *how* threats are constructed and perceived through fear appeals and thus emotions (a fact that he also admits in his article (ibid., 460)), he has a point insofar as an explicit theoretical inclusion of emotions within the field is missing. The argument on the availability heuristic in this article follows up on this point.

Crucial Starting-Points Within the Theory

As this paper claims that findings from the discipline of Psychology can help to shed light on specific aspects of the securitization process, the question is: at what point and where in the process do these factors become important? The assumption adopted here is that Psychology is useful to enlighten the question of “success” and “failure” of attempted securitizations, i.e. whether an audience ‘buys’ the argument of the securitizing actors who declare a particular referent object to be existentially threatened. One component of the theory that is crucial in this regard is the element of *facilitating conditions*. Similar to the term of the audience, facilitating conditions are mainly important for the analyst to assess the success of securitizing moves. Buzan et al. define facilitating conditions as “the conditions under which the speech act works, in contrast to cases in which the act misfires or is abused” (1998, 32). They consist of internal conditions concerned with the speech act, such as the internal logic, semiotic and grammar of the act, as well as with external conditions regarding the position of the speaker and the context in which the concrete securitizing attempt takes place (ibid.). After all, as Buzan et al. explain, the centrality of the speech act for securitization “does not mean a study of the features of the threat itself is irrelevant. On the contrary, these features rank high among the ‘facilitating conditions’ of the security speech act” (1998,

32). Non-verbal actions and circumstances may create an environment that makes the audience more susceptible to the actors' arguments that the situation should be viewed as a security issue (McDonald 2008). Balzacq (2011, 13) stresses this point, declaring that

“far from being a departure from constructivist approaches to security, external developments are central to it. [...] to move an audience's attention toward an event or a development construed as dangerous, the words of the securitizing actor need to resonate with the context within which his/her actions are collocated. [...] the success of securitization is contingent upon a perceptive environment.”

In the literature, there has been criticism on this matter which is worth recapitulating here briefly³ since it is relevant for the arguments in the later part of this paper. Criticism can be subdivided into two different camps. The first criticizes that facilitating conditions should be taken into account more extensively, while the second condemns the alleged inconsistency of facilitating conditions with the rootedness of the theory's basic element of the speech act in poststructural theory. The reason for the various objections to the role of facilitating conditions within the framework is the same as with the problem of normativity. It is ultimately a question of the authors' ontological position: Do they believe that uttering (the logic of) 'security' is already sufficient for an act of securitization? Or, as suggested mainly in the joint work of 1998, is the interaction between actors, audience, and facilitating conditions essential to speak of an act of securitization? Stritzel (2007, 362) imputes the alleged neglect of facilitating conditions in *Security* to Wæver, claiming that “[i]n sum, Wæver agrees with Butler and Derrida – and in accordance with Schmitt and Arendt – that a speech act has an indeterminate force of its own that is not related to features of an existing context.” Wæver may, as evident in his single-authored publications, indeed have a different position in this regard than Buzan and de Wilde. In *Security*, however, the non-poststructuralist reading has been established (Buzan et al. 1998, 34-35) even though a certain “tension in the argument of the Copenhagen School remains” between the two readings (Stritzel 2007, 364). I take up this *via media* ontological and epistemological approach which should enable the incorporation of Psychology findings into Securitization Theory. External facilitating conditions (the circumstances) link to the availability heuristic that is elaborated below, while internal facilitating conditions (the “grammar” of the speech act) can be connected with the argument on “loss aversion” and the “certainty effect.” The third argument derived from the realm of Psychology,

³ For the most detailed discussion on this topic so far, see Balzacq et al. 2014.

Social Identity Theory, can improve our understanding of the “Schmittian” dichotomy inherent in the securitization process between the referent object and the audience on the one hand, and the existential threat or referent subject on the other. Prior to the elaboration of these ideas some potential caveats with regard to the incorporation of psychological findings into Securitization Theory are briefly discussed in the next chapter.

Cross-cultural variations and validity of (Social) Psychology Findings

One problem quickly arises when dealing with studies in the discipline of Social Psychology: the question of cross-cultural variation. The objection is that one should not assume that findings are necessarily universal and replicable beyond cultural borders. The fact that, historically, the vast majority of research in the discipline has been conducted in the United States and Western Europe reinforces this problem (Smith 2014, 571-572; Miller-Loessi & Parker 2006, 531).⁴ Replication studies in other countries could alleviate this concern; the problem, however, is that such studies are not being conducted as much as would be desirable: Miller-Loessi & Parker (2006, 542) speak of “a relative scarcity of such studies in social psychology” and point, among other factors, to the publication process of research journals that tends to favor new ideas over replication studies. This problem is not confined to cross-cultural variation but is also true generally.⁵ As a recent, large meta-study published in the journal *Science* has shown, many findings in the field of Psychology do not pass the test of reproducibility when the study is repeated (Open Science Collaboration 2015). Summarizing their collaborative effort, they conclude: “A large portion of replications produced weaker evidence for the original findings despite using materials provided by the original authors, review in advance for methodological fidelity, and high statistical power to detect the original effect sizes” (ibid., 943).

When we look at Securitization and its extension to parts of the world other than the West (as observed above), we also need to ask whether there can be factors that can be traced to differences in culture. For instance, one could ask whether the audience in more collectivist societies tends to react differently to securitizing moves in contrast to

⁴ The definition of “culture” in Social Psychology itself is up for debate (Miller-Loessi & Parker 2006, 529), and although contested, “the nation-state is often the unit of analysis in comparative research (ibid., 530).

⁵ Nor is it confined to the field of (Social) Psychology, as replication studies in the Social Sciences tend to be extremely rare, too.

audiences in more individualistic societies.⁶ Securitization Theory has of course acknowledged that there has to be a ‘discursive fit’ (c.f. Hayes 2013, 28-30) between securitizing actor and audience for securitization to succeed. That is, securitizing moves need to be tailored to the target audience, including aspects such as history and culture. Thus, on top of possible variations according to different governance systems (factors of social structures), cultural differences might further complicate the task to establish globally valid explanations how the mechanism of securitization works.

So how should we deal with these concerns? I propose two ways to mitigate them. First, I will build my argument only on well-established findings in the fields of Psychology and Social Psychology that mainly represent uncontested knowledge. That means that I will forego very recent studies whose initial findings might call for further research and replication studies to test their robustness. Second, I will draw only on such findings that have shown to be valid across cultures, i.e. findings whose universality is generally accepted through cross-cultural replication.⁷ The downside of this approach is that I will miss some chances to include newer or culture-bound discoveries that may illustrate certain accounts of securitizations in a particular country or region, but since in this explorative article I can only touch on very few different examples, this tradeoff can be justified.

Availability Heuristic and Threat Perception

In this subchapter, I will draw on a well-established finding in the field of psychology: the availability heuristic. The availability heuristic concerns people’s (subjective) assessment of probabilities of uncertain events and is thus one form of “judgment under uncertainty” (Kahneman & Tversky 1982). Put simply, it states that the availability of information on a particular kind of event and the easiness with which this information comes to mind can affect the probability one assigns to this class of events. Events that come to mind easily are thus judged to be more likely than others (Kahneman et al. 1982). More frequent events are memorized more frequently, and thus can be retrieved more easily when asked about it. Most of the time the availability heuristic does a good job to make complex problems accessible and answerable. The problem, however, is

⁶ Miller-Loessi & Parker (ibid., 539) summarize that “individualism/collectivism stands out as a universal and important cultural dimension, affecting many basic psychological processes.”

⁷ Variations in findings, however, do not necessarily call into question that there are indeed universal social psychological phenomena. They may just point to cultural variance *within* these universal processes (Stroebe et al. 2014, 21). For a short discussion of difficulties in measuring cross-cultural universality, see: Miller-Loessi & Parker 2006, 538-539.

that in some cases, systemic biases distort the judgment of the probability of a class of events. One important intermediary for observing and memorizing events is the media (Kahneman 2012, 8). Coverage of different kinds of events by the media, in particular on TV, differs substantially. Some news events can be covered easily as they come with striking images, and are thus more prevalent than events whose visualization is difficult: “public interest is most easily aroused by dramatic events” (Kahneman 2012, 9). Furthermore, it is not only the frequency with which different classes of events are reported that affects the assessment of probability but also the intensity of the images they produce: “our expectations about the frequency of events are distorted by the prevalence and emotional intensity of the messages to which we are exposed” (ibid., 138). The depiction of terrorist attacks is the prime example for news events that are likely to spark a particularly strong memorization when one is confronted with such attacks through news coverage. “In today’s world, terrorists are the most significant practitioners of the art of inducing availability cascades. With a few horrible exceptions such as 9/11, the number of casualties from terror attacks is very small relative to other causes of death” (Kahneman 2012, 144). Even taking into account the rising numbers of terrorist attacks recently, the individual risk to fall victim to one of these attacks is, luckily, very small. The immediate significance of this almost “common-sense” heuristic for securitization is evident: “Frightening thoughts and images occur to us with particular ease, and thoughts of danger that are fluent and vivid exacerbate fear” (Kahneman 2012, 139). One hypothesis that can be derived from the availability heuristic with view to Securitization is the following:

H1: Events that produce remarkable pictures and emotionally arousing news stories will be remembered more vividly and strongly, and through this process, lower the threshold for future successful securitizations with the same issue. Recency and the manner of media coverage play an important role.

Kahneman provides an explanation based on human evolution for the underlying reasons of such behavior “We have inherited from our ancestors a great facility to learn when to be afraid. Indeed, one experience is often sufficient to establish a long-term aversion and fear” (Kahneman 2012, 237). The subject of terrorism seems thus primed to be an “easy target” for securitizing moves. The 9/11- as well as the Paris terror attacks of November 2015 can illustrate these points. The airplanes crashing into the towers of the World Trade Center in New York and the collapsing buildings are images that are

imprinted on anybody's memory who was old enough at the time. They were repeated constantly within the first weeks after 9/11. Arguably, it did not take too much persuasion to make the audience accept the wide range of emergency measures adopted in the weeks and months after the attacks. The Paris attacks seem to have had a similar effect (though maybe only in the European context), where the coverage (yet without shocking live imagery) especially of the mass execution in a Paris night club during a rock concert was engrained in the collective memory of the French.

Loss Aversion and Risk Seeking In Losses

The concept of loss aversion is one element of Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky 1979) and is considered the theory's most important claim (Kahneman & Renshon 2009, 85) as well as having "provided the foundation of behavioral economics" (ibid., 86). In a nutshell, loss aversion means that, "when directly compared or weighted against each other, losses loom larger than gains" (Kahneman 2012, 282).

One aspect of loss aversion covers the role of emotions. Citing more recent findings, Kahneman & Renshon (2009, 86) note that "loss aversion occurs in proportion to the emotion experienced when an individual considers giving up a good." Thus, when confronted with a potential loss, it is important to take notice of people's emotions attached to a good.

So how can we transfer loss aversion to Securitization? The argument is very straightforward. After all, securitization is a process that evolves around the fear of losing something. When a referent object is depicted as being existentially threatened, potential losses clearly loom larger than gains, because in the vast majority of cases, the most one can get out of a fended off threat is the status quo. Preserving the referent object in its initial state and being without fear of losing it is the most positive outcome one can hope for. This means that per se, securitizing moves fall on fertile grounds as an audience tends to lend an ear to possible threats very easily.⁸ Referring to prospect theory, Rohlinger & Snow (2006, 512) state that "[t]hreats to [...] values, resources, and ways of life may be more likely to generate collective action than the promise of benefits." The biological roots of this proneness to potential menaces are explained by Kahneman (2012, 282), as he notes that "[o]rganisms that treat threats as more urgent than opportunities have a better chance to survive and reproduce." It is no coincidence

⁸ Of course, these assumptions are true only on average and do not rule out individuals that are rather risk-seeking.

that “urgency” also plays a major role in the securitization process – calling to mind this argument in the discourse seems to evoke tendencies deeply rooted in human behavior to counter emerging threat situations. While these latter arguments can help explain why securitization is possible in general, they do not clarify why some securitizing moves succeed while others fail. This is where the phenomenon of “risk seeking in losses” comes into play.

The idea of risk seeking in losses departs from the postulation that is not the final state that is decisive for the assigned value of something but gains and losses that occur within the process. This means that the “utility” is reference-dependent and not absolute (Kahneman & Renshon 2009, 88). Another important concept is the so-called certainty effect: “The certainty effect refers to the overweighting of outcomes that are certain, relative to outcomes that are merely probable” (ibid., 89). It means that for the sure avoidance of a risk (the occurrence probability is brought down to zero percent), people are willing to pay a relatively higher price as they would be if the risk was merely lowered (by the same amount), but not totally erased. Transferred to our subject matter, it means people are often very reluctant to accept a residual risk – no matter how small or negligible it may be – to be a victim of that risk, for instance a terrorist attack. They will rather accept the very high “costs” of inconveniences (strict airport security for everyone, for example), higher fees or taxes or even the restriction of fundamental freedoms if they think that through this all, the risk can be completely eliminated. Consequently, I hypothesize that securitizing moves which include the promise that a risk will be totally terminated if emergency measures are granted (a war will be won, terrorist organizations will be defeated, etc.) will elicit the approval of the audience more likely than if the promise was to only lower the risk to a certain degree. This is what can also be deduced from the broader assertion made by Kahneman & Renshon (2009, 89) when they state that “[i]n policy debates, arguments that draw on the certainty effect often appear more compelling and persuasive than they should be. Experimental evidence dovetails with the common-sense observation that the invocation of certainties has a rhetorical power that mere probabilities lack.”

Examples for speech acts that employ arguments can be found in statements made by the former U.S. president, as he suggested that the so-called war on terror can and will be won – even though the evidence suggests that this kind of transnational terrorism cannot be totally eliminated:

“My administration has a job to do, and we’re going to do it. *We will rid the world of the evil-doers;*” “It is time for us to *win the first war of the 21st century*

decisively, so that our children and our grandchildren can live peacefully into the 21st century.” (George W. Bush 16 September 2001, emphasis added).

Likewise, President Hollande, in the aftermath of the terror attacks in November 2015 in Paris, proclaimed to defeat the terrorists:

“mais il y a face à l'effroi une Nation qui sait se défendre [...] et qui une fois encore *saura vaincre les terrorists*”⁹ (François Hollande, 13 November 2015); “la France elle est vaillante, et *elle triomphera* de la barbarie”¹⁰ (François Hollande, 14 November 2015, emphasis added).

In his address to both chambers of the French parliament on 16 November 2015, Hollande made use of this kind of argument in a very pronounced manner. Several times during his speech, he spoke of the necessity “de détruire Daech.”¹¹ Renouncing the possibility to contain ISIS, he declared: “Il ne s’agit donc pas de contenir, mais de détruire cette organisation.”¹² In the closing words of his address, the culmination of this argument becomes apparent in the last paragraph: “Nous éradiquerons le terrorisme parce que les Français veulent continuer à vivre ensemble sans rien craindre de leurs semblables.¹³ (...) Le terrorisme ne détruira pas la République car c’est la République qui le détruira.”¹⁴

Summarizing this subchapter, I propose two hypotheses, derived from transferring psychological knowledge into the field of Securitization:

H2: When referent objects evoke strong emotional reverberations, loss aversion will be particularly strong with regard to that referent object.

H3: Stating that a threat will not just be lowered but completely eliminated increases the chance of successful securitization.

Social Identity Theory

This sub-chapter starts out from an assumption that has been central to the argument in the sub-chapter on loss-aversion: the human drive to reduce uncertainty. Kinnvall, in her 2004 article, claims that increased globalization leads to a state where people perceive a great deal of uncertainty. She writes that

⁹ “but in the face of this dread, there is a nation that knows how to defend itself [...] that will defeat the terrorists.”

¹⁰ “France is valiant and it will triumph over barbarism.”

¹¹ “to destroy ISIS.”

¹² “There is no question of containing it. This organization must be destroyed.”

¹³ The phrase “nous éradiquerons ...” is then repeated with different endings three times in the following lines.

¹⁴ “We will eradicate terrorism because the French want to continue to live together without fearing anything from their neighbors. [...] Terrorism will not destroy France because France will destroy it.”

“the globalization of economics and politics is being felt among ordinary citizens as time and space are being compressed and as events elsewhere, real or imagined, are becoming increasingly localized. A globalized world is for many a world devoid of certainty, of knowing what tomorrow holds. It is a world where many people feel intensified levels of insecurity as the life they once led is being contested and changed at the same time” (Kinnvall 2004, 742).

This is where Social Identity Theory comes into play, whose origins date back to Tajfel & Turner (1979, 1986). One central claim of the theory is that people have a basic need for a positive social identity and are therefore strongly motivated to cast their in-group in a positive light vis-à-vis out-groups (Morf & Koole 2014, 150). As Hayes (2013, 25) notes, “[s]urprisingly, given its dominant position in social psychology and strong experimental validation, the social identity approach remains underutilized in the study of international relations.”^{15,16}

The above cited drive to reduce uncertainty in turn makes people look for ways that can accomplish this need.

“As individuals feel vulnerable and experience existential anxiety, it is not uncommon for them to wish to reaffirm a threatened self-identity. Any collective identity that can provide such security is a potential pole of attraction. It is a war of emotions, where world leaders and other paramount figures are seeking to rally people around simple rather than complex causes” (ibid.).

Concurring with this observation, it seems plausible to assume that securitizations, when they are made in opposition to out-groups like other nations (securitizations whose emergency measures can mean war), migrants and refugees, or terrorists, are more likely to succeed as they function in part as a way to reaffirm one’s own in-group identity. In contrast, securitizations whose referent subject¹⁷ – the entity that allegedly threatens the referent object – does not constitute a human out-group but is of a more abstract nature, do not play a role in affirming one’s own identity.¹⁸ This is the case with issues of public health or climate change: pandemics (HIV or the Ebola virus, for instance) cannot, obviously, be regarded as an out-group against which one could demarcate one’s in-group. Instead, they potentially threaten all of humankind. When we

¹⁵ In addition to Social Identity Theory, Hayes understands the theory of self-categorization (see, for instance: Abrams & Hogg 1990) as part of the social identity *approach*.

¹⁶ Hayes’ claim is meant in a rather strict, social-psychological understanding of Social Identity Theory in a domestic context. If we look at the role of identity theory as outlined by Wendt (1992) and other political scientists, this claim does of course not hold, since identity theory has become an established approach within IR theory since his seminal article was published (see also Hayes 2013, 5). Moreover, questions of identity are of course regularly discussed in the literature on Securitization (for many, cf: Buzan & Wæver 2009, 261, 268). Notwithstanding, I hold that the potential of using some more specific elements and claims of Social Identity Theory that are studied in detail in the discipline of Psychology allows to refine certain elements of the securitization process.

¹⁷ See Balzacq 2005, 183; 2011, 36.

¹⁸ This discussion goes hand in hand with the question of “[s]ize or scale” of referent objects (Buzan et al. 1998, 36).

look at different dimensions of security, however, these issues can be understood as a threat to human individuals regardless of their group identity and thus be defined in the realm of global or human security (Sjostedt 2008, 9). This makes it harder for securitizing actors to succeed in their securitizing attempts as the identity component of the securitizing move ceases to apply. As Sjostedt (2008) shows in her article on “[t]he Securitization of HIV/AIDS in Russia,” securitizing actors initially reverted to (in this case domestic) in- and outgroup identity reaffirmations, singling out homosexuals and drug users versus ‘ordinary’ Russians. This might be explained in light of the aforementioned argument that securitizing moves absent of notions to the domestic identity would not have been strong enough to claim extraordinary means to fight the HIV crisis in the country. Only after such identity-bound speech acts were voiced, the existential threat to the Russian society could be amenable to the audience.¹⁹

Hayes (2012; 2013) argues that domestic social identities enable and constrain securitizations. He elaborates this argument exclusively with the domestic identity of democratic societies to explain the finding of the democratic peace. To construct other democracies as an existential threat becomes nearly impossible, he claims, as the audience would reject the allegation that another democracy would act in such a threatening way towards one’s own country. Of course, domestically derived identities do not solely arise from governance systems but consist of a variety of elements. The crucial point to which I subscribe here is that securitizations are significantly more likely to be successful when they appeal to the identity of the in-group and clearly separate the out-group, thus enforcing the Schmittian cleavage of “us” vs. “them.” Going further than his argumentation of a domestically derived democratic identity, I claim that securitizations above the nation state are equally dependent on identity constructions. Such a turn to the international goes more into the direction of Risse’s argumentation in regard to the Democratic Peace (Risse-Kappen 1995);²⁰ yet by explicitly reverting to social-psychological findings, it can contribute to a more precise explanation of the phenomenon. One such finding is the so-called common in-group identity model. According to the model, conflicts over group identities can be overcome

¹⁹ Whether or not later statements without the domestic-identity split (recognizing that the virus was not only an issue for some minority groups), as were observed by her, would have been enough to initiate an opening up of the Russian audience to HIV as a security issue, is, of course, speculative. I do not claim that such attempts are impossible, only that invoking identity-bound speech acts facilitates the securitization attempt substantially.

²⁰ In my view, Hayes’ approach of explaining the democratic peace is very close to the one laid out by Risse (Risse-Kappen 1995); at the least, it is closer than Hayes is willing to admit (see Hayes 2012, 71).

by constructing an umbrella-like identity under which the initially distinguishable groups are brought together to form a new, superordinate group identity. In securitizations with large-scale referent objects (on a higher order than the nation-state), we should therefore expect to see successful securitizations more often when securitizing actors include references that are apt to construct a common, superordinate identity among the audience that can encompass the populations of several countries.²¹ Another socio-psychological insight that may shed light on the process of securitization is the use of stereotypes in securitizing moves. Stereotypes can serve to widen the cleavage between in- and out-groups; on the other hand, securitizing moves might strengthen or reaffirm intergroup stereotypes. “Stereotypes become more extreme and more resistant to change under conditions of intergroup conflict” (Hogg 2006, 487). Conversely, the social construction of a new, inclusive, superordinate in-group identity (re-categorization) works to reduce stereotypes between the initial groups (Spears & Tausch 2014, 554).

To resume this subchapter, I propose two hypotheses, derived from transferring social psychological knowledge into the field of Securitization:

H4: States where the degree of uncertainty has been rising are more prone to securitizing attempts. This should be the case since, as elaborated above, rising uncertainty within societies stresses the need for reaffirmations of identity, which can be accomplished by securitizing moves that emphasize a divide between “us” and “them.”

H5: The use of identity-bound arguments in securitizing speech acts makes attempts to securitize an issue substantially more likely, especially when the referent subject is a clearly denominated, human out-group. This applies to national as well as international contexts.

On a normative-political level, these last two hypotheses do not bode well for the near and medium-term future in Europe and the United States. The Brexit vote, the developments within U.S. society that enabled Donald Trump’s rise in the Republican

²¹ Often, parallel national securitizations can be observed, with national actors appealing to their respective national audiences. Increasingly, though, especially in a supranational setting like the EU, supranational actors can be seen as appealing to audiences beyond the nation state instead of merely addressing the people of their own nationality. One example in this regard is the securitization of the debt- and financial crisis in the Eurozone, where actors like the president of the EU-commission as well as the president of the European Central Bank took center stage in communicating the alleged existential threat to the societies of the Eurozone (Lucke 2015).

Party and the divide over refugees and immigration all seem to indicate that the level of uncertainty is raising in these societies. Concurring with the hypotheses, this observation and the rise of identity conflicts make it plausible to assume that attempts to securitize issues may be seen even more frequently and that their chances of success are rather high in the current environment.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at incorporating some well-established findings from the discipline of Psychology into the Securitization framework in an explicit way. Concluding this endeavor, the preliminary results indicate that such a liaison could indeed prove fruitful. Crucial elements of the securitization process can be linked to insights in the field of Psychology to the benefit of the Copenhagen School's major concept, particularly pertaining to the question of success or failure of attempted securitizations. By drawing on uncontested psychological knowledge as far as possible, the caveats connected with cross-cultural variation and robustness of psychological findings were circumnavigated. The availability heuristic serves to enlighten why and how certain classes of news events such as terrorism are a relatively easy target for securitizations. The concept of loss aversion and the certainty effect shed light on the observation that securitizing actors tend to promise the total elimination of the alleged threat even though common sense and the experiences of the "War on Terror" suggest that this is very unlikely (at least in the area of counterterrorism). Finally, Social Identity Theory shows how securitization works as a way to reaffirm one's own in-group identity. In each of the three arguments, only the main ideas were demonstrated, but since there are numerous other elements or details associated with Social Identity Theory, availability heuristic and loss aversion, they could also prove beneficial for understanding how securitization works in detail. The same goes for other phenomena in the realm of Psychology. To test the hypotheses presented in this paper, comparative large-scale analyses of securitization attempts should be conducted that include a variety of cases in different settings (varying in sector, time, place, circumstances).

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