

# The Securitization of the Environment and the Transformation of Security

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*Abstract:*

The theory of securitization, elaborated by the Copenhagen School, makes a relevant point in outlining the power of discourse and the political nature of security, nevertheless the paper argues that the potential of discursive approach is limited by the fixity that the Copenhagen School imposes on security practices. For the School these practices, which are associated with the exceptional decision that constitutes enemies and brings into existence the logic of war, are not open to negotiation and this makes it difficult to account for any transformation of security discourse and logic. The paper argues that in the process of securitization not only issues are transformed into threats but also what is understood as security and the practices to provide it are challenged and transformed. Analysing the securitization of the environment and applying Beck's arguments on reflexive modernization to securitization, it is argued that considering securitization as a reflexive, "rule-altering" process, which can be defined as reflexive securitization, can provide relevant insights into the transformation of security practices and discourses.

*Key words:*

Securitization, Copenhagen School, speech act, environmental security, risk society.

## *Introduction*

Contemporary security discourses are characterised by a tension. On the one hand, the war on terror, or the way of dealing with issues as different as illegal immigration or bird flu, suggests that the appeal to security is an appeal to emergency, which represents issues as existential threats and calls for exceptional measures. On the other hand, the language of prevention is gaining relevance and precautionary approaches and risk management are evoked to deal with the same issues. Security is used both to evoke exceptional measures and to eschew them.

The Copenhagen School, a body of research mainly associated with the work of Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, has developed a relevant instrument to conceptualise the first of these developments, namely the theory of securitization. This theory outlines the political nature of “doing” security and challenges the traditional approach to security - concerned with identifying and dealing with supposedly self-evident threats – and introduces a social-constructivist perspective that considers how problems are transformed into security issues. Securitization is the successful process of labelling an issue a security issue and results in the transformation of the way of dealing with it. This transformation has relevant implications; through the label “security” problems are turned into existential threats that require exceptional, emergency measures, which may include breaking otherwise binding rules or governing by decrees rather than by democratic decisions. The way of dealing with them becomes that of a more or less metaphoric war. In this way the Copenhagen School (CopS hereafter) has provided “one of the most innovative, productive and yet controversial avenues of research in contemporary security studies.” (Williams 2003: 511)

Securitization, however, does not permit conceptualising the second aspect of the recent developments in the security field, where the appeal to security shows a growing concern for preventive measures. While securitization makes a relevant point in outlining the power of discourses and the political nature of security, it is argued that the CopS imposes an unnecessary fixity on security as a form of social practice. For the School the label security brings with it a specific mindset and a set of problematic practices associated with the logic of war and emergency. These practices are not open to negotiation or political debate and this makes it difficult to account for any transformation in security practices and provisions.

The question addressed in this paper is whether and how it is possible to adopt a broad understanding of securitization - as the very political act of defining what counts as a threat – without imposing the fixity of security practices securitization is associated with. The paper argues that in the process of securitization not only issues are transformed into threats but also what is understood as security and the practices to provide it are challenged and, in some cases, transformed. Analysing the securitization of environmental issues and applying Beck’s arguments

on reflexive modernization and his distinction between “rule-directed” and “rule-altering” processes (Beck 1994: 34-5) to securitization, it is argued that securitization is not (or is no longer) a “rule-directed” process, it is a reflexive, “rule-altering” one, which can be defined as reflexive securitization<sup>[1]</sup>. In the same way Beck has suggested that the consciousness of environmental problems is forcing modernity to become reflexive, this paper argues that the attempts to securitize the environment are turning securitization into a reflexive process.

The reflexive character of securitization and the limits imposed by fixing security practices are outlined by an analysis of the peculiarities of securitization within the issue area that the CopS identifies as the “environmental sector”. Several reasons justify this choice. First, even if there are different perspectives on the meaning and opportunity of environmental security, the securitization of an array of environmental issues represents one of the first attempts to evoke security not only to ask for urgent and exceptional measures but also to challenge the very set of practices that characterizes security in the international arena. Second, the CopS has devoted several efforts to analyse the peculiarities of environmental sector and this allows an exploration of the challenges posed by transforming environmental problems into security issues. Finally, the environmental case seems to anticipate a broader process of transformation since the emphasis on prevention that is now entering the security debate has been one of the defining characteristics of the environmental security discourse. In this way the conclusions that can be reached analysing the environmental sector are relevant beyond it.

The paper is in three parts. The first introduces the key elements of the theory of securitization. It shows that securitization captures several aspects of the transformative intent that characterizes many appeals to include environmental issues into security analysis, and yet, it points out that the fixity imposed on security practices by the CopS creates an impasse that leads to the problematic suggestion of keeping the label security away from as many issues as possible, including the environment. The necessity of this fixity is challenged, in two steps, by the second part. First, it is shown that, within the environmental sector, securitization presents several peculiarities and does not follow the fixed format suggested by the School. Second, with a digression on speech act theory, it is suggested where the problematic fixity comes from. The final part, drawing on Beck’s analysis of Risk Society, outlines the existence of an alternative security logic, emphasises the reflexive character of securitization as a social practice and concludes that during a process of securitization not only are issues transformed into security issues but also the practices associated with security can be challenged and transformed.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Drawing on Rasmussen’s formulation of “reflexive security” (Rasmussen 2001: 285).

## *1. The Copenhagen School and the Environment*

The debate about environmental security, which dates back to the 1980s, represents one of the first claims to broaden security. At that time few attempts, were made to explore the problems and implications of broadening the security agenda and even fewer included the environment in their analyses. The CopS is an exception, and even if the environment was not its primary concern, the School dealt explicitly with it and its peculiarity. Over the years, it has analysed several environmental issues as they were emerging in the European debate over security, and, following Buzan (1991: 19), the environment was recognized as one of the sectors<sup>2[2]</sup> that needed to be considered in their specificity for analysing contemporary security dynamics.

To understand this interest it is necessary to consider the development of the CopS' research project, which started in 1985 as a study of "Non military Aspects of European Security,"(Jahn, Lemaitre and Wæver 1987: 5) challenging "the view that the core of Security Studies is war and force, and that other issues are relevant only if they relate to that."(Buzan 1997: 13) For the School, however, in-security is not synonymous with "harm" or with whatever can be considered damaging or threatening. (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 2-5, 203-12) Thus, to avoid a problematic overstretching of the concept of security the School chose a double strategy.<sup>3[3]</sup> First, it adopted an empirically driven approach that "concentrate[s] attention on those specific and rather clearly discernible threats and problems that have provoked a political and scientific debate on European security in a specific historical situation,"(Jahn, Lemaitre and Wæver 1987: 12) instead of considering speculative and potential threats. Second, building on the results of these analyses, the School developed a theoretical framework to identify "[w]hat quality is it that makes something a security issue in international relations?"(Buzan 1997: 13)

This strategy had a relevant impact on the interest of the School for the environment. First, the development of the School overlapped with the emergence of environmental issues in the European security debate. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the environment was one of the issues that provoked the most intense debate among other non-military aspects of security. On the one hand, global environmental threats, such as global warming or the hole in the ozone layer appeared on the agenda and the Brundtland Commission launched the phrase "environmental insecurity" in the UN discussions. (WCED 1987: 19) On the other hand, the interest in the environment was largely used in the discourses to promote a new world order; Gorbachev, speaking at the UN general assembly suggested that "[t]he threat from the sky is no longer missiles but global

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<sup>2[2]</sup> The others sectors are: military, political, economic and societal.

<sup>3[3]</sup> See Huysmans, 1998.

warming,”<sup>4[4]</sup> while the Clinton administration used environmental security as a slogan to promote a more active US foreign policy (Harris 2001: 122). The analysis undertaken by the School in *European Polyphony* (Wæver et al., 1989) evidences how “[p]olitical, economic and environmental security are central to recent East European security discussion” (Tromer, 1989: 4), while in another collection of essays: *The European Order Recast*, (Buzan et al. , 1990) published just one year later, Buzan warned that “the environmental sector may well confront humankind with its first truly systemic challenge.”(24)

Second, the relevance of environmental issues has pushed the CopS to accommodate their peculiarities within its framework of analysis. This was not an easy task, despite the appeals to “environmental security”, its meaning is ambiguous and contested.<sup>5[5]</sup> Environmental issues are a broad and heterogeneous category, problems are complex, uncertain, some of them have trans-national or global dimensions, moreover “[t]he established rules of attribution and liability – causality and guilt – break down” (Beck, 1995, 1), perpetrators and victims are often the same. The environment represents a challenge that “expose[s] to critical examination some very basic ‘settled’ assumptions of the ‘mainstream’ traditions of the social sciences” and more specifically of security studies, which has largely ignored the environment in its analysis. For the School the environment is one of the sectors that needs to be considered to analyse contemporary security dynamics and, the theory of securitization, which identifies what makes an issues a security issue, has to be applicable to environmental problems as well as to military ones.

At this point, in order to continue the discussion, it is necessary to introduce the key elements of securitization theory: security as a speech act, its inter-subjective nature, and the “specific rhetorical structure”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 26). They are analysed in turn to show that an approach that considers the discursive formation of security issues is highly sensitive to transformations but the Copenhagen School limits this potential by imposing a problematic set of assumptions on what counts as security.

Wæver, drawing on language theory, considers ‘security’ as a speech act. “In this usage, security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance *itself* is the act. By saying it, something is done (as in betting, giving a promise, naming a ship).”(Wæver 1995: 55) Wæver’s understanding of speech act is based on the philosophy of language of Austin who used the term “speech act” to point out that when something is said, something is done in or by saying it.(Austin 1962) Austin distinguishes between constative utterance such as “it is raining,” and performative utterance such as betting, naming, or marrying. A constative can be true or false. A

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<sup>4[4]</sup> Quoted in Myers, 1996: 11.

<sup>5[5]</sup> See Litfin, 1999

performative can be successful (or using Austin's adjective, felicitous) or not, according with its capability of transforming a situation, which is independent from truth or falsity. A successful performative brings into existence the very state of affairs it names.

Wæver is interested in Austin's theory because it captures the power of language in transforming situations and provides a perspective in which the problematic distinctions between "true" and "false" or objective and subjective threats becomes irrelevant. By saying: "I promise" one is not describing the act of making a promise, is actually making it. Analogously, to say: "global warming is a security issue" is not considered as a constative (that can be true or false - the point, in this perspective, is not to decide whether global warming is a real threat or not), but a performative (that can be felicitous/successful or not). What matters for the School is whether saying that global warming is a threat transforms the way of managing it. The CopS is not interested in the truth of a statement but in the "truth effect" of it. Considering security as a speech act opens a new perspective in analysing the development of the environmental security discourse. Many environmental threats and their consequences are largely prefigured and uncertain, and their transformation into security issues is largely based on the truth effect of relevant claims. Moreover they effects different systems in different ways and transforming them into security issues reflects political strategies, both in prioritising issues and selecting them.

Considering the security utterance only, however, could suggest that everything can become a security issue, it would be sufficient to name it as such. To avoid this problematic stretching, the CopS qualifies its claims in two ways: First, securitization is a collective phenomenon, "a specific form of social praxis"(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 204)<sup>6[6]</sup> and second, it should have a specific rhetoric structure and follow specific rules.

Securitization, for the CopS, is a collective phenomenon in two respects. First, it is an inter-subjective practice. One actor can try to say that something vital is at risk and can point at a threat, but the success of the speech act, is not decided by the speaker alone,<sup>7[7]</sup> but by the audience as well. "[S]ecurity...ultimately rests neither with the objects nor with the subjects but *among* the subjects."(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 31). Securitization is not a prerogative of an actor and something becomes a security issue because it is legitimately included in the security considerations of a political community. Thus the securitization of the environment reflects a growing relevance of the issue and a shared aspiration to do something about it. Second, security involves collectivities not individuals. For the School the point is relevant because, in this way, it claims to be able to

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<sup>6[6]</sup> This distinguishes between a "securitization move" that every actor can perform and a successful speech act that results in the securitization of the issue. (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 25)

<sup>7[7]</sup> This part of the process for the CopS is a "securitizing move."

“historicize security, to study transformation in the units of security affairs,” an opportunity that is precluded both to traditionalists, who focus only on the state, and Critical Security Studies that focuses on the individual (206-7). Securitization can capture and be considered as part of a broader process of transformation of political communities. Dalby has pointed out environmental security discourses concern “the identities that contemporary political arrangements are securing” {Dalby, 2002:162} and several attempts to link security and the environment embodies cosmopolitan intents. As Beck suggests “threats create society and global threats create global society.”(Beck 2000b: 38) The implications of this point are noticed by Wæver who asks: “[A]re security’s referent objects always limited collectivities, or can they also be inclusive and universalist?”(Wæver 1997: 357), he then goes on asking whether something can be securitized in the name of humanity or, more specifically, if “communities of danger”<sup>8[8]</sup> as large as humankind can become “security units”, which are legitimised by reference to their own survival. (Wæver 1997: 355) Wæver’s answer, however, tends to be negative, and the reasons have not to do with historical or sociological analyses that could outline the enduring relevance of the state as a security actor but with other assumptions of the theory. These aspects are those related to an antagonistic logic of security and are the same as those that determine the problematic fixity of security practices, which precludes the possibility of historicizing security and analysing the transformation of security units.

To clarify the point it is necessary to explore the last characteristic of securitization: security is a specific kind of speech act; it has a specific rhetoric structure and brings into existence a specific set of practices. The appeal to security casts an issue as an “existential threat.”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 21-2) Security is about “the staging of existential issues in politics to lift them above politics. In security discourse, an issue is dramatized and presented as an issue of supreme priority; Thus, by labelling it as *security*, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means.”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 26, emphasis in the original) For the CopS this appeal to survival carries with it a set of connotations that invokes the logic of “threat-defence,” the identification of an enemy and eventually the logic of war. (Wæver 1995: 54)<sup>9[9]</sup> This aspect is rooted in the classical realist tradition.<sup>10[10]</sup> The mechanism that identifies the “securityness of security”, the “quality ... that makes something a security issue in international relations”(Buzan 1997: 13) recalls the understanding of the political provided by Schmitt for whom “the political is

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<sup>8[8]</sup> This expression is borrowed from Beck (1992: 47).

<sup>9[9]</sup> “[I]n the extreme case – war – we do not have to discuss with the other party; we try to eliminate them. This self-based violation of rules is the security act, and the fear that the other party will not let us survive as a subject is the *foundational* motivation for that act” (Buzan *et al.*, 1998: 26, emphasis added).

<sup>10[10]</sup> For a thoughtful analysis of the classical realist roots of securitization see Huysmans 1998b and Williams 2003

the most intense and extreme antagonism,...that of the friend-enemy grouping.” (Schmitt, 1996: 29) Securitization is identified with the exceptional decision that constitutes enemies and brings into existence the logic of war. The School does not share this vision of the political but suggests that this logic characterizes the security mindset. The liberal project, for the School, has narrowed down this logic and the practices associated with it, limiting them to the military sector and the national security discourse, where the use of force and the logic of war are legitimated.(Buzan and Waever 1998) Thus, the problem with the broadening of the security agenda is that this mindset is spread to issues from which it had been banned. In this way the problems with securitization, when the environment is involved, start to appear.

On the one hand, an approach that considers the discursive formation of security issues provides a new perspective to analyse the environmental security discourse and its transformative potential. First, it allows for an investigation of the political process behind the selection of threats, exploring why some of them are considered more relevant and urgent than others. The focus shifts from the threats to the collectivities, identities and interests that deserve to be protected and the means to be employed. Second, securitization suggests that the awareness of environmental issues can have a relevant role in defining and transforming political communities, their interests and identities, since the process creates new ideas about who deserve to be protected and by whom. Finally, as Behnke points out, securitization can open the space for a “genuinely political” constitutive and formative struggle through which political structures are contested and re-established.(Behnke 2000: 91) Securitization allows for the breaking and transforming of rules that are no longer acceptable, including the practices associated with an antagonistic logic of security.

On the other hand, securitization is problematic because of the set of practices it is supposed to bring about. For the CopS security “carries with it a history and a set of connotations that it cannot escape.”(Wæver 1995: 47) While securitizing an issue is a political choice, the practices it brings about are not. Accordingly, transforming an issue into a security issue is not always an improvement. In the case of the environment, the warning seems clear: “When considering securitizing moves such as ‘environmental security’...one has to weigh the always problematic side effects of applying a mind-set of security against the possible advantages of focus, attention, and mobilization.”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 29) The School shares the normative suggestion that “[a] society whose security is premised upon a logic of war should be re-shaped, re-ordered, simply changed.”(Aradau 2001: introduction) For the CopS this does not mean to transform the practices and logic of security, because, as it will be shown below, for the School, this is impossible. The CopS suggests avoiding the transformation of issues into security issues. It is necessary “to turn threats into challenges; to move developments from the sphere of existential fear to one where they

could be handled by ordinary means, as politics, economy, culture, and so on.”(Wæver 1995: 55, quoting Jahn). This transformation, for the CopS, is “desecuritization”, and the School has introduced a distinction between politicization - «meaning the issue is part of public policy, requiring government decision and resources allocation<sup>s</sup>”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 23) - and securitization - «meaning the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure.”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 23) The slogan is: “less security, more politics!”(Wæver 1995: 56)

Nevertheless, there are two major problems behind this suggestion. First, if securitization is normatively problematic, desecuritization can be even more problematic. It can lead to a depoliticization and marginalisation of urgent and serious issues, while leaving unchallenged the practices associated with security. In the case of the environment, many appeals to security are aimed at both soliciting action and transforming what counts as security and the way of providing it.

Second, within the School’s framework, desecuritization cannot be possible. Securitization in fact can be inescapable, the unwanted result of discussing whether or not the environment is a security issue. As Huysmans has noticed, the performative, constitutive approach suggested by the speech act theory implies that even talking and researching about security can contribute to the securitization of an issue, even if that (and the practices associated with it) is not the desired result. “The normative dilemma thus consists of how to write or speak about security when the security knowledge risks the production of what one tries to avoid, what one criticizes: that is, the securitization of migration, drugs and so forth.”(Huysmans 2002: 43) When the understanding of security is the problematic one described by the CopS, research itself can become a danger. This captures a paradox that characterizes the debate about environmental security. As Jon Barnett has showed in *The Meaning of Environmental Security* (2001) the securitization of the environment can have perverse effects and several attempts to transform environmental problems into security issues have resulted in a spreading of the national security paradigm and the enemy logic, even if the intentions behind them were different. Barnett has argued that “environmental security is not about the environment, it is about security; as a concept, it is at its most meaningless and malign”(2001: 83) in this way, he seems to accept the ineluctability of the security mindset or logic evoked by securitization. However, his suggestion of promoting a “human centered” understanding of security, in which environmental security is not about (national) security but about people and their needs, within the securitization logic, cannot escape the trap he has described. Why, in fact, should the sort of his claim be different from that of similar ones?

## *2. The fixity of Security practices*

These dilemmas, however, are based on the idea that security practices are inescapable and unchangeable and the theory of securitization, as elaborated by the CopS, has contributed to suggest so. The CopS has achieved the result of making a specific, negative understanding of security – which has characterised the dominant Realist discourse within IR - appear as “natural” and unchangeable since all the attempts to transform it appear to reinforce its logic. To challenge this perverse mechanism it is necessary to unpack securitization further. First, it will be shown that securitization is not analytically accurate, the environment representing a relevant case. Second, the assumptions behind this problematic fixity will be explored.

The CopS explores the specificity of the environmental sector in *Security: A Framework for Analysis* (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998) (*Security* hereafter), the theoretical book where the CopS illustrates the theory of securitization and analyses the dynamics of securitization within five relevant sectors. For each sector the School identifies the actors or objects (referent objects) that are threatened, specifies the relevant threats and the agents that promote or facilitate securitization.<sup>11[11]</sup> The environmental sector is rather different from the others and the transformative intent that is associated with the appeal to environmental security is more evident.<sup>12[12]</sup> Amongst the peculiarities of the environmental sector described by the School, three deserve a specific analysis for their implications: First, the presence of two agendas - a scientific and a political one; second, the multiplicity of actors; third, the politicization/securitization relationship. They will be analysed in turn

“One of the most striking features of the environmental sector,” it is argued in *Security*, “is the existence of two different agendas: a scientific agenda and a political agenda.”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 71) The scientific one refers mainly to natural science and non-governmental activities. The “scientific agenda is about the authoritative assessment of threat,”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 72) and Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde admit that “the extent to which scientific argument structures environmental security debates strikes us as exceptional.”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 72) Quoting Rosenau, they suggest that “the demand for scientific proof is a broader emerging characteristic in the international system.”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 72) This

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<sup>11[11]</sup> So for instance in the military sector the referent object is usually the state and the threats are mainly military ones, while in the societal sector the referent objects are collective identities “that can function independent of the state, such as nations and religions.”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 22-3)

<sup>12[12]</sup> This is the case even if the School adopts a conservative strategy that appears from the choice of the referent object (or what is threatened). In the first works of the School, the referent object within the environmental sector was the biosphere: “Environmental security concerns the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend.” (Buzan 1991: 19) In *Security* the School narrows down this perspective and identifies the level of civilization (with all the contradictions that contribute to environmental problems) as the main referent object. This move favours a conservative perspective which considers the securitization of the environment as a way to preserve the status quo and the security strategies on which it is based. Despite this, the description of the environmental sector captures the specificity of the sector and reveals the tensions within the overall framework.

questions the “self referentiality” of the speech act security. Are some threats more “real” than others thanks to scientific proof? Can considerations developed to characterize reflective behaviours be applied to natural systems? Even if dealing with these issues is beyond the scope of this article, it is necessary to note that the appeal to an external discourse has serious implications. First, it questions the possibility and opportunity of desecuritization. Is it possible and what does it mean to “desecuritize” an issue which is on the scientific agenda? If scientific research outlines the dangerousness of an environmental problem, how is it possible to provide security? Second, it suggests that security and the practices associated with it can vary from one sector to another and thus from one context to another.

The second peculiarity of the environmental sector is the presence of many actors. This contrasts with Wæver’s suggestion that “security is articulated only from a specific place, in an institutional voice, by elites.”(Wæver 1995: 57) The multiplicity of actors is largely justified by the School with the relative novelty of the securitization of the environment. “The discourses, power struggles, and securitizing moves in the other sectors are reflected by and have sedimented over time in concrete types of organizations - notably states...nations (identity configurations), and the UN system,”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 71) however, this is not the case with the environment: “It is as yet undetermined what kinds of political structures environmental concerns will generate.”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 71). In this way a tension appears since the attempts to securitize the environment are described as having a transforming potential, requiring and calling for new institutions. Within the environmental sector securitization moves seem to have a transformative intent that contrasts with the conservative one, that characterizes other sectors.

The third peculiarity is that many securitizing moves result in politicization. This is problematic for the School, which argues that “transcending a security problem by politicising it cannot happen *through* thematization in security terms, only *away* from such terms.”(Wæver 1995: 56) For the School, once the enemy logic has been inscribed in a context, it is very difficult to return to an open debate. Nevertheless the various politicizations of environmental issues that followed the appeal to security – those the CopS dismissed as failed securitizations - seem to reinforce the argument, suggested by Edkins, that there is a tendency to politicize issues through their securitization. (Edkins 1999: 11) This represents another signal that securitization, within the environmental sector, can take a different form, and that the problematic aspects of evoking security are not so evident.

Securitization theory, for the CopS, is meant to be descriptive, however the environmental sector suggests that some of its aspects prevent it from providing an adequate instrument for analysis. To understand why this occurs, it is necessary to explore in more detail the

conceptualization of security by Wæver, who has introduced securitization within the School and is the strongest opponent of any attempt to securitize the environment. Wæver's formulation of securitization is influenced by what is called a generic interpretation of language. (Huysmans 2002: 45) This approach suggests that the meaning of a word is captured not by looking at its definition but by analysing its common use and the practices that it produces.<sup>13[13]</sup> In Wæver's words, "from a study of the discursive practices using the concept of security it is argued, that there is a particular *logic of security*." Accordingly, he suggests "distilling this definite *usage* of the concept of security from security practice." (Wæver 1997: 361) This approach could be very receptive to the transformations in the use of words and emphasises the transformative potential of discourses. However, this does not seem to be the case with securitization. The following analysis will show how a static and de-contextualised understanding of speech acts contributes to justifying this assumption.

Wæver's understanding of speech acts is based, as noted earlier, on the philosophy of language of Austin. However, Wæver's reading of Austin is influenced by Derrida's interpretation<sup>14[14]</sup>. To clarify the point it is necessary to note that Austin's work has suggested two interpretations. The first one, largely based on Searle's work, argues that performative communication is the communication of an intentional meaning: "understanding the utterance consists in recognizing the illocutionary intentions of the author" (Searle 1977: 202) and "these intentions may be more or less perfectly realised by the words uttered" (Searle 1977: 202). The second tradition is that of continental philosophy whose position is clearly expressed by Derrida, who cannot accept Searle's assumptions on communication and intentionality. Derrida in "Signature Event Context," (1982) an essay on Austin's speech act theory, recognizes in Austin the great merit of challenging the traditional theory of communication, opening it up "to what is other than the transmission of thought-content." (Payne 1995: 9) and accordingly outlining the capability of words of establishing meanings that are not yet in the context, transforming the latter beyond the intention of the speaker. The problem, for Derrida, is that Austin fails to live up to his initial promise, since he still demands "the conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject" as well as "an exhaustive determinable context." (Derrida 1982: 322) As a result, "performative communication remains the communication of an intentional meaning, even if this meaning has no referent in the form of a prior or exterior thing or state of things." (Payne, 1995: 9) For Derrida, on the contrary, a performative can be successful independently from the intention and presence of the speaker. It just needs to conform to a repeatable model. To Austin's contextualised understanding of

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<sup>13[13]</sup> "In this approach, the meaning of a concept lies in its usage and is not something we can define analytically or philosophically according to what would be 'best'" (Buzan *et al.*, 1998: 24).

<sup>14[14]</sup> See Ceyhan, 1998.

performative, Derrida “opposes ... the irreducible absence of intention which is inescapable in all language.”(Payne, 1995: 9)

For Wæver “A speech act is interesting exactly because it holds the insurrecting potential to break the ordinary, to establish meaning that is not already in the context” (Wæver, 2000: 286, fn7). Wæver, following Derrida, believes that the intention of the speaker and the contextual analysis are irrelevant ( see Ceyhan 1998: 7) since security is a self-referential practice. In other words, the meaning of security held by the speakers (national security or common security) and their intentions (militarising the environment or promoting emancipation) drop out of the picture, the only relevant aspect being the practices (exceptional measures, breaking of the rules, agonistic perspectives) associated with the realist logic of security and brought into presence by a felicitous performative: securitization.

As a result of de-contextualizing the analysis and ignoring the intentions of the speaker, the meaning of security needs to be fixed and iterable, independently from the context, because it cannot change and be specified according to the context in which it is to be used. In this way, a set of specific practices becomes the yardstick to identify what security is within different sectors and for different actors.

On the one hand, Wæver, following Derrida, has the great merit of recognising that the speakers, or writers cannot control the meaning of their utterance. The origin of every speech act can only be more or less anonymous societies, and their results are, to some extent, unpredictable.<sup>15[15]</sup> Securitization is not only about the strategic use of the word security and the success of securitization moves are uncertain and unpredictable. On the other hand, Wæver, seems to limit the unpredictability of securitization to its success, since he seems to assume that to make communication possible, if context and intention are irrelevant, meaning should be fixed and iterable. However, even if signification is possible only through iteration, iterability “supposes a minimal remainder...in order that the identity of the selfsame be repeatable and identifiable *in, through* and even *in view* of its alteration.” (Derrida, quoted in Zehfuss 2002: 200)

Wæver is aware that the logic of security he has described refers to a specific disciplinary discourse and tradition and he has shown that securitization depicts the national security paradigm that emerged after the Second World War (Wæver 2002), capturing a concept that “radically transformed ‘security’ by marrying it to the homeless concept with no name: *Raison d’état*.”(Wæver 2002: 44). Nevertheless, Wæver has provided a mechanism that essentializes a set of security practices, perpetuating the logic of national security and the understanding of the political that lays

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<sup>15[15]</sup> In this way Wæver can explain, for instance, the paradoxical effects that turn the attempts to transform and green security into militarization of the environment.

behind it.<sup>16[16]</sup> It is not the analysis of different practices within different sectors that allows an understanding of the logic of security and its transformation; the logic of security, in Wæver's reading, becomes fixed and independent from the context. In this way the practices of security are no longer open to negotiation and transformation, while the realm of political argument is limited to the opportunity of bringing about security practices.

A de-contextualised, self-referential approach to security underestimates two aspects: first, different contexts can have different logics and practices of security, and they can influence and challenge each other; since the process is not one way only or from the military to the other sectors, as Huysmans has noticed, Wæver "does not raise the question of how the security formation is entrenched in a symbolic, cultural order or how this formation can change by securitizing sectors other than the military" (Huysmans 2002: 58); A lot of work has been done on the implications of applying the (realist) logic of security to environmental issues while little has been done on how the environmental logic (and which one) influences security practice. This transformation is likely to occur through securitization moves, that is through appeals to security in different contexts and for different needs rather than away from them.

Second, the logic of security itself can change, as new principles, actors, capabilities and threats gain relevance and different security discourses emerge. A logic of security based on creating enemies and evoking emergencies can be problematic in dealing with issues in which perpetrators and victims are often the same, in which prevention is relevant and effective actions need intervention at both local and global level.

Environmental security is about transformation and this is the reason why the environmental sector is so problematic. To provide an account of the discursive formation of security issues and of the process of transformation that securitization implies it is necessary to move away from the emphasis of self referentiality of the speech act security to move into the realm of communicative action<sup>17[17]</sup> and social change.

### *3 Beck's Risk Society and the Securitization of the Environmental Sector*

Beck provides the elements to conceptualise the transformation of the logic of security in two ways. First, he suggests how the consciousness of environmental issues questions existing

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<sup>16[16]</sup> The fixity of security has been challenged by Balzacq (2005), who has suggested to consider securitization as a pragmatic act, which is concerned with the communication of intentional meaning and it is attentive to the characteristics of the audience and of the speakers, rather than a speech act that focuses on the self-referential character of security. Balzacq has noticed a tension between the "self referential" aspect of security and the attempt to consider securitization an inter-subjective practice.

<sup>17[17]</sup> Williams has argued that "securitization is located with the realm of political argument and discursive legitimation, and security practices are thus susceptible to criticism and transformation" (2003, 512)

security practices and logic. For him the awareness of unbounded, non compensable risk pushes modernity to become reflexive and the appeal to security becomes an appeal to transform existing security practices and provisions. Second, Beck describes an alternative logic of security, which eschews the friend/enemy opposition and is concerned with ensuring that risks are prevented from transforming into actual threats to a community.

Beck's sociological perspective sees a world whose order is made coherent by concepts that are fluid and yet embedded in social practices. While social practices, to some extent, can be taken for granted since they are based on the "non-reflective character of the reflexive monitoring of habit and routine"(McSweeney 1999: 213)<sup>18[18]</sup> they are also open to transformation. This accounts for the persistence of a security logic like the realist one described by the CopS, but suggests that it can be challenged and questioned. In this way Beck's work provides a framework to consider how the practice of securitization is evolving and transforming itself to become more relevant both analytically and normatively.

Beck has been recently discovered by security studies<sup>19[19]</sup> for two interrelated reasons. First, there is a growing interest for the concept of risk and risk management which seem to provide an appropriate instrument to deal with a security environment characterised by growing uncertainty and complexity<sup>20[20]</sup> (see Rasmussen, 200 Cooper) . Second Beck provides one of the most accessible analyses to explores how a process of social change can effect the practices of security.

Both these aspects are related with Beck's focus on risk. The word risk implies the possibility of choice and refers to a specific attitude of modern societies to experience the future and try to control it. As Beck suggests: "'Risk' inherently contains the concept of control. Pre-modern dangers were attributed to nature, gods and demons. Risk is a modern concept. It presumes decision-making. As soon as we speak in terms of 'risk', we are talking about calculating the incalculable, colonizing the future"(Beck 2002: 40). This attitude results in specific institutions to provide security: the welfare state and the insurance mechanism. In Beck's words: "calculating risks is part of the master narrative of first modernity. In Europe, this victorious march culminates in the development and organization of the welfare state, which bases its legitimacy on its capacity to protect its citizens against dangers of all sorts."(Beck 2002: 41) This protection relies on an insurance mechanism that allows the distribution of the risk among a broader collectivity and the creation of mechanisms of compensation. Security, in this way, is socialised.<sup>21[21]</sup> In this way Beck

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<sup>18[18]</sup> For the concept of habit, see Bourdieu 1990: ch.3

<sup>19[19]</sup> The most comprehensive attempt to use his work has been done by Rasmussen (2001).

<sup>20[20]</sup> See [Rasmussen, 2001 and Cooker](#)

<sup>21[21]</sup> This implies a long term transformation that follows the development of the modern state. "Individual security, in the liberal thought of the Enlightenment, is ...both an individual and a collective good. It is a condition and an objective of

has outlined the key elements of an alternative logic of security that complements and coexists with other dynamics, like those depicted by the CopS as securitization. More specifically, as Waever has noticed (2002), in the international domain the prevalent logic was that of threats, *raison d'état* and exceptional measures, while within the state, the logic of risk was the dominant one and security was provided through more and more sophisticated techniques of governmentality and classification of the population, supposedly negotiated in the parliamentary sites.

The relevance of Beck's work to explore the transformation of security logic is based on a further argument. Beck suggests that we are entering, or have already entered, a new phase of modernity - "late modernity"- in which "risk society" is substituting the industrial one. Risk society struggles to minimize and eschew risks. In an industrial society the main objective was the production of wealth, this process implied the creation of risks but they were considered an acceptable price, which could have been limited by insurance and compensation mechanisms. In a risk society the relationship is reversed and the main concern is not how to maximise wealth but rather how to minimise risks. The reason is that risk society is characterised by a greater number of risks (like those produced by a more complex and dangerous technology) with new characteristics. Contemporary risks are unbounded. They may affect parts of the globe distant from the place they originated, or they may take generations before the side effects become visible at all, and they may be irreversible. Nuclear, chemical and genetic technologies have the potential to bring destruction on such a large scale that risk calculi are undermined. In this way "[t]he construction of security and control that dominated (social) thought and (political) action in the first stage of modernity is becoming fictitious in the global risk society. The more we attempt to 'colonize' the future with the aid of the category of risk, the more it slips out of our control."(Beck 2000a: 216). For Beck the proliferation of unbounded risk and the consciousness of living in a risk society have made modernity become reflexive. Reflexivity refers to an automatic mechanism that makes self-contradiction evident to society and pushes it to transform itself but implies also, according to Beck, elements of reflection or thinking about these contradictions and suggests a conscious transformation.<sup>22[22]</sup> The proliferation of risks and their consciousness push modernity to face its own contradictions and fully develop the potential of the enlightenment project.

Risk society challenges the logic of security described by the Cops on two aspects: first, the possibility to rely on reactive, emergency measures and second, the conceptualization of insecurity

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individuals. But it is one that can only be achieved in some sort of collective enterprise... It is something that individuals get for themselves, in a collective or contractual enterprise."(Rothschild 1995: 63)

<sup>22[22]</sup> As Beck explains: "while simple modernization ultimately situates the motor of social change in categories of instrumental rationality (reflection), 'reflexive' modernization conceptualizes the motive power of social change in categories of the side-effect (reflexivity). {Beck, 1994 #56} 38

around “the idea of dangers external to oneself”(Wæver 2002: 20). As Agamben has pointed out, having a security logic that focuses on emergencies is a way to accept them and opens up the space to govern through them. Drawing on Foucault, he traces back this move to the Physiocrats and their *laissez faire* approach, which trusted in the self-regulating mechanism of the market. He explains that they were not “primarily concerned with the prevention of famine or the regulation of production, but rather wanted to allow for their development in order to guide and ‘secure’ their consequences.”(Agamben 2002) Agamben then concludes that “[m]aybe the time has come to work toward the prevention of disorder and catastrophe, and not merely towards their control. Today there are plans for all kinds of emergencies (ecological, medical, military), but there is no politics to prevent them.”(Agamben 2002). Within a risk society the very possibility of having security practices based on evoking emergencies is questioned. By suggesting that contemporary threats are beyond insurability, Beck warns against security mechanisms that let emergencies happen. “The security dream of first modernity was based on the scientific utopia of making the unsafe consequences and dangers of decisions ever more controllable; accidents could occur, as long as and because they were considered as compensable”(Beck 2006: 334). In a risk society “the logic of compensation breaks down and is replaced by the principle of *precaution through prevention*”(Beck 2006: 334) This logic is inspired by the precautionary principle that has become a relevant norm within environmental politics.<sup>23[23]</sup>

The second aspect concerns the possibility of escaping threats and is related with the opportunity of evoking enemies. Security, in the international arena, has been structured by “the idea of dangers external to oneself”<sup>24[24]</sup>; risk society instead appears as permeated by risks, among which people can choose but cannot extricate themselves from. Risk “eliminates all the protective zones and social differentiations within and between nation-states.”<sup>25[25]</sup> Thus risk society questions the opportunity of approaching security in terms of enemies rather than in terms of shared threats. For the CopS, security is about the inscription of enemies and the logic of war. For Beck instead “[t]he concept of ‘enemy’ is the strongest possible antithesis to the concept of security,”(Beck 1997: 82) In his words: “Enemy stereotypes empower,” as they create “the relationships and the

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<sup>23[23]</sup> The principle, which emphasises the relevance of “foresight” in dealing with issues that could cause serious or irreversible damage and warns against taking the absence of evidence of harm as evidence of its absence, has been included in several international agreements and declaration, including the World Charter for Nature and the Rio declaration, and has become a corner stone of EU environmental politics.

The Rio Declaration provides one of the most cited formulation “Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as reason for postponing cost effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.”

<sup>24[24]</sup> Wæver, 2002: 32.

<sup>25[25]</sup> Beck, 1999: 62, emphasis in the original.

behavioural logic of attack and defence, pro and contra, which first kill the question and then the people.” (Beck 1997: 82)

How can a security logic based on precaution and interdependence coexist with securitization? Some commentators, have considered an approach based on risk management as an alternative to securitization,<sup>26[26]</sup> and suggested that they tend to dominate in domestic politics and international relations respectively (Wæver, 2002). Against these interpretations, one has to consider that the process of questioning security practices is brought about by an appeal to security. In front of environmental threats, the appeal to security ends up in questioning the practices of security based first on the evocation of emergencies and second on the inscription of enemies.

The description of the dynamics of the environmental sector provided by the CopS captures these peculiarities in two ways. First, it outlines the importance of new actors, largely from what Beck would define the sub-political realm.<sup>27[27]</sup> The environmental sector is characterised by a multiplicity of actors with different perspectives and different understandings of security. These actors are “not yet organised in concrete types of organizations” (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 71) and sedimented political structure. Environmental concerns promotes both the creation of new institutions and the legitimation of new security actors, which are not necessary limited collectivities. Second, at global level few attempts to securitize environmental issues are successful but result in simple politicization “The environmental sector displays more clearly than any other the propensity for dramatic securitizing moves but with little successful securitization effects (i.e. those that lead to extraordinary measures.” (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 74) This suggests that through the appeal to security, another set of practices, which characterises a different security formation, can be brought into existence. As the CopS notes that within the environmental sector “ ‘emergency measures’ are still designed and developed in the realm of ordinary policy debates”(Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: 83). As the appeal to security affects more and more functional areas, its association with the state of exception and the logic of war is progressively challenged and its necessity questioned.

Considering securitization (understood as the appeal to security and the discursive formation of security issues), within different contexts and by different actors, outlines the existence of a reflexive process that, through the appeal to security, questions the practices of securitization and the understanding of security that lies behind it. This certainly suggests a more complex reality than the one suggested by the CopS. For the School, security analysis fixes the rhetorical structure of securitization and opens it up to different threats. In a risk society, both the construction of threats and

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<sup>26[26]</sup> Huysmans, 1996; Aradau 2001

<sup>27[27]</sup> Sub-politics can be considered as a form of politics “outside and beyond the political system of the nation-state.”(Beck 1996: 18) The self-confrontation of modernity, the recognition of the ineluctability of side-effects opens up the space for the re-politicization of areas that become contingent and as such subject to political struggle.

the construction of the rules by which security is carried out are open to a process of social construction and transformation. The attempts to apply traditional, national security understanding to more sectors of social life have the effect of progressively exposing its incongruence.

### *Conclusion*

This essay has outlined how the theory of securitization as elaborated by the CopS is not well equipped to account for the emergence of security practices based on prevention and risk management even if they can be brought about by the very appeal to security. Securitization theory has the great merit of conceptualising the power of discourses, and, more specifically, of the word security, in transforming a situation, but the CopS identifies what characterises security, or the “securityness” of security, with the constitution of an enemy and the confrontational logic of war. In this way the School has imposed a problematic fixity that tends to essentialize an historical and sector specific understanding of security and the practices legitimised by it. Moreover, in its questioning the opportunity of inscribing enemies in a context, the CopS suggests the desecuritization of as many issues as possible, leaving unchallenged problematic sets of practices associated with national security and opening up the space for governing through them, all the times the word security is successfully evoked. In this way, any attempt to link the environment and security with the aims of transforming security practices drops out of the picture. There is no difference between uttering environmental security to justify a new role for the army or evoking it to introduce precautionary measures. For Wæver the intentions of the speakers are irrelevant and the consequences of a successful securitization are always dangerous.

The framework provided by the CopS legitimises environmental issues within the paradigm of Security Studies but at the same time it limits the potential that these kinds of issues have to question and transform the paradigm itself. The Copenhagen School has created a dangerous solution that allows the inclusion of new threats and security claims within powerful, sedimented structures, making these structures appear as unchangeable. Securitization becomes a way not only to de-politicise an issue, bringing it above politics and ordinary procedures, but also a way to depoliticise or to maintain the depoliticization of security. A static, reductive understanding of security is imposed.

Considering securitization as a reflexive practice - through which not only issues are transformed into security issues but also the practices to deal with them are challenged and transformed - can provide an account of the recent interest in precautionary approaches. This perspective suggests that there is no such a thing as the “securityness of security” but there are different security logics, which characterise different contexts and influence each other. Moreover, it provides a way to question, contextualize and set limits to the logic of security that has dominated

International Relations. Yet it leaves open the possibility of dealing with what could be defined as “enemicization” but avoids subsuming all the appeals to security to its logic.

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