DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS, ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Provisional Title: Outcomes In Desecuritization: Between Political Normality and Normativity

Total word count: 1,470

i. Introduction

My proposed doctoral research addresses the question of outcomes in the Copenhagen School's process of *desecuritization* (Buzan *et al:* 1998; Wæver: 1995). More specifically, I propose a critique of the ways in which the term has figured within dominant theoretical approaches to security in Europe. In reviewing the extant literature on the topic, it transpires that the further development of desecuritization, both at the level of explanatory and normative theory, is hindered by the following challenges: that is, *(i)* the apparent lack of theoretical constancy across substantive accounts of desecuritization; *(ii)* the need for explicit elaborations of outcomes in desecuritization; and *(iii)* the relative absence of critical engagement with some of the term's central assumptions.

I attend to these difficulties through advancing a distinction between *thick* and *thin* desecuritization. I then test my revision at an empirical level, through a case study of a post-conflict transitional setting. This portion of the project examines the process of societal dialogue surrounding a desecuritized policy debate in a politically fragile context, within a broader process of institutionalized democratization. Through my analysis, I hope to elaborate on the role of discourse ethics in security. Ultimately, my aim is to contribute to the debate on the interrelation of security and democracy, while addressing the continuing discussion on forms of enquiry within normative securitization studies. In developing these aspects, I hope to contribute to the project of how ethical governance in security practice may be thought.

ii. Anticipated Impact

I anticipate two main theoretical contributions. From the standpoint of explanatory theory, the elaboration of a distinction between two categories of meaning in desecuritization adds another layer to the Copenhagen School's theory, in so doing, expanding its definitional scope and possibility for empirical application. From the standpoint of normative theory, the notion of thick desecuritization 'stretches' securitization theory by bringing attention to an opening that permits for theoretical intervention on the part of the security analyst. Further, a better understanding of what is meant by 'desecuritization' allows for the theorization of more robust arguments in favour of such a stance, thus advancing the research agenda in normative securitization studies.

iii. Preliminary Work Schedule, Research Structure, and Methods

I locate my research at the interstice of a series of disciplinary perspectives; including securitization studies, critical security studies, critical policy studies, democratic theory, and peace and conflict research. Over the course of 2012–2015, I anticipate the project unfolding in three main phases:

• **Year one**:

-Refinement of research proposal, methodology and overall strategy;
- Development of the theoretical basis for the extension of the conceptual framework for desecuritization;
- Literature analysis;
-Drafting of first chapter on thick and thin desecuritization.

• **Year two**:

-Arrangement of a visiting studentship at the Centre for Advanced Security Theory in Copenhagen, or at the Department of Politics and International Studies at the Open University;
-Piloting of tools advanced in phase I of the project, refinement of research techniques;
-Main phase for the development of proposed case study (*specific case to be determined*);

-Performance of document analysis, discourse analysis, and process tracing;

-Drafting of the case study portion of the project.

• **Year three**:

-Data analysis and theoretical contextualization;

-Development of theoretical discussion around case study findings;

-Full thesis write-up.

What follows is an outline of the themes I hope to pursue through my research.

iv. The Theoretical Significance of Desecuritization

The effects of the broader 'ethical turn' in International Politics have begun to acquire increasingly coherent manifestations within the subfield of securitization studies in recent years, as debates on the morality of (de)securitization seem to indicate.[1] Such a progression reveals that theorists have begun to apply central concepts within securitization theory in ways that diverge from its original explanatory function, while moving towards a usage that reflects its purpose as a normatively-oriented theoretical frame of reference (*e.g.* Aradau: 2004, 2008; Huysmans: 1998, 571). Here, the changing theoretical mandate of securitization theory, we might posit, reflects an intention in testing the ways in which theory can guide the enterprise of 'sculpting' security practice toward more socially-optimal forms.

Within the bounds of the above enterprise, the concept of *desecuritization* has been singled out as a particularly significant theoretical tool. The general suggestion has been that, through engaging with desecuritization, theorists involve themselves in an explicitly political project of 'unmaking' certain problematic aspects of security thinking and practice. As the C.A.S.E. collective (2006, 455) affirms, desecuritization is thus theoretically significant, due to its capability of accommodating an engagement both with political 'normality' (in terms of serving as a description of politics) and with notions of 'normativity' (in terms of it being able to incorporate principles and ethical concepts that push for the transformation the status quo).

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[1] To give only a few examples, Aradau: 2004, 2008; Floyd: 2007, 2011; Wæver: 2011.

v. A Problem with Desecuritization

A significant silence arises at this point in the theory which, I argue, blocks its development as a tool for use in normative enquiry in particular. It appears that securitization theory is only capable of accommodating a limited temporal frame within its structure, in so doing, omitting the question of outcomes in desecuritization. I trace the research problem on outcomes to the presence of divergent understandings of what is, or can be accomplished through desecuritization. In order to make clear the status of the current literature on the matter, a basic portrayal of the (de)securitization process is sketched as follows:

**Figure I: The Progression of an Issue through the Securitization Framework**
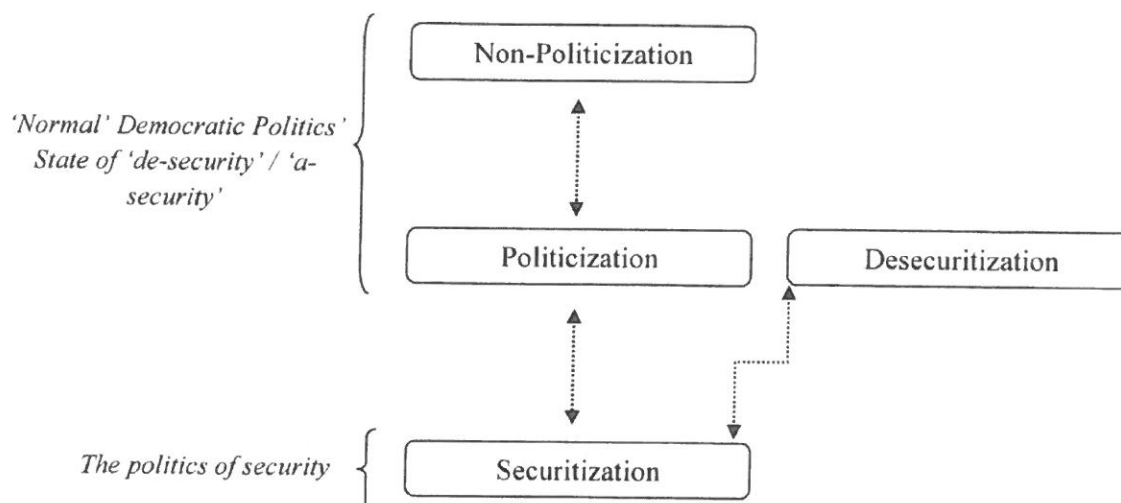
STAGE I

vi. Thin and Thick Desecuritization

Desecuritization should perhaps be understood as referring to at least two different kinds of processes, where each version of the term is accompanied by different policy implications. Such a distinction could illustrate nuances in the process that a 'pure' desecuritization approach may not fully communicate, accommodate, or discern. While *thin* desecuritization connotes merely the fading of an issue from the policy agenda, or its exit from popular political discourse altogether, *thick* desecuritization refers to processes by which topics continue to be addressed and deliberated upon; an activity potentially aligned to a broader ethico-political purpose. This

approach suggests that for those seeking to advance certain elements of the critical security studies project, the desecuritization discussion should not necessarily converge around an argument for the *de facto* desecuritization of issues, but for a *particular kind* of desecuritization – namely, the sort of thick desecuritization that has the potential to allow, as Aradau (2004, 389) has suggested, for security issues to turn into 'different types of issues', and accommodate the space necessary for theoretical intervention. Such a distinction is depicted in the graphic below.

Figure II: The Progression of an Issue through the Securitization Framework
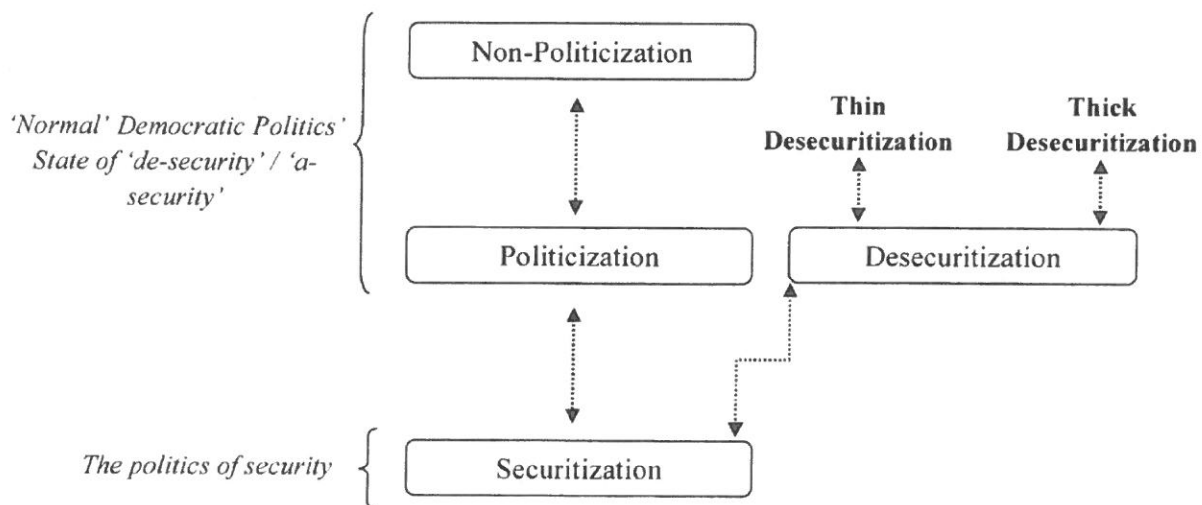
STAGE II

vii. Case Study on A Post-Conflict Transitional Political Setting

Inspired by Wæver's (2011) recent suggestion that securitization theory be applied to conflict research, the second stage of the project proceeds through the means of a case study on a desecuritized policy debate in a post-conflict political setting. In testing the applicability of securitization theory as a tool through which to make sense of conflict escalation or resolution, I employ the conceptual framework proposed earlier in order to unpack the relationship between politics, civil society, democracy, conflict, and notions of 'positive' and 'negative' security. Through such means, I hope to treat the concept of desecuritization alongside the literature on discourse ethics. In specific, I am interested in assessing the contentions in the literature that

surround discursive political practice in post-conflict situations, which may as much be interpreted as a security concern as a fragile prospect for sustainable security.

STAGE III

viii.   Discussion and Analysis

The final stage of my project will critically assess the findings culled from the case study portion of the analysis and incorporate them in an extended critique of the Copenhagen School's conception of 'normal politics', proposing a way to develop thinking on the gap between 'normality' and 'normativity' in security studies, through the lens of democratic theory.

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