

DOCTORAL THESIS

The securitization of the European refugee crisis: a novel approach to the 'audience acceptance' of the Copenhagen School of security studies

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ABSTRACT

In 2015, Europe experienced the most significant refugees' outbreak in modern history. Millions of displaced persons crossed the external borders of the European Union. Some of the EU member states represented and handled the outbreak as an opportunity. Some others framed and dealt with the migratory pressures as a security threat.

The designation of an issue as an existential threat to a referent object constitutes a security speech act. According to the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, when extraordinary measures and the acceptance of the audience follow a security speech act, then we observe successful securitization.

Motivated by the desire to examine the securitization of the refugee crisis in Europe, from a Copenhagen School's perspective, I performed a thorough assessment of the relevant literature which brought into the light a research gap. Despite the persistence of the Copenhagen School's scholars to underline the importance of their analytical framework's 'audience acceptance' component, most of the securitization literature focuses on the other two components of a successful securitization: the security speech act and the emergency action. As a result, the audience acceptance component suffers from under-theorization, underdevelopment, and under-assessment.

To enhance the analytical potential of the Copenhagen School's *theorem*, I develop two methodological novelties —the Triangulation Method of Audience Identification and the Comprehensive Securitization Empirical Framework. The first guarantees the accurate identification of the securitization audience. The second classifies ten different forms of securitization based on the presence or absence of the three securitization components and on the placement of the 'audience acceptance' within the securitization's timeline.

To demonstrate the applicability of the novel analytical tools, I test them on the securitization of the European refugee crisis. To support my findings, I perform a comparative case study of five case studies: Greece, Poland, Hungary, Germany, and the EU. To draw my conclusions, I consult thousands of official statements, hundreds of surveys and opinion polls, dozens of relevant books and peer-reviewed articles and several in-person interviews with renowned decision-makers.

The outcomes of the research suggest that, in the case of the European refugee crisis, the primary targeted audience was the general public. However, the opinion of the general public about the designation of the existential threat and about the necessity of the extraordinary measures' adoption was rarely considered after the utterance of the security speech acts. In most of the cases, the securitizing actors assessed the feelings of the general public before uttering the speech acts. The findings of this research also indicate that the higher the negativity of the general public towards immigrants and refugees, the most likely the political elites to perform a security speech act and to resort to emergency action. Despite the indisputable impact of the public opinion, the final decision about the securitization of the refugee crisis belongs to the political actors.

Keywords: Refugee Crisis, Securitization Theory, Copenhagen School, European Union, Migration.

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