

## 7 Rethinking the securitization of the environment

Old beliefs, new insights

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Other chapters in this book have pointed at the limits of a formalistic and de-contextualized approach to securitization. They have shown, in different ways, that the social construction of a security issue is a more dynamic, nuanced and complex process than the one described by the Copenhagen School (CS). This chapter deals with the implications of adopting a narrow, textual approach to securitization when analyzing the social construction of global environmental problems as security issues. It thus amplifies the third assumption developed in Chapter 1, while taking seriously some of the methodological precepts offered thereof. The chapter does this by reconsidering some of the debates surrounding environmental security. The first one is related with the opportunity of speaking environmental security: What are the consequences of evoking security? Are they always as problematic as the CS assumes? The case of the environment is a relevant one because the debate is divided between those supporting the term environmental security, suggesting that is a good way to promote action and those who warn against its implications. The second debate is about the practices brought about by securitization: Are they fixed and unchangeable or can they be transformed by securitizing non traditional issues?

The environmental sector is relevant because several appeals to environmental security have been made with the intent of challenging existing security practices and provisions and yet many contemporary security discourses – mentioning precaution and resilience – seem to have been influenced by the environmental debate and concepts. An approach, like securitization, which considers the discursive formation of security issues, provides a new perspective to analyze the environmental security discourse, its potential to transform what counts as security and the ways to provide it. It allows, for instance, an investigation of the political process behind the selection of threats, exploring why some of them are considered more relevant and urgent than others. In this way, the focus shifts from supposedly objective threats to the collectivities, identities and interests that deserve to be protected and the means to be employed.

In this chapter, however, it will be shown that the possibility of understanding the transformation of security practices and provisions is precluded because, by focusing on the textual, formal aspect of speech acts, the CS imposes a problematic 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. For the CS, these practices are not open to negotiation or political debate. Accordingly, transforming an issue into a security issue is not always desirable. 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 de Wilde 1998: 29). The solution suggested by the CS is to avoid the transformation of an issue into a security issue or to "desecuritize" as many issues as possible. This however cannot always be possible or desirable, as the debate about environmental security has shown. First, 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 above all the practices allegedly associated with it) is not the desired result (see Huysmans 2002: 43). Second, attempts to show that something is not a security issue can lead to the marginalization and the minimization of urgent threats, especially when several attempts to transform environmental issues into security issues seem to have mobilized actions and produced forms of cooperation rather than conflict.

The second reason that makes the environment a relevant case to investigate is that the CS has dealt specifically with it. For the School the environment sector is one that need to be considered to analyze contemporary security dynamics. In this way several tensions emerges between an empirically driven approach adopted by the CS, which is attentive to the peculiarities of the environmental sector and the attempts to identify the quality that makes an issue a security issue or the "securityness" of security. Amongst the peculiarities of the environmental sector the CS observes that few attempts to evoke security within the environmental sector have not passed the border of ordinary politics or brought about exceptional measures and the logic of confrontation. The School has dismissed those appeals as failed securitization moves that are appeals to security that did not lead to securitization. Against this perspective, or old beliefs, this chapter argues that the securitizations of the environment were indeed successful since they brought about measures and policies that probably would not otherwise have been undertaken, and yet they contributed to transform the logic and the practices of security.

The chapter is in three parts. The first part deals with the limits that a textual approach to security creates in the case of the environment. It introduces the key elements of the theory of securitization and their relevance for the analysis of environmental security discourses and their implications. This part shows that a discursive approach like securitization can potentially capture several aspects of the transformative intent that characterizes many appeals to include environmental issues in security analysis, and yet, it points out that the fixity imposed on security practices by the CS 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 by the second part, which outlines a tension between the empirically driven analysis of the environmental sector and the conceptualization of the "securityness of security" and suggests that the

securitization of the environment has contributed to bring about a transformation of security practices. The final part provides some examples from the environmental sector. It argues for a more contextualized approach, which suggests that in a process of securitization not only are issues transformed into security issues, but also the practices associated with security are challenged and sometimes transformed (Balzacq, 2009a; Balzacq, this volume). More specifically, the chapter deals with two cases of securitization of environmental issues. They are the hole in the ozone layer and environmental conflict.

### **Securitization and the environment: potential and limits**

In order to explore the potential and limits of securitization theory in dealing with the social construction of environmental problems as security issues, it is necessary to briefly review the key elements of securitization theory: the performative power of evoking security, its inter-subjective nature, and the "specific rhetorical structure" (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998: 26), and analyze them in relation with the environmental problem.

Wæver, drawing on Austin's work, 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). While this is not the place to discuss whether Weaver's understanding of speech act is appropriate (see Balzacq in this volume), it is relevant to emphasize that 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 become irrelevant. Accordingly, 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 dealing with it. In this way, the CS does not focus on the truth of a statement but on the "truth effect" of it. Considering the performative power of speaking security opens a new perspective to analyze the development of environmental security discourses and their consequences. Many environmental problems are uncertain and will fully manifest their consequences in a more or less distant future; this makes the political process of constructing insecurities crucial to understanding why some problems are considered as more relevant and urgent than others or why some issues mobilize action while others are largely ignored.

However, focusing on the security utterance only can be problematic because this could suggest that everything can become a security issue when someone names it that way. Indeed not all the appeals to security transform an issue into a security issue. To avoid this problem the CS distinguish between securitizing moves (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998: 25), which are appeals to security that can be successful or not, and proper securitization. The School then qualifies securitization in two ways: first, securitization is a collective phenomenon, "a specific form of social

praxis" (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998: 204); and second, it has a specific rhetoric structure and follows specific rules.

Securitization, for the CS, is a collective phenomenon in two respects. First, it is an inter-subjective practice. One actor can try and say that something vital is at risk and can point at a threat, but a successful securitization is not decided by the speaker alone, 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 de Wilde 1998: 31). Securitization in this way reflects the values and interests of a political community. In the case of the environment, its securitization suggests a growing relevance and awareness of environmental problems and a shared aspiration to do something about them. Second, security is about collectivities not individuals. For the School, this is relevant because it allows scholars to "historicize security, to study transformation in the units of security affairs," an opportunity that for the School is precluded both to traditionalists, who focus only on the state, and Critical Security Studies that focuses on the individual (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998: 206–7). This is quite relevant for the environmental debate since it opens up the possibility of transforming political community through the social construction of common threats, and several attempts to link security and the environment embody cosmopolitan intents. As Beck suggests "threats create society and global threats create global society" (Beck 2000: 38). The CS, however, is sceptical about the possibility of a security unity as large as humankind,<sup>1</sup> and the reasons have to do not 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 analyzing the transformations of security units, at least in universalistic terms.

In order to clarify why it is difficult to imagine a security unity as large as humankind, it is necessary to explore the other qualification of securitization provided by the CS, namely that security is a specific kind of speech act; it has a specific rhetoric structure and brings into existence a specific set of practices. 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 labeling it as *security*, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means" (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998: 26, emphasis in the original). For the CS 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). 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 the most intense and extreme antagonism, . . . that of the friend-enemy grouping" (1996: 29). Securitization is identified with the exceptional decision that constitutes enemies and brings into existence the logic of war. Even if the School does not share this vision of the political, it suggests that this logic characterizes the security mindset. Accordingly the problem with the broadening of the security agenda is that this mindset is spread as well.

In this way, the problems with securitization, when the environment is involved, starts to appear. On the one hand, an approach that considers the discursive formation of security issues provides a new perspective to analyze the environmental security discourse and its transformative potential. It allows, for instance, an analysis of the political process that leads to prioritizing some issues instead of others, the transformation of the political communities that are supposed to be protected, the legitimizing of security practices and the empowerment of the actors that can contrast specific threats. On the other hand, securitization is problematic for the set of practices it is supposed to bring about, which are supposed to be fixed and based on a very narrow understanding of what security is about, which is identified as the inscription of enemies in a context. While the securitization of an issue is open to negotiation and political debate, the practices it brings about are not, and they will necessarily come into existence once an issue has been successfully securitized, and, moreover, are those practices themselves that allow us to decide whether an issue has been securitized or not.

This tension is evident in the long term debate about environmental security, which opposes those who suggest considering the environment as a security issue in order to promote action, to focus on the issues that really matter and to adopt a cooperative rather than a confrontational approach to security, and those who argue that security has a tradition it cannot escape and thus appeals to security should be avoided. The latter argument has been reinforced by securitization theory and the sense of necessity it seems to impose.

Several commentators have tried to bridge this divide and avoid what Dalby (2001), talking about environmental security, has described as "the dangers in a good idea." Floyd (2007) has suggested that there are positive and negative securitizations and that this can be decided on the basis of their results. This is largely based on the consideration that within the environmental sector not all the appeals to security have introduced a confrontational logic, identified enemies or allowed exceptional measures against them; on the contrary, some of them have promoted quick and effective actions. However, without challenging the logic of security suggested by the CS, the solution proposed by Floyd seems to imply that, in some circumstances, the logic of creating enemies can be the most appropriate. However, this seems to contradict the attempt to overcome the divisions between the CS and Critical Security Studies since the latter adopts a positive understanding of security (see Booth 1991, 2007).

Another example is provided by Jon Barnett. He first argued that the securitization of the environment can have perverse effects and shown that 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. Then, to avoid these problematic developments, Barnett has suggested promoting a "human centered" understanding of security. However, if one accepts the ineluctability of the security mindset and logic evoked by securitization: "environmental security is not about the environment, it is about security; as a concept, it is at its most meaningless and malign" (Barnett 2001: 83) one cannot expect that an appeal to a human centered security will provide

different outcomes. If the practices evoked by speaking security are fixed and unchangeable, why should the sort of claim made by Barnett be different from similar ones? Why should his appeal to a "human centered security" be different from the appeals to environmental security, if the intentions of the speakers or the context are irrelevant? These dilemmas, however, are based on the idea that security practices are inescapable and unchangeable and the theory of securitization, as elaborated by the CS, has contributed to suggest so.

### Failed securitization or changing security practices?

The CS has contributed to making a specific, negative understanding of security – which has characterized the dominant Realist discourse within IR – appear as "natural" and unchangeable since all the attempts to transform it appear to reinforce its logic as the examples from the environmental security debate have shown.<sup>2</sup> This perverse mechanism, however, can be challenged by showing that the social construction of a security issue does not necessarily follow the formal mechanism described by the CS, and the environmental sector provides relevant examples. More specifically, it will be shown that the attempts by the CS to combine an empirically driven approach, which is attentive to the actual processes of securitization and the specificities of different sectors with a de-contextualized "securityness of security" create several tensions and inconsistencies. These tensions will be analyzed by considering the peculiarities of the environmental sector as described by the CS itself.

The CS explores the specificity of the environmental sector in *Security: A Framework for Analysis* (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998), the theoretical book in which the CS 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. The environmental sector is rather different from the others. Amongst the peculiarities of the environmental sector described by the School, two deserve a specific analysis for their implications: first, the presence of two agendas – a scientific and a political one; second, the multiplicity of actors. They both stress the relevance of a contextualized analysis and the importance of factors which suggest that the social construction of security issues is more complex than the successful performance of a speech act. This will lead to the final characteristic of the environmental sector, namely the consideration that several securitization moves lead to politicization, rather than to securitization, since they do not exceed the "normal bounds of political procedure" (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998: 25). Against this problematic compromise it will be argued that the securitization of non traditional issues like environmental problems is challenging and transforming existing security practices, but the focus on the fixity of security practices does not allow the CS to account for this process. The three aspects are analyzed 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 de Wilde 1998: 71). They explain that the scientific agenda refers mainly to natural science and non-governmental activities and it "is about the authoritative assessment of threat" (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998: 72). In the case of the environment the relevance of the scientific agenda is evident in the attempts to legitimize different competing claims with the authority of science, but it is often present in other sectors, such as health issues related with the spread of pandemic or other diseases. Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde argue that "the extent to which scientific argument structures environmental security debates strikes us as exceptional" (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998: 72), but, quoting Rosenau, they admit that "the demand for scientific proof is a broader emerging characteristic in the international system" (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998: 72).

This, however, has two implications. First, it seems to challenge the possibility of transforming the way of dealing with an issue by appealing to security and focusing on the "truth effect" of a statement. In other words it questions the "self referentiality" of the speech act security (Balzacq 2005). That is, if one starts to admit that a successful securitization within the environmental sector requires specific conditions, namely the presence of authoritative knowledge, or scientific proof, one has also to admit that the specific nature of an issue, an environmental problem, for instance, requires a context and issue-specific analysis. This calls for a more contextualized approach that considers the peculiarities of each case and challenges the possibility of translating the dynamics of securitization from one sector to another. Second, the existence of two agendas has implications for the suggestion of desecuritizing as many issues as possible. 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? This suggests the importance of an epistemic community and experts in a process of securitization, and shows that some actors are in privileged positions to perform a successful securitization, an argument suggested by Bigo (1994, 2002) to outline the importance of security experts and argue against a de-contextualized approach. This leads to the second peculiarity of the environmental sector: the presence of a multiplicity of actors.

The environmental sector is characterized by securitizing actors, supporting actors and veto actors. This suggests the political struggle and the complexity of the social construction of threats. This contrasts with Wæver's suggestion that "security is articulated only from a specific place, in an institutional voice, by elites" (Wæver 1995: 57). In the environmental case 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 de 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 de Wilde 1998: 71). This suggests that the logic of security described by the CS refers to a specific one that has developed with and contributed to the development of specific institutions and, with them, of the actors, practices

and means that are supposed to provide security. The presence of several actors is not only a prerogative of the environmental sector, but it also characterizes other new sectors in which no institutional arrangements are in place.

These considerations lead to the final peculiarity, which can also be considered as the solution adopted by the CS to deal with the problem that, within the environmental sector, several appeals to security have not brought about the logic of security and the practices associated with it. 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 politicizing 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 CS dismissed as failed securitizations – seem to suggest that there is a tendency to politicize issues through their securitization.

Securitization theory, for the CS, is meant to be descriptive; however, the environmental sector suggests that the focus on the formal aspect of the speech act security prevents it from providing an adequate instrument for analysis. A de-contextualized, 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; this process is not one way only or from the military to the other sectors. 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 securitizing 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 (Huysmans 2002: 58).

Environmental security is about transformation and this is the reason why the environmental sector is so problematic. In order 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 on the self-referential character of the speech act security to move into the realm of communicative action (Williams 2003: 512) and social change. This is in line with the suggestion proposed by de Wilde that securitization "triggers two debates: one about the underlying risk assessment, one about the strategic answer to it" (de Wilde 2008: 596).

### Two cases from the environmental security debate

This section describes two securitizations within the environmental sector, namely that of the hole in the ozone layer and that of environmental conflicts. It emphasizes the relevance of a more contextualized analysis and – contrary to the conclusion reached by the CS, which considers environmental securitization as failed securitization moves – suggests that these securitizations have challenged and somehow transformed some of the practices associated with securitization.

For each one of the threats, the securitizing actors and the causal mechanisms invoked are explored to show how the social construction of a threat is a more complex matter that relies on different actors, shared understanding and symbolic references. The emphasis, however, will not be on showing that securitization does not rely on formal, linguistic aspects only, but on the implications of this for security provisions and the transformation of the practices of security. In this respect, the choice of the cases is relevant. In the case of the ozone, appeals to security have determined the first international agreement based on the precautionary principle. In the case of the environmental conflict, the debate has contributed to promoting preventive approaches. They both suggest the relevance of security practices based on prevention, risk management and resilience, which have recently gained relevance in the climate security discourse. They somehow contrast with the logic of emergency and exception which characterizes the speech act security as described by the CS. In this sense, the logic of security captured by the CS represents a very specific case. An empirically driven, sociological approach can outline when it occurs and why, avoiding subsuming all the construction of threats to this logic.

### *The securitization of the depletion of the stratospheric ozone*

The depletion of the stratospheric ozone is one of the global environmental problems often mentioned as a threat to security (Prins and Stamp 1991; Mathews 1989; Barnett 2001). Wæver, Buzan and de Wilde mention it in *Security* and Clinton in the National Security Strategy considers it as a direct threat to the health of US citizens (1998: 13). This prompts several questions: how was it conceptualized as a threat, which actors were involved in the process, which measures resulted from that conceptualization?

The earth is protected from dangerous high energy radiations by a layer of ozone in the stratosphere. Ozone is a molecule constituted by three atoms of oxygen; it adsorbs the energy of the radiation by splitting into two compounds – a molecule of oxygen and a radical – and then recombining again. In the 1970s, concerns emerged that, in the high atmosphere, exhaust gases could destroy ozone by preventing its recombination. The initial debate was prompted by environmental concerns related to the construction of a fleet of supersonic airplanes by the US, the UK and France and heated by the dispute on landing permits and accusations – on both sides of the Atlantic – of trying to export environmental standards. The issue was largely framed as an environmental problem which might have implications for the national economy, and was not considered as a security issue. This initial framing (Litfin 1994: 62) contributed to the selection of the actor who became the legitimate scientific authority in the field of atmospheric research. Since space expeditions were also suspected of interfering with the stratospheric ozone, NASA convinced Congress it was the best agency to study the stratospheric ozone's depletion and it soon became a major authority in the field, providing about 70 per cent of spending on stratospheric research (Litfin 1994: 63).

In 1974 Rowland and Molina, two chemists at the University of California Irvine, suggested that CFC gases, widely used in industry for their inertia in the lower atmosphere, can release chlorine into the stratosphere, thus acting as a catalyst in a

set of reactions that have the final result of impeding the recombination of the ozone molecules. They forecasted the depletion of between 7 and 13 per cent of the ozone layer. At that time, CFCs had an impressive diffusion, both as aerosol propellants for deodorants and as coolers in refrigerators and air conditioners. They were also used for blowing polyurethane foams, sterilizing medical equipment and for a variety of other uses. They were considered wonderful chemicals, very useful in a variety of settings and with no side-effects.

Ozone depletion started to become one of the emerging global environmental problems. The problem was first discussed by UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) in 1976. The following year a meeting of experts on the ozone layer was convened and UNEP and WMO (World Meteorological Organization) created a committee to periodically assess ozone depletion (Litfin 1994: 73–5).

While research on the atmospheric dynamics was still in its infancy, there was a relevant body of research on the impact of ultraviolet radiation on life. Ultraviolet radiations is dangerous for people and for various forms of life, causing cancer and blindness. It was the possibility of an impact on human health that heated the debate on CFCs and shaped states' actions in the international arena, even before consensus emerged on the relevance of the thinning of the ozone layer and its causes. The debate within UNEP and WMO was characterized by the creation of two committees. The choice of two committees (one discussing the economic dimension and the other the health issues) suggested how two contrasting constructions of threats were emerging: the first one considered the threat to the economy of cutting CFC production, the second the threat to human life posed by the production of these chemicals. Securitizing actors were NGOs and environmental groups, which tried to mobilize states to act collectively. Scientific research on the health impact of high energy radiation played a relevant role in transforming ozone depletion into a threat to human health and in promoting international efforts. In this sense the issue was securitized in the scientific agenda.

Despite the lack of consensus on the extent of the problem and its causes, in 1981 inter-governmental negotiations to phase out ozone-depleting substances started. Their result was the signature of the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer in March 1985. The Vienna Convention was a framework convention; it did not set up specific targets or incentives but called for common research. For several states involved in the negotiation the main concern was the protection of their industries rather than that of the ozone layer, which appeared to be a distant, uncertain threat. In this respect this was a failed securitization that did not mobilize exceptional measures.

In May 1985, a British research team discovered what was immediately labeled as the "ozone hole." The term hole is actually a metaphor since it refers to a depletion of about 30 per cent of the ozone in the Antarctic region, something rather unexpected and not forecast by any scientific model. Despite the initial scepticism, the alarming results were verified by NASA. The authority of science was somehow challenged since it had not been able to predict such a dramatic development and the relevance of acting on the precautionary principle gained relevance. The broadcasting of NASA images of a computer model representing the polar zone

characterized by 30 per cent depletion in a bright, alarming colour contributed to the visualization of the "hole" and the perception of a threat (see Litfin 1994: 96–9).

This led to a process of securitization of a new kind of threat. While in the negotiation of the Vienna Convention what was supposed to be protected, at least by a number of states, was the industry producing ozone depleting substances, the symbolic representation of a hole in humanity's stratospheric protecting blanket mobilized action. The ozone layer was considered as a fragile asset to be protected (Litfin 1994: 97). This created a sense of crisis and the transformation of the depletion of the stratospheric ozone into an existential threat to the whole of humankind. Several securitizing actors were involved, from states to civil society and the scientific community. Boycotting of spray cans and food packages followed. Nevertheless no measures outside the borders of normal politics were taken.

Even if scientists cautioned against basing international negotiations on the discovery of the ozone hole because there were other plausible causes for this occurrence, it is difficult to imagine that it did not play a role in the subsequent agreements. The representation of ozone depleting substances as a threat to human life contributed to the quick signature of the Montreal Protocol, in which 50 countries agreed on a gradual phase-down of CFC production and consumption and set a target of 50 per cent of their 1986 levels by 1998–99, with a ten-year grace period for developing nations. A few months later new scientific evidence confirmed that the Antarctic phenomenon was likely related with CFCs and consensus mounted for a total phase-out. The Protocol was amended and strengthened at Conferences of the Parties in London (1990), Copenhagen (1992), and Vienna (1995). The number of controlled substances was increased from the original eight to over eighty. By 1995 most of them were phased out by the industrialized countries while substantial steps were taken by several developing countries. As Kofi Annan stated: "Perhaps the single most successful international agreement to date has been the Montreal Protocol."

The case of the Montreal Protocol seems to represent a case in which the politicization of an issue occurred through its securitization and not outside it. The representation of the threat was the result of a social process in which different interests were shaped and transformed. The process was characterized by the interplay between the scientific and the political agenda and outlined the dialogical rather than formal nature of the process of constructing an issue as a security issue. Symbols and images played a determinant role but they had to be framed in a context characterized by the production of cumulative knowledge suggesting a causal link between CFCs and ozone depletion. Decisions however were taken without the legitimizing authority of scientific research and ozone negotiations are the first case of international agreements based on the precautionary principle. And yet the security measures and provisions were based on cooperation rather than confrontation and included economic sanctions and incentives.

### ***Environmental conflict***

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the number of environmental problems which were argued to have security implications was quite large, including

problems like climate change, pollution and depletion of natural resources (Mathews 1989). In the 1980s the emergence of global environmental problems, like global warming and ozone depletion, determined one of the first attempts to broaden the international security agenda. The Brandt Report (1980) suggested that "few threats to peace and survival of the human community are greater than those posed by the prospects of cumulative and irreversible degradation of the biosphere on which human life depends" (quoted in Brauch 2003: 81) and the Brundtland report (1987) used the expression "environmental security." In the 1980s the tendency to frame environmental problem in security terms was encouraged by peace movements interested in mobilizing action on the issues that really matter and by the attempts to promote a non confrontational approach to the non military dimensions of security. However, it was with the end of the Cold War that the debate on environmental security gained relevance.

Even if the initial interest for environmental issues was quite broad, ranging from pollution to global warming it narrowed down in a few years. An example is provided by the negotiation of the United Nation Conference on Environment and Development; while security was an issue broadly discussed in the preparatory work, by the time of the Conference, held in Rio in 1992, it was no longer on the agenda and the term security was carefully avoided in the official documents. Several reasons lie behind these de-securitizing moves, such as the concerns of developing countries about green imperialism and interference in their security agendas, the diminishing concern for environmental security in the former communist countries where the slogan was used to mobilize political action against the Soviet Union. There is, however, an exception, which is the debate about environmentally induced conflict. In this perspective environmental degradation is a security issue since it may contribute to triggering and sustaining violent conflicts. The argument was rather persuasive in the post Cold War environment. It resonated with the more familiar understanding of national security and opened up a new role for the military.

The academic discussion was largely shaped by the work of Thomas Homer-Dixon, who chaired a series of research projects which aimed to study the relationships between environmental degradation and violent conflicts (Homer-Dixon 1991, 1994). Even if Homer-Dixon was cautious in suggesting a straightforward connection between environmental degradation and conflict, his argument was spread and amplified by Kaplan's article "The Coming Anarchy" (1994), which forecast massive population displacement and violent conflict, and baldly labeled the environment as the "national-security issue of the early twenty-first century" (Kaplan 1994: 58). The argument was quite influential within the Clinton administration. As Matthew reports the then US Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs, Timothy Wirth, sent a copy of Kaplan's article to every US embassy and the alarming picture it provided seemed to give an account of the crises the US had to face in Somalia and was struggling to address in Haiti (Matthew 2002: 111). This contributed to the securitization of environmental conflict within defence and political circles, at least in the US. This has promoted further research and political initiatives, in both the US and Europe.

This further research suggested that conflicts are likely to be sub-national and low-intensity (Homer-Dixon and Blitt 1998; Homer-Dixon 1999). These results have been reinforced by the projects undertaken by Spillmann and Bächler (Bächler 1998, 1999; Bächler, Böge *et al.* 1996), whose results have been largely influential on the study "Environment & Security in an International Context," launched in 1995 by the NATO Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS) and carried out by research teams in Germany and at the Pentagon (Lietzmann and Vest 2001). The project identified a number of "syndromes," which are sets of complex, abnormal and problematic relationships between environmental and other social, demographical and political factors that might help monitor and provide early warning systems for potential conflicts.

Research on environmental conflicts has determined an intense academic debate concerning the empirical validity of the claim that environmental degradation causes conflicts, the methodology of various research projects and the normative implications of their results. The argument that environmental scarcity induces conflicts has been challenged by empirical research showing how environmental degradation often provides the opportunity for cooperation (Hauge and Ellingsen, 2001) demonstrating that it is resource abundance rather than scarcity that determines conflicts (Berdal and Malone 2000). Nevertheless this debate is more relevant for the security provisions it has determined. During the Clinton administration, Homer-Dixon's research was used to promote a more proactive foreign policy (Harris 2001: 121-22) while the EU commission, largely influenced by the NATO project, has promoted actions to include environmental consideration into its development programmes and has used environmental concerns to develop and legitimize security capabilities and competencies at European level. Once again, the relevance of the appeals to security rested on the truth effect they produced, and on the groups securitization was accepted by, in this case the political and defence elites. However, even in this case the security practices adopted do not seem to reflect the antagonistic logic of war but suggest a process of transformation.

One of the aspects of this transformation is the growing interest in human security. As Duffield and Waddell explained: "[h]ow conflict has been understood in the post-Cold War period is central to understanding the concept of 'security' within human security" (Duffield and Waddell 2006: 43). Human security shifted the focus of security from the state to the individual and the UNDP 1994 annual report, which provides one of the definitions of the concept, identified environmental security, together with economic, food, health, personal, community and political security as a relevant component of human security (UNDP 1994: 22) and stressed the "all-encompassing" and "integrative" qualities of the concept (UNDP 1994: 24). A second aspect of the transformation is that the debate on environmental conflict has challenged a set of security practices, which focused on military threats and reactive measures and outlined how military responses and preparation are inadequate to deal with environmental issues. And yet it has contributed to shifting the attention to different kinds of vulnerability, suggesting that the instruments to provide stability require effort to promote both mitigation and adaptation to environmental

impact and change and that the best results are associated with early intervention and preventive measures (Duffield and Waddell 2006: 10).

The debate on environmental conflict has been criticized on normative grounds (Dalby 1999; Barnett 2001) because it shifted the focus of research on developing countries and represented people in the Third World as "barbaric Southern Others" (Barnett 2001: 67); erased the responsibility of developed countries for causing environmental change; and tried to frame environmental problem in terms of national security. Nevertheless one has to consider that this debate and the policies it has determined have achieved two things: first, they have legitimized new actors and instruments to develop forms of security governance, which play down the role of the state and of traditional reactive responses; second they have promoted the development of human security and of a new paradigm of preventive measures which are often legitimized by the use of the concept. This does not mean denying the relationships of power or even domination that are behind the environmental conflict discourse or even the human security one. Duffield and Waddell have considered that discourse as an attempt to broaden the neo-liberal governmentality on a global scale. This, however, suggests that the security practices are different from those identified by the CS as are the means to resist or challenge them.

## Conclusion

Securitization theory has the great merit of conceptualizing the power of discourses, and, more specifically, of the word security, in transforming a situation, but the CS's focus on self referential speech act and the emphasis on the de-contextualized "securityness" of security, while providing an elegant theory which captures the structural and social dimensions embedded in language and the problematic persistence of a set of practices which associate security with the identification of an enemy and the confrontational logic of war, does not allow us to explore the complexity of the social construction of security issues and explore the potential of a discursive approach. This tension is evident in the analysis of the environmental sector provided by the School itself in *Security: a New Framework for Analysis*. In that case, the empirically driven analysis which characterized the original approach of the School and which pays attention to the multiplicity of actors involved in the process of securitization, their different rules and capabilities, and emphasizes the importance of a scientific and a political agenda, contrasts with the self referential understanding of security suggested by considering securitization as a speech act.

The point however is not only about providing a more accurate picture of the social process of the social construction of a threat and of its implications. The problem is that the approach suggested by the CS tends to essentialize a specific logic of security and the practices associated with it. This is problematic because the possibility of exploring any transformation in the logic and practices of security is precluded, and this is particularly problematic within the environmental sector. Moreover, the CS, in questioning the opportunity of inscribing enemies in a context, 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, every time the word security is successfully evoked.

Suggesting that different security logics interact and coexist does not mean that they can be freely chosen or that other logics, like those based on risk management are without problems. One can always imagine air strikes against factories producing ozone depleting substances (Dabelko and Simmons 1997) or warning against the depoliticization determined by risk management (Aradau and van Munster 2007).

Adopting a sociological approach to the political construction of security issues can outline the transformation in the form and content of securitization and of the practices of security. However, rather than opposing a pragmatic (or sociological) to a philosophical approach to securitization (Balzacq 2009a), it is worth considering the latter as an analysis of a very specific construction of security and revaluing the original approach of the CS, based on an empirically driven approach. This is how I read *A Theory of Securitization* (Balzacq, this volume). By fixing the securityness of security and identifying it with a specific understanding of security, and of the political, the CS has limited its analysis to one logic of security only and it has essentialized it. The philosophical approach to securitization has thus explored the possible implications of that logic, taking for granted that it subsumes all the other logics. A greater attention to the various practices of security provides more nuanced results than those which are often associated with securitization and above all with some applications, generalization and simplifications of the insights the theory provides.

## Notes

- 1 See Wæver 1997; 'Concepts of Security', PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen. 355–357.
- 2 See Trombetta, M.J. *The Securitization of the Environment and the Transformation of Security*, paper presented at the SGIR, Sixth Pan-European Conference on International Relations, Turin 12–15 September 2007.