**[Securitization Forum: Scholars’ agency in securitisation: a leap forward](http://duckofminerva.com/2015/09/securitization-forum-scholars-agency-in-securitisation-a-leap-forward.html%22%20%5Co%20%22Securitization%20Forum%3A%20Scholars%E2%80%99%20agency%20in%20securitisation%3A%20a%20leap%20forward)**

Clara Eroukhmanoff

Available at: <http://duckofminerva.com/2015/09/securitization-forum-scholars-agency-in-securitisation-a-leap-forward.html>

The scholarly impact of securitisation theory (ST) cannot be overstated in Europe. I would argue that this differs from US scholarship if and when scholars situate ST within the linguistic turn. As [Oren and Solomon](http://duckofminerva.com/2015/09/why-does-american-ir-ignore-securitization-theory.html) observe in this forum, linguistic approaches in the US are either ignored, or misunderstood. I suggest that if scholars wish to approach ST in this way, their agency needs to be re-established.

Since Waever coined the term “securitisation” in [1995](http://www.amazon.com/On-Security-Ronnie-D-Lipschutz/dp/0231102712) and the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde) wrote [Security, a New Framework for Analysis](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Security-A-New-Framework-Analysis/dp/1555877842)in 1998, scholars have discussed securitisation in relation to: the problematic position of the security analyst ([Eriksson 1999](http://cac.sagepub.com/content/34/3/311.refs)), identity, migration and the societal sector ([Huysmans 1995;](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Migration-European-Integration-Inclusion-Exclusion/dp/0838636136) [McSweeney 1996](http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=6304920&fileId=S0260210500118467)), the idea of visual securitisation ([Williams 2003](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1046/j.0020-8833.2003.00277.x/abstract); [Vuori 2010](http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/41/3/255.abstract); [Hansen 2011](http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/17/1/51.full.pdf%2Bhtml?hwshib2=authn%3A1442656597%3A20150918%3A49fb3ee8-6f11-40e7-a5f6-8c7e069c1b7f%3A0%3A0%3A0%3AOsL%2Bvz8yOZUqZWVVVQSPYA%3D%3D)); [Heck and Schlag 2012](http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/04/27/1354066111433896.abstract)), its democratic and Europeancentrism ([Huysmans 1998a](http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/4/4/479.refs); [Hansen 2000](http://mil.sagepub.com/content/29/2/285.full.pdf); [Bilgin 2011](http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/42/4-5/399.abstract)), its Schmittian view of exceptional politics [(Huysmans 1998b](http://mil.sagepub.com/content/27/3/569.full.pdf%2Bhtml), [2011](http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/42/4-5/371.abstract); [Bigo 2000](http://www.amazon.co.uk/International-Relations-Politics-European-Integration/dp/0415214173); [Neal 2006](http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/37/1/31.abstract); [Roe 2012](http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/43/3/249.abstract)), its problem of context ([Balzacq 2005](http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/11/2/171.short?rss=1&ssource=mfc), [2011](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Securitization-Theory-Security-Problems-Dissolve/dp/0415556287); [Stritzel 2007](http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/13/3/357.abstract); [Salter 2008](http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jird/journal/v11/n4/abs/jird200820a.html); [Barthwal-Datta 2009](http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=5502100); [Ciută 2009](http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=5502112); [McDonald 2008](http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/14/4/563.abstract)), the normativity of the theory ([Aradau 2004](http://oro.open.ac.uk/8943/); [Behnke 2006](http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jird/journal/v9/n1/full/1800070a.html); [Floyd 2011](http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/42/4-5/427.abstract)), conceptualisation of desecuritisation ([Huysmans 1998a](http://mil.sagepub.com/content/27/3/569.full.pdf%2Bhtml); [Aradau 2004](http://oro.open.ac.uk/8943/); [Salter 2008](http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jird/journal/v11/n4/abs/jird200820a.html); [Hansen 2012](http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8607385&fileId=S0260210511000581); [Floyd 2015](https://www.routledge.com/products/9780415643863)), and the role of emotions in the politics securitisation ([Van Rythoven 2015](http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/05/27/0967010615574766.abstract)).

Recently, [Balzacq, Guzzini, Williams, Wæver and Patomäki](http://ire.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/10/27/0047117814526606) debated over the essence of securitisation theory in the Journal of International Relations. As Williams (2011, 212) notes, it is hard to think of another perspective in security studies that can encompass so many diverse studies in a single theoretical framework. It is fair to suggest that securitisation theory constitutes a major, if not the most important, security studies debate in the last decade. Yet, as Van Rythoven and Hayes highlight in this forum, these publications are mostly in European journals. Securitisation theory has been more silent in American scholarship. This may be because ST has Eurocentric origins ([Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2015, 9)](http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0415841844/ref%3Dpd_lpo_sbs_dp_ss_1?pf_rd_p=569136327&pf_rd_s=lpo-top-stripe&pf_rd_t=201&pf_rd_i=0415484448&pf_rd_m=A3P5ROKL5A1OLE&pf_rd_r=02766ZN7T0ZRA3HRNQSW) and remains within a “Westphalian straight jacket” ([Wilkinson 2007](http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/38/1/5.short?rss=1&ssource=mfc)). Or perhaps, because critical security approaches “have arguably gained momentum and density in Europe” ([CASE collective 2006, 444](http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/37/4/443.short?rss=1&ssource=mfc)). But there is no obvious reason why this framework cannot work in empirical contexts other than Western Europe. For instance, [Donnelly](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Securitization-Iraq-War-engagement-Routledge/dp/0415518113) examines securitisation in relation to the Iraq War; Hayes ([2009](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2009.00565.x/abstract)) utilises ST to explicate the role of identity in the US response to the Indian and Iranian nuclear programs. I explored [elsewhere](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17539153.2015.1053747#abstract) the securitisation of Islam in the United States and introduced the idea of remote securitisation ([Eroukhmanoff 2015](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17539153.2015.1053747?journalCode=rter20)).

The difference in securitisation publications between the American and European contexts becomes clear, when, on the one hand, Barthwal-Datta [recalls](http://duckofminerva.com/2015/09/securitization-forum-securitization-theory-is-all-very-well-but-will-it-sell.html) (in this forum) that a US University Press was concerned about her manuscript because securitisation theory did not sell in North America, while on the other, I am told in the UK that the field is “too crowded” to break through the already rich literature on securitisation. In that respect, it seems that securitisation theory has already been approached from “all angles” in Europe, and is “saturated.” This demonstrates the extent to which securitisation theory has flourished over this side of the Atlantic.

Krebs and Goddard [contend](http://duckofminerva.com/2015/09/securitization-forum-the-transatlantic-divide-why-securitization-has-not-secured-a-place-in-american-ir-why-it-should-and-how-it-can.html), “the transatlantic divide over securitisation theory is no accident.” I would argue that one of the reasons for the lack of securitisation literature in American scholarship (more specifically in the US) stems from the recurring distrust with post-positivist epistemologies.[[1]](http://duckofminerva.com/2015/09/securitization-forum-scholars-agency-in-securitisation-a-leap-forward.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1) Research from the [TRIP](http://www.wm.edu/offices/itpir/_documents/trip/trip_around_the_world_2011.pdf) project showed in 2012 that only 20% of universities in the US use post-positivist epistemologies, while 59% of universities conduct research with a positivist epistemology. The balance is inversed in the UK, where only 27% of universities adopt a positivist epistemology, and 35% adopt post-positivist epistemologies.[[2]](http://duckofminerva.com/2015/09/securitization-forum-scholars-agency-in-securitisation-a-leap-forward.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn2) This is where the split between mainstream and critical constructivism – called “consistent constructivism” by [Fierke](http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0199696012/ref%3Dpd_lpo_sbs_dp_ss_1?pf_rd_p=569136327&pf_rd_s=lpo-top-stripe&pf_rd_t=201&pf_rd_i=0199298335&pf_rd_m=A3P5ROKL5A1OLE&pf_rd_r=0JGWG0H7A9M0WXZARZ5E) (2013, 196) – occurs, and can explain why the former is established in North America, while the latter is not. The problem is that, as [Turton and Freire](http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jird/journal/vaop/ncurrent/pdf/jird201424a.pdf) (2014, 2) have rightly pointed out, there is a hierarchical institutional structure of scholarship between the United States (the “core”) and the “periphery” (the regions of South America, Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe), where the role of the “periphery” is consumptive, and portrayed as unable to produce original scholarship.

Securitisation theory is influenced by a post-positivist epistemology when the Copenhagen School argues that security is a speech-act: “it is the utterance itself that is the act” ([Buzan, Wæver and de Wile 1998, 26](https://books.google.de/books?id=j4BGr-Elsp8C&redir_esc=y)). Threats are not to be studied objectively for what they “really” are. Instead, securitisation analysts should study the discourses that frame the issue as a threat. Securitisation becomes a question of articulation ([McDonald 2008, 572](http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/14/4/563.abstract)). Regretably, this may not fulfil the “scientific” standard required for “serious” American scholarship. It is orientated towards understanding, rather than explaining. An approach located in the linguistic turn will be fundamentally different than an appraoch using mainstream methods of analysis. For instance, by asking “how” questions, rather than “why” questions ([Fierke 2013, 198](http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0199696012/ref%3Dpd_lpo_sbs_dp_ss_1?pf_rd_p=569136327&pf_rd_s=lpo-top-stripe&pf_rd_t=201&pf_rd_i=0199298335&pf_rd_m=A3P5ROKL5A1OLE&pf_rd_r=0JGWG0H7A9M0WXZARZ5E)). It bears on “critical thinking”: “exploring the ways in which personal experiences, ways of seeing the world and ways of acting in the world are interconnected” ([Brincat et al. 2012, 3](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Critical-International-Relations-Security-Studies/dp/0415601584)) As Brincat et al. ([2012, 3](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Critical-International-Relations-Security-Studies/dp/0415601584)) note, “doing critique” emphasises the ways in which knowledge is not merely “out there,” but driven by interests. In that respect, if taken critically, securitisation theory does not aspire to be “analytically neutral” ([Hopf 1998; 71](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539267?seq=1" \l "page_scan_tab_contents)).

There are, of course, multiple interpretations of securitisation theory, some which can better “fit” with a North American IR agenda. Goddard and Krebs have highlighted, in this forum and [elsewhere](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09636412.2014.1001198#.VfCpv9NViko), that securitisation can be a fully causal theory. Perhaps critical approaches to security studies are also guilty for being continuously sidelined by mainstream approaches. After all, we constantly justify our methodological standpoint against “mainstream IR theories.” There is a third way, I suggest. Instead of morphing securitisation into a positivist theory, we have to make a leap forward and re-establish our agency as scholars, that is, if we want to engage with ST as a post-positivist theory. Perhaps it is time to apply our critical framework in our personal career choices, as Barthwal-Datta has done, and not compromise our theoretical grounding for “what sells.” It may be quite important to remind our agency in the publication process, for the less publications there are on critical approaches in American scholarship, the more we reify “central IR theories” as central.

In that sense, we can put the classic [Wendtian argument](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858) to the test in the conduct of our personal lives: the state of literature on securitisation is “what we make of it.” Colleagues in this forum all point to the difficulties of getting work on securitisation published in leading American IR journals, which “creates disincentive for scholars who are experts in American security discourse and practices to use this theory” (Lupovici, this forum). But this is precisely the problem; we compromise to mainstream approaches at our peril, because we, to a certain extent, are the ones who make the discipline. We should be the ones creating the incentives to make critical approaches to security, which I see securitisation theory fitting in, as central as other perspectives with other epistemological assumptions. This should be part of an engaged methodological pluralism, which has been urged by [Jackson](http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Conduct-Inquiry-International-Relations/dp/0415776279) (2010, 209). Whether one likes it or not, International Relations is a pluralist field ([Rengger 2013](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/insp.12090/epdf)). But one that may come at the expense of loosing the “critical edge” of critical approaches as they become more mainstream ([Nunes 2012, 345](http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/43/4/345.full.pdf%2Bhtml?hwshib2=authn%3A1441793922%3A20150908%3A979e0e45-82e9-4e43-8a1f-4977d077dcb7%3A0%3A0%3A0%3AOev3q6LR%2BnhPIhIxKcyxHA%3D%3D)).

[[1]](http://duckofminerva.com/2015/09/securitization-forum-scholars-agency-in-securitisation-a-leap-forward.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref1) There are of course some exceptions, for instance, the school of Minnesota, Utah, and Virginia Tech).

[[2]](http://duckofminerva.com/2015/09/securitization-forum-scholars-agency-in-securitisation-a-leap-forward.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref2) Finland is the only country where more than the majority of universities conduct their research with post-positivist epistemologies, at 71%.

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