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“Moving Forward Together: Logics of the securitisation process”

***Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 2014, 43(1): 187-206**

Introduction

In its current configuration, the literature on securitisation – the process of integrating an issue into a security framework that emphasizes policing and defence – relies mainly on two logics. The logic of exception postulates that security is a process designed to combat existential threats via exceptional measures. The current benchmark in securitisation research, the analytical framework proposed by the Copenhagen School (CoS), relies on the logic of exception. In contrast, the logic of routine views security as a collection of routinised and patterned practices, typically carried out by bureaucrats and security professionals, in which technology comes to hold a prominent place.

For some scholars, these two approaches to the study of securitisation frame a battleground on which a conflict among various structural, critical, cultural, and sociological standpoints is waged. Indeed, a fair amount of discussion among proponents of both logics takes the form of competition: advocates on each side of the debate attempt to refute the criticisms levelled against their own framework in order to illuminate that framework’s ontological priority. Although many graduate students cut their theoretical teeth on these debates, little has been gained thus far in the battle for possession of the field.

By questioning the literature's underlying understanding of these two logics as opposing and competing, I pursue two aims in this article. First, I seek to bolster current research on the securitisation process by moving the conversation away from its current analytical stalemate. I claim that sophisticated empirical studies reveal elements of both exception and routine in the securitisation process, and argue that these studies call implicitly for further investigation into the coexistence and complementarity of the two logics. I caution scholars against overdrawing distinctions between the two logics, for it is not clear that they are mutually exclusive. Second, I seek to recognize and harness the strengths of both logics, and to identify the fruitful theoretical "bricks" each framework contributes to our understanding of securitisation. Throughout this discussion, I focus on the factors that unite securitisation scholars, rather than those which separate them. Consolidating securitisation scholarship in this way will allow us to better connect our theoretical models with contemporary security politics. By opening new avenues of research and problematizing issues that have been politely neglected by advocates of both logics, we can also counter the strong tendency in recent years to pull the security debate within competing 'camps'.

With these goals in mind, I put forward three main arguments in this article. First, I contend that each of the logic of exception and the logic of routine, on its own, presents an incomplete picture of the securitisation process; thus, each theoretical camp fails to present a convincing framework for the study of securitisation. The incompleteness of these logics manifests itself on multiple fronts, including their understanding of change and recurrence, their visualization of the securitisation process, and their identification of securitising agents. Second, I argue that the two logics share two important commonalities: security performance and path dependence. The securitisation process is first and foremost about a

performance – a process of doing something – and refers to decisions that are socio-historically informed. Finally, I contend that moving forward together will help scholars to study the coexistence of development and change, critical junctures and recurrence, and transformation and reproduction.

What I do not intend to do in this article is to present a synthesis disguised as a discussion of complementarities, or to argue that one logic is ontologically prior to the other, or to champion the explanatory leverage of one logic over the other. My objective is not to propose a new comprehensive theory of securitisation that draws from both logics, nor is it to revisit all of the flaws previously identified in both the logic of exception and the logic of routine, let alone to offer correctives or provide a refinement of either logic.

The body of this article will proceed as follows. The first section presents an overview of the logic of exception and the logic of routine as currently applied and organised in securitisation research. The second section levels a theoretical critique at the two logics by underscoring the incompleteness of each logic in isolation.¹ The third section provides a brief outline of some areas of common ground to foster the development of a convincing research agenda. Finally, in the fourth section, I illustrate the preceding set of arguments through an analysis of the social construction of migration as a security threat in France since the end of the Cold War.

¹ Undoubtedly, there are numerous methodological, theoretical, and normative issues concerning the concepts of exception and routine. Although these issues have inspired substantial disagreement among scholars, it is not within this article's purview to engage with them in detail.

The logic of exception and the logic of routine

The literature on securitisation draws mainly from two logics. The logic of exception, inspired primarily by Carl Schmitt's² work on the subject, focuses on speech acts that legitimize exceptional policies and practices in the face of an existential security threat. The current benchmark in securitisation research, the CoS,³ relies on the logic of exception, as do most researchers in the area of "visual securitisation."⁴ The CoS posits that labeling something as a security issue imbues that issue with a sense of importance that legitimizes the use of emergency measures extending beyond the usual political processes. A security speech act not only describes a state of affairs but also determines appropriate ways of acting and participating in relation to that state of affairs. Securitisation research seeks to understand the process by which an issue is cast as an existential threat to a designated referent object. Yet, securitising agents cannot navigate freely toward successful securitisation. Security speech acts must follow the grammar of security, securitising actors must possess social capital and power to legitimize their securitising moves, and the audience of a security speech act must accept proposed securitising moves as legitimate.

Contrasting with the logic of exception is the logic of routine. Inspired by Michel Foucault's and Pierre Bourdieu's systems of thought,⁵ the logic of routine sees securitisation as a process of establishing and inscribing meaning through governmentality and practices. It sees the securitisation process as consisting of a series of routinised and

² (Schmitt, 1985 [1922], 1996 [1932])

³ (Buzan *et al.*, 1998; Wæver, 1995)

⁴ (Hansen, 2011) The literature on the CoS is vast, see (Balzacq, 2005; Bourbeau, 2011; Cory, 2012; Curley & Herington, 2011; Floyd, 2011; Guzzini, 2011; Holbaard & Pedersen, 2012; McDonald, 2008; Vuori, 2008; Williams, 2003)

⁵ (Foucault, 1994, 2007) (Bourdieu, 1990, 1991)

patterned practices, carried out by bureaucrats and security professionals, in which technology holds a prominent place.

The logic of routine is embraced by a broad set of scholars, each of whom brings to the table their own focus and influences.⁶ Didier Bigo, in particular, is a central figure in scholarship on the logic of routine. He argues that security is not necessarily about survival, nor is it about urgency. Rather, security is largely defined by mundane bureaucratic decisions and practices that create a sense of insecurity and unease. Security, according to Bigo, is “an attempt at securitisation of daily life by the security professionals and an increase in the strengths of police potential for action.”⁷ In the context of the securitisation of migration, security is a “transversal political technology, used as a mode of governmentality by diverse institutions to play with the unease, or to encourage it if it does not yet exist, so as to affirm their role as providers of protection and security.”⁸

A sense of incompleteness

Building on the previous discussion, I wish here to level a theoretical critique at both the logic of exception and the logic of routine. I argue that, when considered separately, both theoretical stances offer an incomplete picture of the contemporary process of securitisation. The incompleteness of each of these logics is expressed in many ways, of which I only underscore the most important ones: (i) the issue of continuity and change, (ii) the question of who can be a securitising agent, and (iii) the depiction of the securitisation process.

⁶ (Balzacq, 2011; Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2006)

⁷ (Bigo, 2001, p. 111)

⁸ (Bigo, 2002, p. 65)

Continuity and change are concepts that the logic of exception and the logic of routine, respectively, struggle to theorize convincingly. Focusing only on moments and places of exception neglects the numerous ways in which security practices are reproduced consistently across time and space. Unless we accept the proposition that we are living in a permanent state of exception where exception itself is the rule,⁹ the CoS model is ill-equipped to deal with the idea that mechanisms of security are proliferating and generating a constant sense of insecurity, fear, and danger.¹⁰ Conversely, an exclusive focus on routine practices does not allow room to account for change, critical junctures, or the impacts of ‘window of opportunities’ on contemporary security affairs. The logic of routine makes a strong case for the enduring characteristics of the social world, but less so for the sources of change and critical junctures. This conclusion is echoed by Raymond Duvall and Arjun Chowdhury, for whom the current analysis of practices not only falls short of offering satisfying ways of theorizing change in world politics but also generates an exaggerated sense of stability.¹¹ The logic of routine has so far failed to produce guiding principles to make sense of key moments of change in the securitisation process, where actors step out of adopted boundaries and transcend the field of action in which they are normally engaged.

A second area in which both logics present an incomplete account is the question of who can be a securitising agent. The CoS focuses almost exclusively on sovereign and elite politics.¹² Unsurprisingly, Schmitt’s often-quoted remark that “sovereign is he who decides upon the exception” has been employed to argue that the CoS has an elite bias. In her

⁹ For a discussion on this issue see (Agamben, 2005)

¹⁰ (Balzacq, 2005; Huysmans, 2011; McDonald, 2008)

¹¹ (Duvall & Chowdhury, 2011)

¹² For a study that employs the CoS and opens the analysis to other securitising agents see (Bourbeau, 2011, 2013b)

investigation of civilian border patrol groups at the US-Mexico borders, Roxanne Doty argues that the logic of exception's focus on elite politics fails to capture the complete picture of contemporary security politics.¹³ Jef Huysmans has also argued that the CoS "implies an elitist vision of politics,"¹⁴ while members of the c.a.s.e. collective contend that the CoS's position "risks the reification of dramatic elite exceptionalist discourses."¹⁵

The logic of routine likewise encounters difficulties in the identification of potential securitising agents, and ultimately presents an incomplete and restrictive understanding of the securitising agent role. Bigo's version of the logic of routine, which focuses almost exclusively on security professionals, wrongly assumes that securitising agents are positioned on a map of social power in fixed ways. His model fails to distinguish between having the authorization to speak and having the ability to speak with authority. As Judith Butler points out, it is indeed possible that one can speak with authority without being authorized to speak.¹⁶ Thus, restricting the scope of securitising agents to security professionals limits more than it reveals in the context of contemporary security studies. Furthermore, various studies have demonstrated that the securitisation process involves other agents than security professionals, such as media agents, religious actors, and NGOs.¹⁷

Both logics are limited in how they depict the securitisation process. While recognizing the existence of routinised security practices, the logic of exception argues that what really matters are key moments in the process. Indeed, advocates of the logic of exception

¹³ (Doty, 2007)

¹⁴ (Huysmans, 2011, p. 375)

¹⁵ (2006, p. 466)

¹⁶ (Butler, 1997)

¹⁷ (Barthwal-Datta, 2009; Hansen, 2011; Karyotis & Patrikios, 2010)

consider only the high points (security speech acts), and not the plateaus on the road to securitisation, to be theoretically significant. The logic of exception argues that routinized practices are nothing more than practices in which urgency is implicitly assumed; hence, urgency is institutionalized. By paying little attention to routinised practices for the sake of theoretical parsimony, the logic of exception eschews the possibility of gradual intensification of the securitisation process.¹⁸

In contrast, the logic of routine overlooks the significance of security “high points” to focus on a theoretically flat view of the securitisation process as a routinised, patterned, and (often) unintentional set of practices. Some advocates of the logic of routine question the very existence of high points (speech acts), while others argue that these high points are themselves simply routinised practices. However, the logic of routine provides little guidance on differentiating between political practices and security practices. The upshot is that advocates of a practice ontology must either decide to curtail the admission of all practices or admit the need to judge and select even within a practice perspective. There is a need to justify and inform the reader of the basis on which a selection is made and why some practices are linked to security while others are not¹⁹.

In short, the logic of exception perceives the securitisation process as binary (either there are high points or there is no securitisation), while the logic of routine understand it as flat (perceived high points are merely patterned practices); as a result of these limitations, each of these logics, when taken alone, offers an unconvincing account of today’s contemporary security politics.

¹⁸ (Williams, 2011)

¹⁹ See (Bourbeau, 2013a)

Focusing on common analytical grounds

While there has been a tendency among security scholars to consolidate into particular, competing camps or schools, I argue that there is a need for us to zoom in on commonalities rather than differences. As Hansen (2008) puts it, we need to “move [away] from the tyranny of small differences to [the] study of common analytical issues.”²⁰ The present section does not aim to develop a comprehensive theory or full-fledged synthesis of the securitisation process, but to recognize and harness the strengths of both logics, and to identify fruitful theoretical foundations.²¹ Identifying fruitful commonalities among opposing viewpoints is fundamental to advancing theoretical research on the securitisation process and developing a richer dialogue between ideas and empirical evidence. In the following pages, I lay out two main conceptual elements that are relevant to this pursuit: performance and path dependence.

Performance

Drawing on both the analytical axioms of the CoS and Emanuel Alder & Vincent Pouliot’s take on the ‘practice turn’ in International Relationship (IR), I argue that securitisation is first and foremost about performance. Indeed, Wæver and Buzan have been arguing since the late 1990s that “the process of securitisation is what in language theory is called a speech act. It is not interesting as a sign referring to something more real; it is the utterance itself that is the act. By saying the words, something is done (like betting, giving a promise,

²⁰ (Hansen, 2008, p. 652) See also (Fierke, 2007; Sylvester, 2007; Vuori, 2014)

²¹ It is also important to note that the objective of the article is not to revisit all of the flaws in either the logic of exception or the logic of routine, let alone to offer correctives to these limits.

naming a ship).”²² Speech acts do not simply describe an existing security situation; through their act or practice component, they actually (re)define a given issue as a security question. Adler & Pouliot’s recent proposal is similar. Following Foucault, they argue that “not only is language the conduit of meaning, which turns practices into the location and engine of social action, but it is itself an enactment or doing in the form of ‘discursive practices’ [...] discursive practices, thus, are socially meaningful speech acts, according to which saying is doing.”²³

Crucially, scholars from various camps all seem to agree that the securitisation process is first and foremost about security performance. Stressing a shared understanding of security performance opens the debate in two fruitful ways. First, it better connects the role of exceptionalist security discourses with contemporary security politics. The CoS’s premise (or threshold) that the securitisation process can only be initiated by a security speech act is flawed, both theoretically and empirically, and little has been gained so far by following this path. Ample evidence suggests that security speech acts are not the inescapable and exclusive initiators of the securitisation process. On some occasions, speech acts only seek to legitimize established security practices – even though these speech acts may be made under the umbrella of exception as if existing security practices were non-existent.

Second, it helps to mitigate the strong tendency of the logic of routine to picture the securitisation process as flat. Critical moments, in which agents step out of routinised practices and habitual boundaries to transcend the field of action, do exist in contemporary world politics. On some occasions, political discourses represent a critical juncture or

²² (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 26)

²³ (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 16) See also (Epstein, 2008)

turning point that profoundly transforms security practices so that they are no longer routinised, unintentional and unreflective. As an advocate of the practice turn in IR points out, “changes in global political discourses [...] opened up the possibility for initiating new practices.”²⁴

Path dependence

In his study on institutions and the politics of the state, John Ikenberry characterizes political development as involving critical junctures *and* developmental pathways.²⁵ Critical junctures are commonly defined as “choice points that put countries (or other units) onto paths of development that track certain outcomes – as opposed to others – and that cannot be easily broken or reversed”²⁶. Developmental pathways suggest that a security architecture is deeply influenced by past trajectories and decisions, that the securitized understanding of an issue tends to get established at critical moments, and that, once set in motion, a securitisation pathway is difficult to alter.

The study of critical junctures is slowly making its way from comparative politics (particularly historical institutionalism and sociological institutionalism),²⁷ to IR scholarship, as exemplified by the recent article of Orfeo Fioretos.²⁸ In the subfield of securitisation research, I have highlighted the role of critical junctures in the securitisation of migration in Canada and France and the link between resilience and security studies.²⁹

²⁴ (Neumann, 2002, p. 648)

²⁵ (Ikenberry, 1994)

²⁶ (Mahoney, 2001, p. 7)

²⁷ (Capoccia & Keleman, 2007; Collier & Collier, 1991; Soifer, 2012)

²⁸ (Fioretos, 2011)

²⁹ (Bourbeau, 2011, 2013c, forthcoming)

However, as James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen³⁰ have recently noted, work on critical junctures tends to insufficiently problematize the process by which the outcomes of critical junctures are translated into lasting legacies. In other words, by neglecting the mechanisms of reproduction, scholarship on critical junctures fails to provide insight into the means by which security understanding and structures get “locked in.”

This is where the logic of routine is particularly useful. By emphasizing patterned, unreflective, and routinised security practices, this framework helps us to gain a better understanding of the dynamics by which the securitisation process is reproduced. Securitising agents often reproduce the same security logic across various domains. Agents carry their existing practices or habits forward when facing “new” situations. Hence, the securitisation process is reproduced and eventually “locked in.”

By thinking about securitisation in the context of this dual lineage of critical junctures and of recurrence, we allow for coexistence and complementarity between the reproduction and transformation processes, and hence open up the possibility of understanding the roles of both change and continuity in securitisation.

Hypothesizing the relationship

There are many different ways to think about the coexistence and complementarity between routinised security practices and exceptionalist security discourses. We might consider, for example, a sequential understanding of this relationship. For instance, we might postulate that security speech acts initiate the securitisation process, while security practices “lock in” the securitisation. Seen in this light, the logic of exception is useful in its ability to

³⁰ (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010)

pinpoint securitising discourses that spring up at particular points in time, while the logic of routine is able to underscore the reproductive mechanisms of securitisation once the process has been started. There are reasons to believe that advocates of the logic of exception would concur with such a view of securitisation.

Alternatively, we might pursue the opposite approach and propose that security practices are implemented before security discourses occur; in this case, the role of security discourses is to legitimize and institutionalize a pre-existing situation. Under this view, routinized security practices are understood to occur away from public attention, while security discourses are simply an after-the-fact public opinion strategy; ‘behind the scenes’ realities would thus be considered more telling than ‘in the spotlight’ theatricalities. This standpoint would sit neatly with the logic of routine.

Asking questions about which logic has primacy locks the scholarship into a sequential analysis of the securitization process. Arguing for the primacy of one logic over the other requires that the scholar be able to hold constant throughout one’s investigation several distinct components of the on-going and complex process of securitisation. The social world we live in is a world of feedback, in which the feasibility of postulating a clear demarcation between securitising discourses and practices is under fire. The gist of the argument presented here is that although the logics might constitute different stages of the securitization process, the logics interact in a complex and wider range of ways.³¹ To be sure, focusing on a single logic is sometimes a necessary analytical convenience when one is conducting a study. However, I posit that the question we really need to ask is not, “Which logic comes first?” but rather, “How do these two logics reinforce each other?”.

³¹ I thank one reviewer for highlighting this point.

Developing a deeper understanding of the securitisation process requires that we step beyond a sequential understanding. By searching for elements of both exceptionalist security discourses *and* routinized security practices across time and across cases, scholars will get a clearer, more comprehensive sense of the securitisation process.

The securitisation of migration in France

The construction of migration as a security threat in post-Cold War France provides a useful case study through which to illustrate the coexistence of both the logic of exception and the logic of routine. Passionate debates about the link (or lack thereof) between immigration and security concerns have taken place in France over the past several decades. The issue of securitized migration in France has thus received extensive analysis, leading to a rich availability of sources.³² As the next pages will show, both securitisation logics have come into play in the development of a French national stance on immigration, which supports the contention that the two logics can co-exist. Furthermore, the dominant discourse framing the French understanding of migration has shifted dramatically in the past thirty years. Previously viewed as a solution to economic and demographic problems, international migration has more recently begun to provoke apprehension and mistrust among French citizens and politicians, while at the same time on-going immigration has cast long-established patterns of socio-cultural identity into troubled waters in post-Cold War France. This social (re)construction of international migration as a security threat (rather than a solution to economic/demographic problems) provides fertile ground for an illustration of the coexistence of the logics of routine and exception.

³² See among many others, (Basaran, 2008; Bigo, 2002; Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002)

Building on previous contributions, I aim to show in this section that not only were the logic of exception and the logic of routine both at play in the process of securitising international migration in France during the post-Cold War period, but that security performances and critical junctures/path dependence were important factors in the move to recast security as the dominant lens through which international migration is understood. To pursue this claim, I focus on security practices concerned with migrant detention and on the discourses of political/media agents.³³ I show that, contra the logic of exception, migrant detention security practices were essential to the process of securitising international migrants in France. These practices were not only important for ‘locking in’ the process and reproducing securitisation mechanisms over time, but also played a vital role in initiating the securitisation process. On the other hand, by focusing on security speech acts, I show that these are not simply discourses or banal speeches, but that, contra the logic of routine, they constitute a crucial vector in the social construction of migration as a security issue.

There are two types of migrant detention facilities in France: waiting zones (officially called *zones d’attente*) and administrative holding centres (*centres de rétention administratif*). In both types of detention facilities, the procedures, codes of conduct, and apparatus of operation are strikingly similar to those of incarceration facilities – as if the

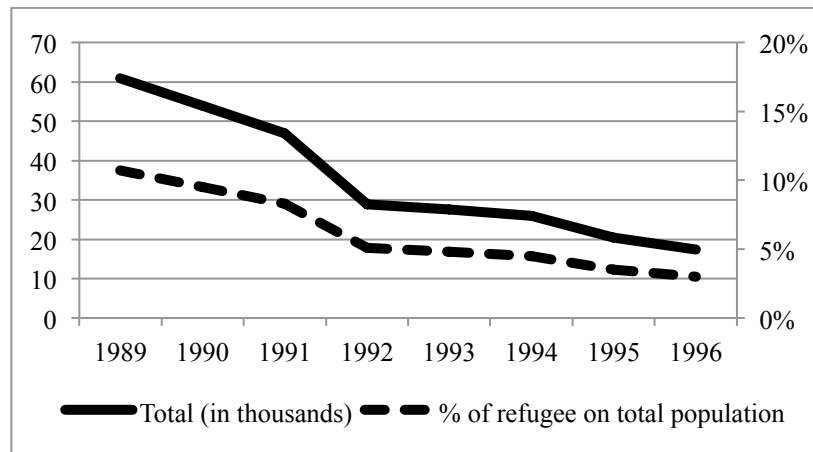
³³ It is important to point out that, although as part of this discussion I necessarily highlight the particular patterns of engagement of some agents with the securitisation process, the analysis in this section is not intended as a theoretical statement on who constitutes a securitising agent. Similarly, although this article focuses on *actors* involved in the securitisation of migration, my emphasis is not on the *authors* of securitisation. Relatedly, laying out a model of the interactions between non-governmental and governmental efforts to securitize migration is a much-needed research project. However, it is, sadly, beyond the scope of the present article.

“solution” to the issue of criminality were simply being (re)applied to a different “problem”.

The past decades have witnessed both the crystallisation of enforcement responses to migration control and the institutionalisation of detention as a security practice. In July 1992, the French Parliament passed the Quilès law, named after the then-Minister of the Interior, that recognised the existing practice of detaining migrants and which introduced a new Article (Article “35 quater”) to the *Ordonnance* of 1945 (which laid down the basic outline of immigration and naturalisation policy in post-war France). The Article understands detention centres as encompassing both spaces of departure and arrival, and spaces where people are controlled; these centres may be located in international airports, ports, or train stations. In the early 1990s, there were about eighty detention centres in France, in which a migrant could be legally detained for a maximum of twenty days.

The Quilès law was introduced in response to a considerable global surge in migratory movements that took place in the early 1990s. Worldwide, the number of refugees rose from nine million in 1984 to a peak of eighteen million in 1992; in France, this surge gave rise to all sorts of foreboding projections and scenarios, and seared in citizens’ minds the fearful image of uncontrollable, unstoppable waves of refugees. Actual numbers pointed in a different direction, however. In fact, as Graph 1 shows, the official number of refugee applications to France showed a significant decrease in the period from 1990 to 1996. In absolute terms, the total numbers of refugee applicants in France decreased from 61,000 to 29,000 between 1989 and 1992. The number of asylum seekers as a percentage of the total population of France decreased as well, from 10.7% in 1989 to 5.1% in 1992: a 50% reduction in only four years.

Graph 1. Asylum applications and percentage of asylum seekers in total accepted immigrants in France, 1989-1996.



Source: Institut nationale de la statistique et des études économiques, *Les immigrés en France*, Paris, République française, 2005.

In this case, not only were the actual numbers sidelined, but security also had to be performed. The worldwide surge in refugee numbers gave French securitising agents the opportunity, if they were so inclined, to present international migration as a security threat that required an urgent and strong national response.

One of the factors that have contributed to the discursive trend linking immigration to national security is the now-famous remarks made by Socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard in January 1990: “France is no longer an immigration country [...]. We cannot welcome all the misery of the world.”³⁴ His successor, Prime Minister Édith Cresson, surprised many fellow Socialists when she admitted in May 1991 that, “it is true, a feeling of insecurity, individual and collective, is strong.” In September of the same year, Cresson organised charter flights to ensure and speed up the deportation of unwanted migrants.³⁵

³⁴ (Rocard, 1990) Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

³⁵ (Cresson, 1991)

These strong statements concerning immigration were soon followed by security speech acts. In November 1991, Minister of the Interior Philippe Marchand (who served in office January 1991 to April 1992) argued that “uncontrolled migratory movement would be a threat against [France’s] fundamental national interest” and France’s security.³⁶ His successor, Paul Quilès (April 1992 to March 1993), further argued that irregular immigration was a security threat to France’s sovereignty and society. Quilès spoke of the threat of irregular migration on a number of occasions, arguing that regaining control over immigration was essential to maintaining social cohesion in France. Irregular and clandestine immigration were among his nine security targets, and had to be fought accordingly.³⁷

Media agents of the time, and particularly those working for centre-right/rightwing newspapers, were quick to present a security understanding of the issue. An analysis of all the editorials published by *Le Figaro*, one of the most important newspapers in France, which boasted a weekly circulation of two million copies during the early 1990s, reveals that the editorialists fiercely and repeatedly presented immigration as an existential security threat to France. The government was advised by *Le Figaro*’s editorialists to understand the fight against immigration as a “new form of war” if it wanted to be successful.³⁸ References to existential threat, emergency measures, and survival of the nation are found throughout the editorials of the time. As early as 1990, editorialists were arguing that “we must suspend immigration, or else anything is possible: the country is on the verge of burning

³⁶ (Marchand, 1991)

³⁷ (Quilès, 1992a, 1992b)

³⁸ (Marchetti, 1995)

fiercely,³⁹ and that immigration was “de-structuralising French society.”⁴⁰ Others contended that France’s national identity was profoundly at risk.⁴¹ Still others openly wondered whether France had a future as a nation, since “the wave will never stop growing.”⁴²

The victory of the Rally for the Republic in the legislative election of 1993 solidified the saliency of the migratory threat and set the tone for the securitisation of migration. The early 1990s was no ordinary period in the history of France, according to then-Prime Minister Édouard Balladur (March 1993 to May 1995). In fact, it was “the most difficult period since the war,” and one which necessitated a bridging of the traditional left/right political division in order to tackle effectively the problem. Balladur argued that, if measures to fight clandestine immigration were not implemented, then “what is happening elsewhere will happen in France: principles to which we are profoundly attached [will be put] in serious peril.”⁴³

The sense of an existential security threat was most spectacularly captured in the mandate of Charles Pasqua, Minister of the Interior in the Balladur government (March 1993 to May 1995). Pasqua pushed for the securitisation of clandestine/irregular migration in an unprecedented way, and formulated strong security speech acts in which urgency, fear of social explosion, and survival of the French nation were recurrent themes. In his first speech as Minister, Pasqua stated that “clandestine immigration is a new phenomenon that

³⁹ (Giesbert, 1990a)

⁴⁰ (Giesbert, 1990b)

⁴¹ (Lambroschini, 1992; Marchetti, 1993, 1995)

⁴² (Rioufol, 1996)

⁴³ (Balladur, 1993)

we urgently need to combat if we do not want to see our national cohesion explode.”⁴⁴ He reiterated this position in several speeches, sometimes speaking in terms of the loss of French identity,⁴⁵ sometimes highlighting the necessity to protect the “national community” from threatening “perils,”⁴⁶ and sometimes contending that irregular migration could lead to France’s social “explosion.”⁴⁷ The stakes were so high, according to Pasqua, that his bill, which reinforced repressive measures to impede access to French territory and limited the entry and residence of several categories of migrants, constituted the “last chance to save France’s integration model”.⁴⁸

While the securitisation process did involve key moments where actors stepped beyond accepted boundaries and transcended the field of routinised action, the routinised security practice of detaining migrants was undeniably a significant axiom in securitising migration. Indeed, concurrent with the emergence of exceptionalist security discourses in the context of international migration, marginal but numerous changes were also made to the security practice of detaining migrants, thereby ensuring a developmental pathway to the securitisation of migration. For example, in 1994, the location of detention centres in French territory was broadened to include inland train stations. In 1995, non-government organisations and other organisations, such as the UNHCR and the Red Cross, gained partial access to these detention centres. Three years later, access for these organisations was slightly increased, both in terms of the number of organisations allowed on site and in terms of the type/quality of access. The institutionalisation of migrant detention as a

⁴⁴ (Pasqua, 1993a)

⁴⁵ (Pasqua, 1993d)

⁴⁶ (Pasqua, 1993c)

⁴⁷ (Pasqua, 1993b)

⁴⁸ Charles Pasqua, *Intervention de M. Charles Pasqua, Ministre de l'Intérieur, à l'université d'été des jeunes RPR*, Paris: Ministère de l'Intérieur, 4 septembre, 1993.

security practice was also gradual: while there were about 3,900 migrant-detainees in 1992, there were 5,000 in 1996, and more than 7,000 in 1998. The establishment of this practice, which succeeded by generating a sense of insecurity, fear, and danger to which migrant detention was the proffered solution, was essential in ensuring a gradual intensification of mechanisms of security in France throughout the final years of the twentieth century

At the same time that these developments in security practices were helping to “lock in” the dominant French response to the issue of international migration, the discursive construction of immigration as an existential security threat was intensifying. An analysis of speeches by Pasqua’s successor as Minister of the Interior, Jean-Louis Debré (May 1995 to June 1997), reveals that security speech acts in the context of international migration were made repeatedly, and that Debré justified them on the basis of emergency, social cohesion and explosion, and survival of France’s collective identity. For instance, Debré argued that to give up in the face of the threat posed by migration to France, “would be too great a risk for our social cohesion [...] and for our nation, as irregular immigrants induce racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism”.⁴⁹ In another speech, he further contended that citizens rightly turn to the State to “ensure their security” and the “calmness of their society” in the face of “important and recurring” migration flows; as Minister of the Interior, he assured them, he intended to fulfill this mandate.⁵⁰

The return of a Socialist government to the National Assembly in June 1997 changed the discursive landscape on security issues. In contrast with the harsh rhetoric of the previous administration, the new Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, talked about international migration

⁴⁹ (Debré, 1996b)

⁵⁰ (Debré, 1996a)

in rather positive terms in his first Declaration of General Policy.⁵¹ What is important in the context of this study, however, is that, while it is possible to observe a significant softening in the tone of official discourses on migration during this period, the sedimentation of security practices was already well under way during Jospin's regime. In other words, despite the moderate tone of the speeches being presented publically, security practices were still being implemented and reinforced. This dichotomy again underscores the complementarity of the logic of exception and the logic of routine in the securitisation of migration. By 1997, the French understanding of international migration had already been locked into a particular "securitised" path of development that would prove difficult to break away from.

As an example of this new reality, consider a situation that arose in February 2001, when the *East Sea*, a rusting Cambodian-flagged freighter, was beached by its crew on the rocks near the tiny port of Boulouris on the French Riviera. The captain fled the boat, leaving it facing land, the propellers turned so that the boat could not return to sea. Crammed into the decrepit and stinking boat were 910 Turkish Kurd migrants – 250 men, 180 women, and 480 children, including 200 children under the age of five. The migrants were packed so tightly that they could not even sit down. After seven days at sea, dehydration and malnourishment were rampant.

This was the first case in recent years of a large contingent of immigrants attempting to enter France by ship. The grounding of the *East Sea* resulted in a groundswell of emotions across France, and could have easily induced bold security speech acts by key political agents to the effect that these incidents were threatening France's security and social

⁵¹ (Jospin, 1997)

cohesion. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister made no declaration to that effect. Instead, security practices were quietly put into place. Within hours after the breaching of the *East Sea*, French authorities transformed the military base of Fréjus near Cannes into an improvised detention centre. Turkish Kurd men, women and children were all sent in requisitioned buses to the 21st Marine Infantry Regiment base and detained as illegal immigrants. This was a powerful symbol of the state's attempt to securitise migration. It also brought back memories of Europe's treatment of Jewish refugees when, for three weeks in the summer of 1947, more than 4,500 Jews sat packed in sweltering heat aboard three British prison ships near Marseilles on the French Riviera.⁵²

The socialist government and the opposition joined forces in denouncing the newcomers as illegal immigrants. The wording of this denunciation was of crucial importance, since it had the consequence of disqualifying any claim of political asylum on the part of the immigrants: the *East Sea* passengers were publicly considered illegal rather than genuine refugees. All the would-be Turkish Kurd immigrants were held in a detention centre without any freedom of movement. The key message put forward by the socialist government of the time was that the security practice of detaining migrants on a military base was an appropriate and justified policy in the face of such migratory movements; again, this situation illustrates how exceptionalist discourse and routinized practices intersect profoundly with each other in the process of securitising migration.

The story of the *East Sea* also illustrates how the securitisation process is infused with security practices that ensure the reproduction of mechanisms of security to generate a sense of insecurity and threat. It suggests that Pouliot and other Bourdieusians in IR are

⁵² (Zertal, 1998)

right in arguing that people sometimes replicate behaviours through practice, and that an individual's *habitus* inclines or disposes each agent to perform or replicate certain practices.⁵³

In 2003, a new amendment to the *Ordonnance* of 1945 was passed, increasing the period of time that migrants could be held in detention from 20 to 32 days. This bill further established the centrality of the security practice of detention to the management of the migration-security nexus. In March 2010, yet another amendment to the *Ordonnance*, the *Immigration, Integration and Nationality* bill, gave the state the authority to create a detention centre wherever undocumented migrants were found in French territory – hence, anywhere in the country.

Further illustration of the coexistence of exceptionalist security speech acts and routinized security practices can be observed well into the 2000s. An analysis of the complete set of speeches given by President Nicolas Sarkozy, Ministers of the Interior Brice Hortefeux and Claude Guéant reveals that several security speech acts were delivered in France throughout the first decade of the 21st century, and that these security speech acts have contributed to the ongoing securitisation of migration. Nearly every observer of France's immigration policy has noted the security turn taken during the Sarkozy presidency (May 2007 to May 2012). The notion that France should have a better selection process for migrants was one of the key themes during the first years of Sarkozy's presidential mandate; the notion that irregular migration constitutes a security threat for France resurfaced thereafter.⁵⁴

⁵³ (Adler-Nissen, 2012; Bigo & Madsen, 2011; Pouliot, 2008; Williams, 2007)

⁵⁴ (Bonelli, 2010; Fassin, 2011; Helly, 2009)

However, it was not until the summer of 2010 that a critical rupture occurred to clearly put French immigration policy on the path toward stronger securitisation of migration. On July 30, 2010, about ten days after clashes between youth and police set several cars on fire and burned an annex of city hall in Grenoble, Sarkozy flew to the southeastern French city to make a fierce speech condemning violence. During this speech, he placed a large portion of the blame for this violence on insufficiently regulated immigration. Describing the events as being of “extreme severity,” Sarkozy said that he wanted “to revoke the French citizenship of immigrants who endanger the life of police officers or other public authorities, or who are convicted of crimes like polygamy and female circumcision.” French nationality is earned, he declared, and one must prove oneself worthy of it. “When you open fire on a member of the police force, you’re no longer worthy of being French.”

Not only did these events require from the government a firm response, but they also offered a unique opportunity to rethink France’s “policy on immigration and security,” according to the president. Sarkozy further declared that France was “suffering from fifty years of insufficiently regulated immigration that have led to a failure of integration.” “We have decided to declare a war against traffickers and criminals,” he insisted, “A war that will last several years and that goes well beyond the power of one government or one political party.”⁵⁵ Even though not all students of French immigration policy employ the concept of securitisation to describe the nature and implications of Sarkozy’s speech, they all agree that the main elements of the speech were urgency, existential threats, historical turning points, rupture, and the need for immediate action: elements at the heart of the logic of exception.

⁵⁵ (Sarkozy, 2010)

Following the events of late July 2010, Interior Minister Hortefeux (June 2009 to February 2011) pledged to begin enforcing new security measures. Criticism of these measures was brushed off with the claim, “We’re waging a national war against insecurity.”⁵⁶ When Guéant became Interior Minister in February 2011, he followed the same lines as his predecessor, giving himself two missions: “to improve security and to fight against irregular immigration.” He argued that France was confronted with a major challenge, and that the country needed to take all necessary measures to ensure that French society would not change, and that France “keeps its civilisation.”⁵⁷ Guéant declared that he agreed with Front National leader Marine Le Pen that there are too many immigrants already in France, and that accepting an additional 200,000 immigrants annually was excessive.⁵⁸ In a speech given in September 2011, Guéant argued that a coherent immigration policy was required for France’s cohesion, a policy that would include a strong and active fight against irregular migration.⁵⁹ He also contended that France was going through a major asylum-seekers crisis, which had already caused a severe abuse of the refugee determination system and that ultimately threatened to undermine France’s social cohesion. He advocated for the adoption of urgent and far-reaching measures, and exhorted France to stop turning a blind eye to the grave danger of “*communautarisme*.” In another speech, Guéant proclaimed that the government position was clear: those that France is generous enough to welcome within its society should “aim for assimilation.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ (Le Parisien, 2010)

⁵⁷ (Le Point, 2011)

⁵⁸ (Le Monde, 2011)

⁵⁹ (Guéant, 2011a)

⁶⁰ (Guéant, 2011b)

Echoes of these security speech acts can also be found in *Le Figaro* editorials from the same time. In 2008, migration flows were still being editorially characterised as “anarchic,” “massive,” and in need of a realistic immigration policy that highlights the importance of strengthening the frontiers of Europe.⁶¹ Editorialists during these years argue that European leaders should embrace Sarkozy’s policy of migration flow control, claiming that, if Europe and France do not act quickly and firmly, the social cohesion of all European societies will be in danger.⁶² According to several editorials, after more than thirty years of a general attitude of *laissez-faire* towards migration flow, France has reached a crucial point where national cohesion is on the line. Because national and social cohesion is at stake, the editorialists argue that the country should welcome Hortefeux’s proposal that prospective migrants be required to take a DNA tests to prove their link to relatives already living in France.⁶³

The institutionalisation, acceptability, and prevalence of detaining migrants as a security practice gained new heights in the 2000s. The number of migrant-detainees rose from an average of about 6,000 migrant-detainees per year in the 1990s, to more than 35,000 in 2000, to 45,000 in 2006, to reach a staggering 56,000 in 2011; this represents an increase of more than a thousand per cent, as Graph 2 illustrates.⁶⁴ Whereas the number of migrant-detainees represented less than four per cent of the total number of accepted immigrants in 1992, it represented nearly twenty-five per cent in 2009, and just short of thirty per cent in

⁶¹ (Rousselin, 2008)

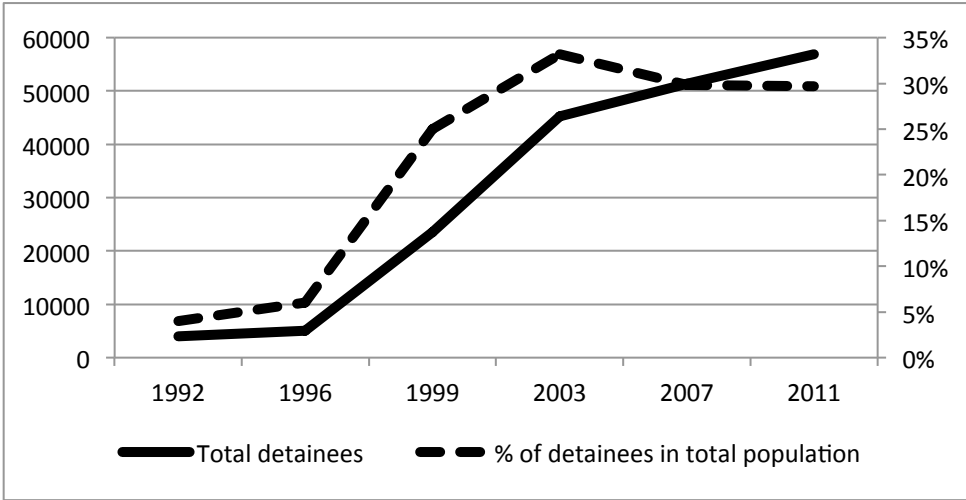
⁶² (Thréard, 2007a)

⁶³ (Thréard, 2007b)

⁶⁴ These numbers do not take into account detention centres in overseas departments, such as Mayotte and Guadeloupe.

2011. In other words, for every ten immigrants accepted in 2011, nearly three were detained.⁶⁵

Graph 2. Total Immigrant Detainees and Percentage of Immigrant Detainees vs. Total Accepted Immigrants in France, 1992-2011.



Source: Direction de la population et des migrations, *Rapport Annuel 2004*, Paris, République Française, 2005; Comité interministérielle du contrôle des migrations, *Rapport au Parlement. Les chiffres de la politique d'immigration et d'intégration*, Paris, République Française, 2011.

What these official numbers make clear is that migrant detention has come to be seen as a security practice that is available to the authorities to assist in their aim of controlling migration. This security practice is embedded in the state's regulations and norms and, as such, fully participates in the social construction of international migration as a security question in France. It also suggests that the dominant understanding of international migration in France has come to stress danger and threat to such an extent that the ideas, discourses, and practices of security have become embedded within French institutions in significant and profound ways.

⁶⁵ (Anafé, 2011; Cimade, 2012; DPM, 2005)

Conclusion

An analysis of social mechanisms involved in the securitisation of migration in France illustrates the multiple points of intersection between the logic of routine and the logic of exception and the usefulness of emphasising security performances and path-dependence/critical junctures. Considering these two logics in tandem allows for the emergence of a more complete picture of the social construction of migration as a threat to France's national security and social cohesion than either logic does when considered alone.

Securitisation research has become one of the most dynamic areas of research in security studies and International Relations in recent years. After twenty years of detailed empirical and theoretical research on the logics of exception and routine, there is a need to cut across these divides and to shift the discussion towards the factors that unite security scholars rather than those that separate us. This article suggests that employing one logic to the exclusion of the other leads to a partial and potentially deceptive account of the securitisation process. Rather than continuing an endless dispute between rival 'schools', I have sought to demonstrate that moving forward together can further enrich our understanding of the securitisation process and stimulate theoretical progress.

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