

The Implications of Securitizing the Environment in Apocalyptic Times

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Abstract

This paper uses an analysis of three securitizations of the environment to identify a gap within contemporary security studies made by the limitations of the existing framework of securitization theory. I argue there are two dominant mid-level securitizations of the environment which have taken place, one through a national security perspective, the other a human security perspective, both of which are being challenged by a newly emerging third macrosecuritization of the environment, an anthropogenic perspective. Using an analysis of all three securitizations, I illustrate that not all securitizations are created equal because once an issue is securitized it may vary within levels of extremity. The various levels of extremity are associated with the scale of securitization that has taken place (i.e. the larger the securitization, the higher the extremity). This analysis supports the argument that the current framework of securitization theory does not have the capacity to effectively analyze securitizations of a scale as large as the anthropogenic securitization of the environment. This paper will illustrate the need for a new framework within contemporary security studies that has the capacity to study issues of this scale as they become more predominant in the future as the effects of climate change and environmental degradation worsen.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|--|--------|
| Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff | CJCS |
| Chief of Naval Operations | CNO |
| Copenhagen School | CS |
| Department of Defence | DoD |
| Greenhouse Gases | GHG |
| Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change | IPCC |
| International Organization | IO |
| Secretary of Defence | SECDEF |
| Task Force on Climate Change | TFCC |
| United Nations | UN |
| United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization | UNESCO |
| United Nations Environmental Programme | UNEP |
| United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change | UNFCCC |
| United Nations General Assembly | UNGA |
| United Nations Security Council | UNSC |
| United States Agency for International Development | USAID |
| World Trade Organization | WTO |

Part I

Introduction

In recent years climate change and environmental degradation have become highly politicized and securitized. They have also generated extreme narratives brought forth by new actors, politicians and scholars. These narratives have driven the climate-security-nexus and drawn public attention towards the issue of climate change and environmental degradation. These narratives represent multiple securitization processes that have occurred in attempts to manage climate security problems from multiple perspectives, yet they have all failed to produce productive action as a result of their unique limitations.

In this paper I have two fundamental arguments, one empirical, the other theoretical. My empirical argument analyzes the multiple securitization processes on the issue of the environment. I argue there are two dominant mid-level securitizations of the environment which have taken place; however, both are being challenged by a newly emerging macrosecuritization. I analyze the two dominant securitizations of the environment, a national security perspective and a human security perspective; however, both of these securitizations have only been partly successful due to limitations. I then analyze the third and newly emerging securitization through an anthropogenic perspective, which challenges the two dominant securitizations by adopting an apocalyptic vision. This third securitization is limited by the framework of securitization theory itself, and the political and social problems of apocalypticism.

My theoretical argument analyzes the effectiveness of securitization theory. I argue that while securitization theory is insightful, it is too limited and at times counterproductive in attempting to manage larger scale securitizations, also known as macrosecuritizations. Further, I suggest that not all securitizations are equal because there are various levels of extremity within

securitized issues; I will illustrate this throughout my analysis of all three securitizations of the environment. I will also attempt to illustrate the importance of the development of a new framework within contemporary security studies that has the capacity to analyze securitized issues of a larger scale and greater extremity.

This paper has five main components starting with a methodology section that provides an overview of the Copenhagen School and Securitization Theory; scholarly critiques of the securitization framework; arguments in support of the framework based on sociological reasons; the securitization of the environment; and apocalypticism. Second, I analyze the two dominant securitizations of the environment which include the national security perspective and the human security perspective, both of which have only been partly successful due to limitations and constraints. Third, I identify an emerging macrosecuritization through an anthropogenic perspective and analyze how it challenges the other two dominant securitizations by adopting an apocalyptic narrative. Fourth, I assess the political and social problems of apocalypticism. Fifth, I analyze the effectiveness of securitization theory and the varying levels of extremity that can be produced by the securitization process within the category of securitized.

The importance of this paper is to attempt to fill a gap not only in climate security studies, but also within contemporary security studies. Within climate security studies, it has been agreed upon that there are two dominant mid-level securitizations of the environment; however, I will identify a third and newly emerging macrosecuritization which adopts apocalyptic tendencies and challenges the other two securitizations. I will analyze how this new securitization took form in response to the shortcomings and limitations of the dominant two securitizations. This paper will also explore the severe political and social implications of this new securitization by identifying and defining a set of problems within apocalypse theory.

I also make an original contribution to contemporary security studies by adding to the existing literature on securitization theory. I argue that an issue may be securitized to varying levels of extremity, the level of extremity is associated with the scale of securitization. I use this finding to further argue that the current framework of securitization theory does not have the capacity to effectively support analysis within securitizations as large as the emerging securitization of the environment. I propose there is a need for a new framework within contemporary security studies which allows for a more complete analysis of issues of this scale.

To preface, I would like to acknowledge a risk that I am choosing to accept in writing this paper. The topic of climate change and environmental degradation is the most contemporary topic within security studies at this time. In choosing to study this topic I have had to rely more heavily on my own analysis of non-academic sources, than I would have liked. In addition, I am using this analysis to make an original contribution to the existing literature on securitization theory in hopes of identifying an important gap in contemporary security studies. This means that throughout the paper the readers can expect to see a heavier than normal usage of grey literature due to the limited existing sources that supports the arguments in focus. I acknowledge that the reliance upon such sources could jeopardize the validity of my claims due to the fast-paced developments within such a current issue. However, I have chosen to take this risk because I believe it can make an important contribution to the future of contemporary security studies.

Part II- Methodology-Literature Review

The Copenhagen School: An Overview

In the early 1990's Securitization Theory was developed as a way to address a widening range of security questions following the end of the Cold War.¹ The theory was developed by the Copenhagen School (CS) and sought to expand the definition of traditional security to include a societal aspect to the way security was practiced and studied.² Securitization is defined as “an intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with saliency sufficient to have a substantial political effect”.³ The CS was developed around core findings by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde and others. They studied the way that the speech act plays an important role in the securitization process and incorporates social factors into the practice of security.

In addition to their findings on the importance of language, they also identified three key components to an effective securitization process which include the following: (1) *referent objects*, which are things or persons who seem to be affected by some kind of existential threat and still have a legitimate claim to survival; (2) *securitizing actors*, which are actors who declare the referent object as being existentially threatened; and (3) *functional actors*, who are actors that affect the dynamics of a sector, they are neither the referent object or securitizing actor, yet still influential in the securitization decision.⁴ The securitizing actor is an individual who has some kind of legitimacy, typically through an institution (i.e. the government) who recognizes a referent object and through the speech act declares an existential threat, this is also known as a securitizing move.⁵ The securitizing move must be crafted carefully through a subtle escalation

¹ Thierry Balzacq, *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 57.

² Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 24.

³ Ibid. 25

⁴ Ibid. 36

⁵ Ibid. 25

of words, images, or actions and declared by a trusted actor otherwise the process will likely fail. This process must be fully accepted by the audience in order to form a successful securitization and move forward with emergency measures.⁶

The securitization process is carefully crafted with many steps that must be taken before being considered a successful securitization process; however, Buzan, Waever, and Wilde have identified three critical components of a successful securitization. The three components include existential threats, emergency action, and effects on interunit relations by breaking free of the rules.⁷ It is important to note that in all cases, a successful securitization has the distinguishing feature of a claim that if the issue is not handled immediately and not understood by all actors as being a priority for survival it will be too late and civilization may cease to exist.⁸

As aforementioned, the speech act is critical to securitization theory as it is required to begin the process. It involves both the actor and the object, and more importantly, the labelling as an existential threat. Speech is a unique element of the securitization process in that it assumes all individuals are active agents who can practice security. As Buzan, Waever, and Wilde suggest, speech enables any individual to engage in the practice of security, meaning that it is no longer just about states and that individuals can practice as well.⁹

New studies have shown that the speech act is about how an issue is communicated, and since we communicate in more ways than speech, it is also important to understand the ways in which visuals such as images play a role in the intensification of the securitization process. Both words and visuals can create a sense of unease, estrangement, and securitization, as well as feelings of fear, anxiety, and risk. This is particularly relevant in the issue of climate change and

⁶ Balzacq, *Securitization Theory*, 58-59.

⁷ Buzan, Waever, Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 26.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

environmental degradation, given that so many of the securitizing factors recently involved have been through the use of imagery (i.e. *An Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore).

Buzan, Waever and Wilde have suggested that a successful speech act has two main components: (1) *the social capital of the securitizing actor*, if the individual is in a position of power they will be more successful; (2) *the element of threat*, if the object they are securing is related to threats it will more easily be securitized.¹⁰ Regardless, it is important to note, that the speech act is not instant; it is a slow process which allows a securitizing actor to make a series of intensifying social acts that are both subtle and contextual and will make the audience believe that something is an issue.

Securitization—The Critique

While there have been many authors who praise securitization theory, there have also been some, such as Thierry Balzacq, Jef Huysmans, and Michael Williams who have recognized the dangerous implications of the theory. There are four dominant critiques within the scholarly literature: (1) The narrow focus of the speech act, (2) the vague role of the audience, (3) the negative response which can escalate to dangerous outcomes, and (4) the practicing of security is predominantly exclusive to the domain of the holders of institutionalized security actors.

One of the most predominant issues in securitization theory is its narrow focus of the speech act. This is problematic given that political communication is becoming increasingly embedded in other forms of communication such as televisual images.¹¹ Today people are becoming increasingly dependent on communicating through social media outlets and televisual

¹⁰ Ibid. 32-33

¹¹ Michael C. Williams, "Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2003): 512.

images. Due to securitization theory's narrow focus on linguistics and the speech act, it fails to attempt to further understand contemporary forms of political communication and limits the kinds of acts that can further contribute to the securitization processes.¹²

Authors including Thierry Balzacq, and Ole Waever have suggested that the weakest aspect of securitization theory is the vague role of the audience.¹³ The audience is defined by Buzan, Waever, and Wilde as those groups that “the securitizing act attempts to convince to accept exceptional procedures because of the specific security nature of some issues”.¹⁴ The ill-defined role of the audience has led to massive amounts of speculation amongst scholars since it is such a fundamental factor within securitization theory.¹⁵ Many scholars such as Stritzel, McDonald, and Balzacq have critiqued this aspect of the theory in great detail. Both Stritzel and Balzacq suggest there are different kinds of audiences to whom different types of securitizations appeal.¹⁶ This seems to be one of the most popular amendments to the framework by scholars but leaves questions about relevant audiences, implications of differing audience opinions, and length of audience persuasion time.¹⁷

Various scholars have also emphasized that the securitization process comes with risks and implications, particularly those that pertain to the severity of escalation and the irreversibility of the process itself. To elaborate on this, Huysmans, Behnke, and Williams have all identified a strong influence of Carl Schmitt within Securitization Theory. The primary influences identified are Carl Schmitt's politics being generally characterized by enmity and exclusion; furthermore, allowing use of exceptional practices to protect from threats from others to the central political

¹² Ibid. 525.

¹³ Balzacq, *Securitization Theory*, 57.

¹⁴ Buzan, Waever, Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 41.

¹⁵ Balzacq, *Securitization Theory*, 58.

¹⁶ Ibid. 61

¹⁷ Holger Stritzel, “Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond,” *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 3 (2007): 363.

life.¹⁸ The purpose of drawing these connections is to warn of the potential authoritarian nature that follows a similar path. For instance, one of the implications of securitization theory is that oftentimes decision makers involved in the process are passionately invested and willing to act in the most extreme ways, including mortal conflict to securitize the issue at hand.¹⁹ Some authors such as Claudia Aradau and Andreas Behnke have noted that because of the highly political aspect entrenched in security, it is challenging to desecuritize an issue because of the inability to keep security and emergency politics separate.²⁰ This critique illustrates that securitization should not be considered a tool to advance political agendas, as it is a process that comes with extensive risks and considerations if not treated carefully.

The fourth critique of securitization theory is that practicing security requires a certain level of power. This suggests that securitization and the practice of security is predominantly exclusive to the domain of institutionalized security actors. However, in my analysis I show that through the adoption of apocalyptic narratives weak security actors are able to gain influence and power as well, and use that to challenge other powerful security actors on an issue. For example, Greta Thunberg has gained massive influence and power following the adoption of an apocalyptic rhetoric on climate change and environmental degradation. She has then used her influence and messaging to challenge political leaders and IOs on their lack of productive action towards climate change.

Despite these critiques, securitization theory can help us to understand deeper underlying societal issues within security problems. The sociological aspect of securitization theory is

¹⁸ Matt McDonald, "The Failed Securitization of Climate Change in Australia," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 4 (2012): 578.

¹⁹ Williams, "Words, Images, Enemies," 518.

²⁰ Andreas Behnke, "No Way out: Desecuritization, Emancipation and the Eternal Return of the Political -- a Reply to Aradau," *Journal of International Relations and Development; London* 9, no. 1 (2006): 62.; Claudia Aradau, "Security and the Democratic Scene: Desecuritization and Emancipation," *Journal of International Relations and Development; London* 7, no. 4 (2004): 389.

particularly helpful in analyzing the securitization processes illustrated in this paper. This is because I look at various levels of extreme narratives and imaginaries as forms of securitization and attempts by securitizing actors to mobilize audiences and gain power to manage the issue of climate change and environmental degradation.

Securitization Theory and Sociological Importance

Despite its limitations, securitization theory is unique in that it brings in a sociological perspective to classical security issues by requiring a number of different interactions across actors into the process and taking into consideration cultural, societal and political factors.²¹ Many scholars have analyzed the importance of the utilization of a sociological framework within securitization theory, particularly Balzacq, Bigo, Salter, and Bourbeau.²² Balzacq's "The 'Essence' of Securitization: Theory, Ideal Type, and a Sociological Science of Security" is particularly compelling in identifying the role that sociology plays in contemporary security studies. He uses a model that highlights case studies on the audience, the relation between politics and security, and the topic of responsibility within the security process; and then goes further by analyzing the sociological role within ontology and epistemology.²³ Ontology can help us to further understand how individuals can use a rational explanation as to why a security issue can or may be described as a threat to themselves or their community, which in some cases is

²¹ Thierry Balzacq, "The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context," *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 2 (2005): 174.

²² Thierry Balzacq, "The 'Essence' of Securitization: Theory, Ideal Type, and a Sociological Science of Security," *International Relations* 29, no. 1 (2015): 108; For reference see, Didier Bigo, "Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 27, no.1 (2002): 63-92; Mark B. Salter, "Securitization and Desecuritization: A Dramaturgical Analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 11, no. 4 (2008): 321-349; Philippe Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration: A Study of Movement and Order*, (London: Routledge, 2011).

²³ Balzacq, "The 'Essence' of Securitization: Theory, Ideal Type, and a Sociological Science of Security," 108.

largely different than the post-structuralist view of securitization theory.²⁴ Furthermore, through epistemology we can analyze the construction of those perceived threats and their respective consequences within a society.²⁵

Balzacq argues that there are core components of the sociological perspective that securitization theory can offer. These components include: (1) the ability to breakdown the understanding of the actors involved by analyzing the role of the audience and the social forms of communications they are exposed to; (2) the ability to breakdown the deontic power relation that is present within the role and relations of politics and security; (3) the understanding of the shared agency and responsibility as a participant of the securitization process.

As we know, the role of the audience is one of the most controversial aspects of securitization theory, but it plays a unique role when utilizing a sociological perspective within the analytical framework. This is because the securitizing acts intended to persuade audiences within the process are based largely in social mechanisms such as communications through persuasion, narratives, and images.²⁶ This factor will play a particularly important role within the analysis of the securitization of climate change and environmental degradation, as it is important to understand what mechanisms were used and why they were effective or not.

While securitization is often critiqued for reinforcing deep power constructs, Balzacq argues that the sociological perspective can actually help us to understand the social contract granted to the securitizing actor in a more in-depth way.²⁷ In addition, it also challenges the idea that we need to attempt to study security and politics separately, as this perspective allows us to examine the varying relation in degrees rather than absoluteness, meaning that with a

²⁴ Ibid. 109

²⁵ Ibid. 10

²⁶ Ibid. 106

²⁷ Ibid. 107

sociological and philosophical perspective we have the opportunity to see how both security and politics are constantly interacting with one another in different ways.²⁸

Finally, Balzacq explains how a sociological perspective allows us to further understand the responsibility that is present when being an actor or a member of the audience within the securitization process. He suggests that through sociology, philosophy, and psychology we can understand the shared agency of securitizing an issue.²⁹ This is key, because within the securitization process there are many ethical questions, particularly when something goes wrong. Having shared agency and responsibility means that when something goes wrong we can understand how and to what extent both the audience and the securitizing actor are to blame.³⁰

The Securitization of the Environment

The roots of the discourse that initiated the securitization of the environment can be traced back to the 1990's.³¹ In the 1990's, there was a large debate about the deepening and widening of the definition of security in a post-Cold War era.³² In addition, the UN was also searching for a post-Cold War direction, they held a series of high-profile meetings and debates on a number of issues that ranged from the environment to gender equality.³³ As a result, they saw a number of multilateral agreements that created a new international agenda which competed with the traditional security agenda by challenging crucial issues of the day.³⁴ These discussions and transformations led to the climate-security-nexus which eventually transpired to

²⁸ Ibid. 108

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. 109

³¹ Delf Rothe, *Securitizing Global Warming: A Climate of Complexity* (London: Routledge, 2015), 83.

³² Ibid. 84

³³ Johannes Stripple, *Climate Change after the International: Rethinking Security, Territory and Authority* (Lund: Department of Political Science, Lund University, 2005).

³⁴ Ibid. 42

the 2007 debates and reports on climate change; for this reason 2007 is the year commonly associated with the beginning of the securitization of the environment.³⁵ Two major events happened in 2007, the first was an unprecedented debate that was held at the UNSC on the subjects of climate change, energy supplies and security.³⁶ The debate brought together over fifty countries and many mixed feelings, but ultimately the majority of attendees agreed that climate change presented a threat to international security and the security council was an appropriate forum to discuss the issue.³⁷ In addition, the 2007 *Sudan Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment* report was released by UNEP and found that the conflict in Darfur was in part driven by climate change and environmental degradation.³⁸ Both instances in the 1990's and 2007 brought in the use of security language to the climate debate; as Huysmans suggests, bringing in security language transforms the method of dealing with an issue—many argue this is how the securitization of climate change was created, and in some cases, why it has been so ineffective.³⁹

Maria Julia Trombetta argues that securitizing the environment through the use of security language initially appeared to be a good idea to alarm traditional security analysts about the issues that truly matter; as well as to increase the relevance of the environmental problems within the political agenda.⁴⁰ However, Deudney suggests that this is problematic as it evokes a set of confrontational practices associated with the state and the military which should at all costs be kept apart from the environmental debate.⁴¹ The use of security language is an important part

³⁵ Rothe, *Securitizing Global Warming*, 83.

³⁶ Oli Brown, Anne Hammill, and Robert Mcleman, "Climate Change as the 'New' Security Threat: Implications for Africa," *International Affairs* 83, no. 6 (2007): 1142.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ United Nations Environment Programme, *Sudan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment* (Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Environment Programme, 2007), 329.

³⁹ Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (Florence: Routledge, 2006), 16.

⁴⁰ Maria Julia Trombetta, "Environmental Security and Climate Change: Analysing the Discourse," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 21, no. 4 (2008): 586.

⁴¹ Daniel Deudney, "The Case Against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 19, no. 3 (1990).

of the dominant environmental security debate, because some studies frame the focus of the issue through a human security perspective and others through a national security perspective. The lack of consistency is problematic because differing conceptualizations of security and multiple securitization processes have led to different types of recommendations to climate change.⁴² As figure 1 shows, this has led to a debate between scholars who believe climate change should be a security issue and those who believe it should not. Of the scholars who believe it should be a security issue there are sub-categories, those who believe it is a human security issue, and those who believe it is a national security issue.⁴³ The differing conceptualizations and processes to securitize the environment have led to various problems, primarily ineffective responses that lack agreement amongst scholars, politicians, and the general public. However, this can also be linked to the reason why the securitization of climate change and environmental degradation passed—because it was understood as not only a human security issue, but also a national security issue.⁴⁴

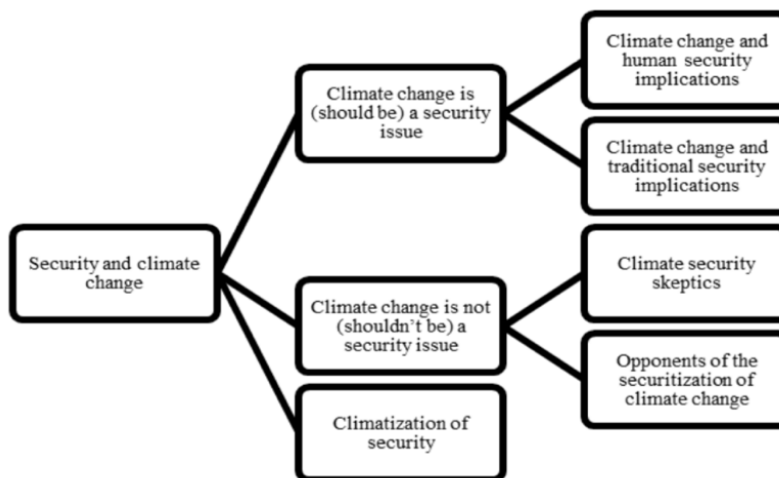


Figure 1. Illustrates the debate within academic literature on climate change and environmental degradation and security. *Source: Climate Change and Security: Different Perceptions, Different Approaches, Basar Baysal and Uluc Karakas.*⁴⁵

⁴² Michael Brzoska, “The Securitization of Climate Change and the Power of Conceptions of Security,” *Security and Peace* 27, no. 3 (2009): 137.

⁴³ Basar Baysal, and Uluc Karakas “Climate Change and Security: Different Perceptions, Different Approaches,” *International Relations* 14, no. 54 (2017): 28.

⁴⁴Ibid. 33

⁴⁵ Ibid. 22

Securitizing climate change and environmental degradation through a human security perspective and a national security perspective are related, as the effects of climate change threaten human security which can lead to conflict that requires national security emergency measures. The human security perspective is concerned with the implications of climate change that threaten access to fundamental human rights such as food security, clean drinking water, shelter, and safety.⁴⁶ Whereas, the national security perspective is highly state-centric with the belief that negative effects of climate change such as mass eco-migration, the spread of terrorism, and the insurgence of climate conflict across the globe greatly threaten state sovereignty.⁴⁷ The predominant way to study this issue has been through the national security perspective. This is because most academics predict that climate change will lead to violent conflict, military intervention, migration, increased terrorism, and the deterioration of relations among major powers within the international community.⁴⁸ However, many scholars including Barnett and Adger, argue that the connection drawn between climate change and conflict is problematic and not entirely backed by conclusive evidence.⁴⁹

Typically, climate change threatens human security before national security. According to the UN, human security identifies and attempts to protect those who are vulnerable to natural disasters, violent conflicts, persistent poverty, epidemics, and economic downturns.⁵⁰ In many cases, scholars believe that prolonged limited access to human security can eventually lead to conflict. For example, if a community experiences a water shortage for a lengthy amount of time, individuals may become possessive and develop violent attitudes over water leading to national

⁴⁶ Ibid. 28

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Brzoska, "The Securitization of Climate Change and the Power of Conceptions of Security", 138.

⁴⁹ Jon Barnett and W. Neil Adger, "Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict," *Political Geography* 26, no. 6 (2007): 640-643.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

security threats such as acts of violence and terror. For this reason, some security actors believe it is appropriate to respond to all kinds of environmental threats with traditional security measures (i.e. increased military intervention and the use of security forums). One of the fears most scholars have is that the response to climate change and environmental degradation being securitized as a national security issue is to increase military action, which would lead to other issues such as western abuse of power and a wasteful diversion of resources.⁵¹

There is also a group of scholars who believe climate change and environmental degradation should not be considered a security issue at all. Laura Ningelen and Giovanni Bettini have particularly insightful arguments on this side of the debate. Ningelen believes the securitization of the environment is problematic because it creates a worst-case scenario problem in which mitigation measures are seldom provided.⁵² She argues that the securitization of climate change is only useful as an awareness measure and does not produce effective narratives that promote both mitigation and adaptation.⁵³ Similarly, Bettini concurs that the securitization of climate change and environmental degradation is both unnecessary and ineffective.⁵⁴ He argues that through extreme use of language and visuals in popularized films and the media, the securitization process has fabricated extreme terminology designed to mobilize fear and urgency; however, this went too far and has caused ineffective mitigation responses.⁵⁵ This kind of imagery and terminology is common in the anthropogenic securitization that adopts apocalyptic narratives and promotes fear and anxiety within the public. It should also be noted that the

⁵¹ Brzoska, "The Securitization of Climate Change and the Power of Conceptions of Security", 138.

⁵² Laura Ningelen, "The Depiction of Climate Change as a Threat Multiplier and How It Hinders Action," E-International Relations Students, May 11, 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/05/11/the-depiction-of-climate-change-as-a-threat-multiplier-and-how-it-hinders-action/>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Giovanni Bettini, "Climate Barbarians at the Gate? A Critique of Apocalyptic Narratives on 'Climate Refugees,'" *Geoforum* 45, (2013): 68.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 65.

dangers of securitizing an issue to such a heightened level of extremity is that it may go too far and lead to a counterproductive response from security institutions.

The Apocalypse

In discussing the emerging macrosecuritization of the environment which adopts apocalyptic tendencies, it is pertinent to preface with a clear definition of apocalypse as it applies to contemporary security studies and the environment. I use the concept of apocalypse throughout this paper to demonstrate a level of extremity within securitized issues. I apply the term in the discussion about the emerging anthropogenic securitization of the environment which adopts apocalyptic tendencies and narratives.

Traditionally, apocalypticism was used within Old Testament studies, but in recent years it has been used in contemporary security studies as well.⁵⁶ In a contemporary security setting, apocalypticism is defined by Hall as “a term which encompasses a broad range of beliefs, actions and social processes centred on cultural disjunctures concerned with the end of the world”.⁵⁷ However, McNeish notes that in contemporary studies, apocalypse can be less about the end of the world and more about a current and imminent crisis that requires some form of revolution to inspire immediate and radical change.⁵⁸ Allison McQueen refers to this same phenomenon as a “prospective catastrophe”.⁵⁹

To support my understanding of apocalypticism, I rely a great deal on Alison McQueen’s *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times*. McQueen studies apocalypticism by drawing

⁵⁶ Jesper Høgenhaven, “Something Borrowed, Something New? Reflections on Apocalypticism and Prophecy in the Old Testament,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 31, no. 1 (2017): 1.

⁵⁷ John R. Hall, “Apocalypse in the Long Run: Reflections on Huge Comparisons in the Study of Modernity,” *Sociological Research Online* 14, no. 5 (2009): 124.

⁵⁸ Wallace McNeish, “From Revelation to Revolution: Apocalypticism in Green Politics,” *Environmental Politics* 26, no. 6 (2017): 1036.

⁵⁹ Alison McQueen, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times*, (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 198.

relationships between its roots in Judaeo-Christian tradition and contemporary examples of apocalypse. She is particularly concerned with how apocalypticism can be both politically seductive, yet responsible for the manifestation of uncontrollable political instability. She discusses the notion of apocalypticism and “the imaginary”, this is a concept which aids in making sense of things that previously seemed incomprehensible and offers a way to respond to such extraordinary revelations (i.e. the end of the world).⁶⁰ The imaginary is part of the stock of narratives, myths, and images which help us make sense of our world when combined.⁶¹ The use of apocalyptic narratives are captivating due to terrifying images of cruelty, injustice, and doom.⁶² The imaginary involves the way ordinary people imagine their social surroundings as a whole due to the influence of images and stories.⁶³ Since apocalyptic narratives are particularly extreme they have a large influence on individuals’ perception of their surroundings as a whole.

McQueen analyzes the ways in which apocalypticism has been utilized across history, she defines apocalypticism as:

“an imminent and cataclysmic end to the known world, along with its attendant evils; it is a rupture in the apparent temporal continuity of history, a revelatory moment around which the past is given meaning and a radically new future is announced.”⁶⁴

To breakdown her definition, one may speculate that the end of the world is in fact always imminent. However, as it relates to this paper, McQueen suggests that those who expect the world will end in environmental devastation tend to believe that this end will be much sooner

⁶⁰ Ibid. 62

⁶¹ Ibid. 52

⁶² Ibid. 53

⁶³ Ibid. 53

⁶⁴ Ibid. 56

than anticipated.⁶⁵ In terms of cataclysmic imagery that denotes the end of the world, this suggests that apocalypticism brings about forms of creative destruction in preparation for building the foundations of a new world.⁶⁶ The rupture she suggests is fairly straightforward, by meaning that apocalypse signifies the end of time and therefore the end of politics and any known order. She also discusses how apocalypticism can be characterized as revelatory, meaning that when utilized, it will present many signs of the end.

McQueen argues that apocalypticism is politically seductive, but usually results in political instability for three primary reasons: (1) the apocalyptic imaginary is hostile to current established political order, (2) the apocalyptic imaginary makes the crises of the day intelligible by imposing such coherent narratives on them, and (3) the apocalyptic imaginary holds out the seductive promise that difference, disagreement, and conflict can be eliminated, yet promises the end of politics instead.⁶⁷

Based on McQueen's insightful definition, I argue that climate change is a contemporary example of something that has not only been securitized but has in some cases been escalated and framed as an issue that adopts apocalyptic tendencies, particularly through the anthropogenic perspective. In the case of climate change and environmental degradation, a number of symbols and images have been presented such as rising temperatures, species extinction, economic crises, and state conflicts to illustrate that environmental issues have been escalated to apocalyptic levels of extremity.⁶⁸ This is recognized when analyzing the language around environmental

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 57

⁶⁷ Ibid. 193

⁶⁸ Ibid. 58

issues, which has recently become increasingly extreme as it is intended to cause a sense of alarm within ordinary individuals so they become aware of an impending planetary apocalypse.⁶⁹

I express some anxieties about the intensification and escalation of climate change to an apocalyptic extremity throughout this paper because of the problems associated with apocalyptic strategies, which may lead to political and societal challenges that further constrain productive action towards the issue. In addition, creating such heightened fears about environmental apocalypse could lead to distraction rather than conceptualizing alternative endings that could bring about important ideas such as adaptation or prevention measures.

Apocalypse is the furthest end of the spectrum of extremity within securitized issues. In theory, this should warrant the most successful and efficient responses, yet in practice it does not. Therefore, I believe that studying the use of apocalyptic narratives in the emerging macrosecuritization of the environment will not only help to further understand the problems within securitization theory, but also those of apocalyptic strategies.

Part III- The Two Dominant Securitizations

Before presenting my empirical and theoretical arguments, I will discuss each of the three securitizations of the environment starting with the two dominant perspectives—national security and human security. I will use my analysis of all the securitizations later to support both my empirical and theoretical arguments.

⁶⁹ McNeish, “From Revelation to Revolution,” 1036.

The Securitization of the Environment Through a National Security Perspective

The national security perspective is the first of the two dominant securitizations of the environment. This securitization is linked to the human security perspective because the relevant actors believe climate change is a sustainability problem which threatens human security and humanitarian development; however, they also believe that it threatens international peace and security and therefore deserves the response of a national security issue.

The securitization of the environment through the national security perspective is a recent development. During the debates that were held at the UNGA and the UNSC in 2007, certain G7 countries expressed an interest in debating climate change through security forums.⁷⁰ They argued climate change should be securitized because it would galvanize political action in dealing with imminent threats resulting from climate change and environmental degradation.⁷¹

Former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon also played a large role in securitizing the environment through a national security perspective. He viewed climate change as a serious threat that would challenge peace and security on many levels. He envisioned many scenarios in which climate change would threaten national security and required immediate action from the international community, such as:

- The economic costs of changing weather patterns such as floods and droughts, which would require the compensation of lost land and could potentially lead to the polarization of society and marginalization of communities. This could lead to weakened institutional capacity to resolve conflict through peaceful and democratic measures and safeguard basic human rights.
- Develop an increased risk of humanitarian emergencies due to extreme weather events which could lead to unwanted displacement of individuals.
- Increased migration driven by factors such as climate change could deepen tension and regional conflict, particularly where there are already large numbers of displaced persons and refugees.

⁷⁰ Michael Durant Thomas, *The Securitization of Climate Change: Australian and United States' Military Responses (2003 - 2013)* (Canberra: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 58.

⁷¹ Ibid.

- Scarce resources could transform existing peaceful competition into violent situations.
- Further limited or threatened access to energy as a powerful driver of conflict, extremism, and terror.⁷²

To reiterate, the accepted securitization of the environment through a national security perspective is concerned with the way climate change can threaten to create or exacerbate weakened institutional capacity, increased levels of migration, and the spread of terrorism. The national security perspective views climate change as an emergency and securitizes through the use of extreme language; however, it is important to distinguish that this securitization is a manageable threat when responded to with the use of effective security institutions and the correct emergency measures because it is a narrow perspective of a larger issue. The major states who have accepted this securitization of the environment include Canada, the United States, Germany, Japan, and Australia. These states have responded by bringing the climate change debate to security forums such as the UNSC.⁷³ Within this forum it was agreed upon that if possible, each respective actor would also involve their own regional and national security actors in climate change. Most notably, the US has involved a number of major security actors to respond to climate change and environmental degradation such as the DoD, SECDEF, CJCS, the National Intelligence Council, Commander of Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, USAID, CNO, TFCC, and many others.⁷⁴ The idea of involving military actors is to establish a greater military presence that is well adapted through climate policy within areas particularly vulnerable to climate conflicts. This means that the military would be more effective in developing strategic planning in conflict zones due to improved infrastructure of military bases

⁷² Derek S. Reveron and Kathleen A. Mahoney-Norris, "Environmental Security," in *Human and National Security: Understanding Transnational Challenges*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 125.

⁷³ Thomas, *The Securitization of Climate Change*, 58.

⁷⁴ Gregg Badichek, "The Threat Divider: Expanding the Role of the Military in Climate Change Adaptation Student Notes," *Columbia Journal of Environmental Law* 41, no. 1 (2016), 164.

built to withstand climate events, more relevant climate training, as well as having the ability to act as first responders during catastrophic climate events.⁷⁵

An example of the securitization of the environment through the national security perspective is the situation in Darfur. It has been highly securitized by the member states of the UNSC and former UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon.⁷⁶ In this scenario, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation led to worsened national security problems in Darfur, such as increased levels of violence. In response, the relevant actors increased traditional military measures and led discussions and updates on the situation in security forums.

While the national security perspective within the securitization of the environment is persuasive due to a number of conflict-oriented outcomes, there are a number of limitations associated within this securitization. These limitations include: (1) the misconception of causality between climate events and conflict, (2) military intervention can undermine peaceful cooperation in times of crisis and lead to further destabilization and exacerbate the severity of the conflict, and (3) the questionability of the appropriateness of a military response to climate related threats.

The first limitation is the misconception that climate change can cause violent conflict. Historically, scholars have blamed climate change for being the root cause of violent conflicts, particularly in the case of Darfur, but also Syria, Yemen, and Somalia.⁷⁷ However, the social science community has failed to present proof and hard evidence that climate change can result in violence.⁷⁸ Additionally, in 2014, the IPCC reported that it is far more likely that climate

⁷⁵ Thomas, *The Securitization of Climate Change*, 259.

⁷⁶ Ban Ki-Moon, "A Climate Culprit in Darfur," United Nations Secretary-General, June 16, 2007, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/articles/2007-06-16/climate-culprit-darfur>.

⁷⁷ John Vidal, "Is Climate Change Responsible for the Conflicts We're Seeing around the World Today?," *Eco-Business*, October 17, 2019, <http://www.eco-business.com/opinion/is-climate-change-responsible-for-the-conflicts-were-seeing-around-the-world-today/>.

⁷⁸ Ningelgen, "The Depiction of Climate Change as a Threat Multiplier and How It Hinders Action."

change and environmental degradation plays a role as a threat multiplier instead, which escalates other factors that are sensitive to climate change such as poor socio-economic conditions, brutal government regimes, and violence.⁷⁹ This effect becomes clear when dissecting the drought in Darfur and comparing it to the one in Northern Nigeria, which suffered similar environmental conditions but no conflict as a result.⁸⁰ This comparison shows that climate change plays an important role in exacerbating conflicts, but is seldom the root cause.

The second limitation is that the use of military intervention in climate related conflicts can undermine the possibility that communities will come together during times of crisis and reduce the severity of potential for conflict.⁸¹ When military troops are deployed to fragile states or conflict prone regions they can at times further destabilize a situation by helping to establish violent behaviour that otherwise may not have been present.⁸² In this sense, the securitization of the environment through a national security perspective is limited in its capacity to evaluate the severity of a situation and the necessity of a military response as it always assumes a worst case scenario situation. This limitation could lead to unfavourable consequences such as further destabilization of fragile states.

The third limitation is the overall appropriateness of a military response to climate change. When global military expenditure rises to support training and climate related missions, less money is put towards funding climate change research that would support effective mitigation and adaptation measures towards the issue as a whole.⁸³ However, if the acceptance of this environmental securitization becomes too normalized, there is a potential risk that it could

⁷⁹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Working Group II Contribution to the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report Volume I Global and Sectoral Aspects*, 2015, 772-773.

⁸⁰ Rothe, *Securitizing Global Warming*, 34.

⁸¹ Ningelgen, "The Depiction of Climate Change as a Threat Multiplier and How It Hinders Action."

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Brzoska, "The Securitization of Climate Change and the Power of Conceptions of Security," 138.

lead to reduced efforts of finding peaceful solutions to conflict, and science based solutions to climate threats.⁸⁴ By accepting this securitization we limit our ability to find more acceptable and appropriate measures in managing climate emergencies.

The Securitization of the Environment Through a Human Security Perspective

The securitization of the environment through a human security perspective attempts to address the climate change emergency from a slightly wider scale than the national security perspective, making it more complex to manage. Actors in this securitization believe that climate change should only be managed through a peaceful and sustainable response that is rooted within science and focuses on the survival, livelihood and dignity of individuals.⁸⁵

The securitization of the environment through the human security perspective is dependent on the acceptance and cooperation of many actors from various levels of power and influence. State actors like Russia, China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, and South Africa are important for the success of this securitization due to their resources and levels of influence internationally and regionally. However, this securitization is also dependent on the support of other actors such as NGOs, IOs, and regional actors including the EU, UNGA, UNFCCC, UNESCO, WTO, Greenpeace, UNEP, IPCC, and others.⁸⁶ Global, regional, and sub-regional non-state actors are critical to this securitization because of their various areas of expertise and influence in empowering communities and individuals. In addition, these actors are not security

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Antonia Zervaki, "Human Security and Climate Change Mitigation: The Case of Ocean Governance," *Marine Policy* 98 (2018): 287.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 288-289

institutions or forums, which allows for the promotion of human centred responses rather than military responses.⁸⁷

This securitization views basic human needs like survival, livelihood, dignity, culture, and basic mobility to be most threatened by the negative impacts of environmental degradation.⁸⁸ These concerns can include economic development, human rights, food security, societal problems, shelter, and clean drinking water. While the human security perspective is a larger scale securitization than the national security perspective, it is important to understand that human security problems, if not correctly managed, can lead to national security problems.⁸⁹ For this reason, relevant actors in this securitization believe that the national security perspective oversimplifies the effects of climate change, since climate change does not directly result in war; instead it leads to livelihood change, which then may lead to conflict.⁹⁰

The general response to the human security perspective of environmental securitization requires financial capacity, expertise, long-term political commitment, and the ability to empower actors across various levels of influence.⁹¹ Typically the response to this type of emergency needs to be comprehensive, people-centred, context specific and make use of preventative actions.⁹² Most solutions attempt to improve the overall capacity of governments and individuals in vulnerable countries so they are able to provide early warning of climate

⁸⁷ Thomas, *The Securitization of Climate Change: Australian and United States' Military Responses (2003 - 2013)*, 58.

⁸⁸ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Working Group II Contribution to the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report Volume I Global and Sectoral Aspects*, 758.

⁸⁹ Barnett and Adger, "Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict," 643.

⁹⁰ Alex De Waal, "Is Climate Change the Culprit for Darfur?," *African Arguments*, June 25, 2007, <https://africanarguments.org/2007/06/25/is-climate-change-the-culprit-for-darfur/>.

⁹¹ Zervaki, "Human Security and Climate Change Mitigation," 287.

⁹² *Ibid.*

events; help to identify the root cause of climate driven threats; and address key policy gaps within regards to both current and emerging challenges as a result of climate change.⁹³

An example of the securitization of the environment through a human security perspective is ocean governance. The reason this topic has been securitized through this perspective is because changes in environmental patterns within major bodies of water can lead to changes in patterns of economic activities.⁹⁴ For example, the relocation of fisheries or the rerouting of oceanic transportation routes could affect communities welfare, economic prospects and social cohesion.⁹⁵ However, due to the fact that human security problems and climate change must be managed on a case by case basis through various sectors (i.e. fishing, mining, and pollution) managing ocean governance and high seas has proven to be challenging.⁹⁶ To respond, global, regional and sub-regional actors are in the early stages of working together in attempt to establish long-term policy on adaptation strategies with climate change in mind.⁹⁷

The limitation within the human security perspective is that it does not focus on immediate events, but instead it focuses on the social provisions of living conditions which impact people over time.⁹⁸ This means that humans are not the direct referent object in this perspective, and therefore, there is not one consistent referent object. For this reason, the policies required to address and manage this securitization need to be increasingly case specific which makes the problem much more complicated to manage. However, if successful measures were established, it would lead to greater success at mitigating environmental degradation than the

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Alister Doyle, "Who Is in Charge of the High Seas?," *Financial Times*, November 11, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/dcbc6e94-de26-11e9-b8e0-026e07cbe5b4>.

⁹⁷ Zervaki, "Human Security and Climate Change Mitigation," 287.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

national security perspective because it attempts to address the problem of climate change with long-term adaptive policies.

Both securitizations of the environment from the human security and national security perspective are limited due to the narrowness of their scope. These securitizations both come down to the protection of people in some form, as all classic mid-level securitizations do.⁹⁹ Additionally, both of these issues are securitized by state actors and are highly politicized as they attempt to use securitization as a way to find political and economic opportunities.

The emerging anthropogenic securitization which I discuss in the subsequent section is fundamentally different than the two dominant securitizations. This new securitization challenges the existing traditional framework of securitization theory. Instead of protecting people, it identifies them as the threat to the environment. Rather than using previous securitizations to build off and create a macrosecuritization, it challenges the previous securitizations entirely.¹⁰⁰ It also questions the relevance of the political units which often do the securitizing, because this kind of securitization does not bring political or economic opportunities, it brings negative implications for the future of their structures.

Part IV- The Emerging Securitization

The Securitization of the Environment Through an Anthropogenic Perspective

The anthropogenic securitization of the environment is a newly emerging securitization. It challenges the previous two securitizations mentioned, as it takes on an apocalyptic narrative

⁹⁹ Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, "Macrosecritisation and Security Constellations: Reconsidering Scale in Securitisation Theory," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 2 (April 2009): 257.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

arguing that unless radical change is made immediately, human life will cease to exist on earth.¹⁰¹ This securitization is dramatically different from the dominant two because it allows weak actors to gain influence and use this securitization to challenge strong actors; it argues that human action is the problem and is threatening the planet; and it argues that climate change is nearly unmanageable by being securitized to an apocalyptic extremity level.

This securitization is unique in that it does not require the support of powerful and influential state actors. The strong narrative it has adopted has allowed for weak actors to gain power and influence by spreading the message and mobilizing other weak actors to shape one powerful and unified movement across the globe. The narrative has resonated with individuals, mainly because it scares people and inspires radical change.

The narrative used within this securitization has adopted apocalyptic characteristics. When actors have made their securitizing moves through speeches, videos, and blogs the language involved is much harsher and more aggressive than the language found within the two dominant securitizations. Influential groups and individuals like the Extinction Rebellion, the Sunrise Group, or Greta Thunberg use words within their rhetoric like “imminent”, “existential”, “apocalyptic”, “annihilation”, “extinction”, and “radical”.¹⁰² This type of language within securitizing moves is a noticeable characteristic of apocalypticism and is partially responsible for the high level of extremity this issue has been securitized as. Commonly, this securitization makes claims that compare GHG emissions and fossil fuels to Weapons of Mass Destruction that will lead to the complete annihilation of society within the next 10-20 years.¹⁰³ This argument is

¹⁰¹ “The Emergency,” *Extinction Rebellion*, accessed November 11, 2019, <https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/the-emergency/>.

¹⁰² “Home,” Extinction Rebellion, accessed November 11, 2019, <https://rebellion.earth/>.

¹⁰³ Extinction Rebellion, “Deep Adaptation: Getting Real about the Climate Apocalypse | Extinction Rebellion,” August 30, 2019, video, 1:14:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugCVsyiBc6A>.

supported among many relevant actors of this securitization and leads people to believe that there is no hope for a better future.¹⁰⁴ For some people, this apocalyptic narrative has motivated radical change, and for others it has immobilized them with fear and anxiety about the future.

As previously mentioned, this securitization views the largest threat as the negative effects that human actions have on the environment. Actors within this securitization believe everyday human activity such as eating meat and animal by-products, travelling, and general consumption of energy are wasteful contributors to factors of environmental degradation like rising levels of GHG emissions, increasing temperature levels, and air pollution.¹⁰⁵ Further, this perspective argues that exacerbated levels of environmental degradation will lead to the sixth mass extinction on earth due to the loss in biodiversity, rising sea levels, desertification, wildfires, water shortages, crop failures, and extreme weather patterns.¹⁰⁶ As a result, we can expect the degradation of human health, the extinction of animals and insects that are detrimental to our ecosystems (i.e. bees), and increased food insecurity at a global level.¹⁰⁷ The trends I have mentioned are already presenting themselves across the globe in 2019, for example, the worsening conditions of the bushfires in Australia, and the record high flooding in Venice.¹⁰⁸ Actors of this securitization use these examples and others, to further illustrate that climate change and environmental degradation are an immediate emergency with no guarantee of an optimistic outcome for the future of civilization.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ “The Emergency.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Lidia Kelly, “Australia Bushfires to ‘Worsen’ This Week, Says Fire Commissioner,” *National Post*, November 17, 2019, <https://nationalpost.com/news/world/australia-bushfires-to-worsen-this-week-says-fire-commissioner>; “Further Flooding Hits Central Venice,” *BBC News*, November 17, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-50452688/venice-floods-further-warnings-of-high-tides>.

¹⁰⁹ Extinction Rebellion, “Deep Adaptation: Getting Real about the Climate Apocalypse | Extinction Rebellion.”

The actions taken to manage this securitization are not a direct response to producing a solution to the problem, but instead look to reform conventional approaches governments have taken to address climate change that are ineffective such as voting, lobbying, and petitions. Simply put, these actors believe that the government's actions, the structure of politics, and our economic interests do not foster an environment that is conducive to radical change. These actors are using this securitization in a way that can potentially lead to severe long-term political implications, as they are unifying the public against the actions of the government to shake the political system and raise awareness.¹¹⁰

There are a number of ways that weaker actors are gaining the attention of powerful security actors like state leaders and IOs. They have recruited hundreds of thousands of people across the globe to participate in walk-outs and climate strikes; this movement has been particularly popular with grade school students influenced by climate activist Greta Thunberg. Further, their achievement in gaining influence and mobilizing individuals has received attention of powerful actors who have heard their demands, which are as follows:

- Urge states and councils to declare an official climate emergency
- Demand politicians and scholars to tell the truth about the climate crisis.
- Change the narrative around the urgency of climate change by sparking debate on the extremity of this issue and by using language that ignites fear across the public.
- Demand the reversal of inconsistent government policies and enact legally binding mitigation policy measures to reduce carbon emissions to net-zero within the coming years.
- Demonstrate the importance of reduced consumption by individuals and governments (i.e. their use of oil, single use plastics, fast fashion, etc.).¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Rita Abrahamsen, "Blair's Africa: The Politics of Securitization and Fear," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 30, no. 1 (2005): 70.

¹¹¹ "Our Demands," *Extinction Rebellion* (blog), accessed November 11, 2019, <https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/demands/>.

While securitizing an issue to the apocalyptic level of extremity seems productive, it faces many limitations within CS securitization theory. The two predominant limitations within this securitization include the lack of a direct and targeted response to the relevant threat, and the risk of immobilizing parts of the population with fear and a sense of hopelessness.

First, I address the lack of a direct response to the identified threat within the anthropogenic securitization. Typically, a normal securitization has emergency measures which respond to the threat. This securitization attacks powerful state actors for not doing more to solve the problem, which means that their emergency response is not a direct solution to the threat they have identified. For this reason, actors like Greta Thunberg have experienced extensive backlash and criticism for being anti-democratic, hypocritical, and participating in panic politics.¹¹² Reasons that such feedback has occurred is likely due to the fact that these actors who have gained influence are not using their influence to find solutions or ways to implement existing ones more fully, but instead they are using their influence to place blame on politicians for not doing a better job.

The second limitation of this securitization is the risk of immobilizing and disengaging individuals by creating a sense of hopelessness for the future. With rhetoric that predicts worst-case scenarios, there is a risk that the population could begin to feel fatigue towards the issue, resulting in feelings of hopelessness and resignation against a threat they believe is inevitable.¹¹³ To elaborate, this securitization is deeply pessimistic about the future of civilization on earth and predicts anywhere from 20-70 years left on the planet.¹¹⁴ Therefore, individuals have started to believe that climate change has passed a tipping point in which nothing can be done and their

¹¹² Christopher Caldwell, "The Problem With Greta Thunberg's Climate Activism," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2019, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/02/opinion/climate-change-greta-thunberg.html>.

¹¹³ Brown, Hammill, and Mcleman, "Climate Change as the 'New' Security Threat," 1153.

¹¹⁴ Extinction Rebellion, "Deep Adaptation: Getting Real about the Climate Apocalypse | Extinction Rebellion."

actions will not make a difference. In true apocalyptic nature, this reaction is completely justified, as the assumption that apocalypse is the highest level of extremity suggests that nothing can be done and the ultimate end is nearing at an alarming rate.

A Macrosecuritization that Challenges its Precursors

The third securitization is fundamentally different than the dominant two securitizations of the environment. First, this securitization does not build off the dominant two in ways that a traditional macrosecuritization would, because it disagrees with the structure of the other two. This securitization disagrees with the level of urgency and severity the dominant two securitizations provide the issue of climate change. Second, this securitization has an excessively widened and deepened scale of the issue, compared to a narrow view of climate change and the implications of environmental degradation the other two securitizations have. Third, due to the scale of this securitization, the current framework of securitization is not compatible to conceptualize and truly understand this process. Finally, this securitization further limits political and economic opportunities which are traditionally present in securitizations, as its purpose is to challenge these institutions to allow the radical change that they currently prevent.

Macrosecuritizations, as defined by Buzan and Waever take on many of the same characteristics as normal mid-level securitizations.¹¹⁵ The key difference is that macrosecuritizations are on a larger scale since they seek to package together multiple normal mid-level securitizations that form a higher and larger order of the securitization process.¹¹⁶

The anthropogenic securitization differs from Buzan and Waever's definition of macrosecuritization in that instead of building on previous lower-level securitizations of the

¹¹⁵ Buzan and Wæver, "Macrosecuritisation and Security Constellations," 258.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 257

environment, it actually challenges them with fundamental disagreements around the issue. The anthropogenic securitization first disagrees with the narrow scope that the dominant two places on the issue. Through a national security perspective and human security perspective, the issue of the environment is narrowly focused on protecting people and the state from the threat of climate change. To manage these securitizations, measures which address the protection of people rather than the environment itself are used. Meaning that their reaction to the climate emergency yields short-term responses without considering long-term risks. Whereas the anthropogenic securitization identifies the people as the security threat to the environment. Actors from the third securitization argue that the security measures from other securitizations are too narrow and do not address the greater problem of how human behaviour impacts the security of our planet. Therefore, these actors argue that unless we make radical changes to human behaviour and the adaptation of climate change to protect the environment, we do not need to address national security or human security concerns, because civilization will cease to exist on earth.

The anthropogenic securitization also radically disagrees with the urgency and timeliness the dominant two securitizations have given the issue of environmental degradation and climate change. The dominant two securitizations frame the climate emergency as a future problem (20-30 years from now); whereas, the anthropogenic securitization views climate change and environmental degradation as an immediate emergency in need of radical action now.¹¹⁷

This new securitization is deeply troubling for the future of political and economic institutions. This is because we have few ways of conceptualizing the securitization process which is occurring at this time. In order to fully comprehend this securitization and the possible

¹¹⁷ Extinction Rebellion, "Deep Adaptation: Getting Real about the Climate Apocalypse | Extinction Rebellion."

future implications it may have, we need a new framework and set of literature that has a greater capacity to analyze this issue. Currently the CS structure is limited to the relation between security and politics; however, this securitization moves beyond that and questions the relevance of the political unit.

In addition, traditional securitizations have typically been made by political units for the purpose of seeking political or economic opportunities for the state. However, the anthropogenic securitization unifies the public against the government in attempt to disrupt the political and economic structures which prevent radical change from happening; and therefore, prevent political and economic opportunities. This securitization is bigger than politics and state sovereignty; however, our existing frameworks to study the implications of this are not well-established. Therefore, we need a contemporary security framework which has the capacity to conceptualize something as large as planetary security, and which moves beyond the individual, the political, and the state.

As I have argued, the anthropogenic securitization has securitized the issue of the environment to nearly apocalyptic levels of extremity. In arguing this, it is important for me to not only outline the limitations of the existing security framework to study such issues, but also to outline some of the known problems with apocalypticism.

Part V- Challenges and Limitations of Apocalypse

I have argued that a new securitization has emerged which challenges the other two dominant securitizations of the environment by adopting an apocalyptic narrative. Since climate change and environmental degradation is one of the most complex and collective problems that humanity has faced, using apocalyptic tendencies to securitize this issue as a prospective

catastrophe is both politically and socially attractive.¹¹⁸ In theory, apocalypticism seems attractive for its ability to motivate radical change; however, in reality there are a number of political and social challenges that apocalypticism can present.

Political Implications of Apocalypse

Apocalypticism is a politically attractive strategy for its ability to validate the use of power; however, there are also a number of serious political implications associated with apocalypticism. I will discuss three implications, including: (1) the potential for hostility towards established political order, (2) rising political tension between important actors, and (3) the potential for the apocalypse to bring about the end of politics.¹¹⁹

The first political implication of apocalypse is that it is particularly hostile towards established political order.¹²⁰ This means the narrative created through apocalypticism, while useful in some cases can delegitimize established order and power of the government. Hostility towards established political order is a considerable risk within the anthropogenic securitization, as it blames politicians for not doing enough and attempts to disrupt political and economic structures that prevent radical changes from happening. Additionally, when one successfully makes an apocalyptic claim, it suggests that the end of the world is imminent and looming in the near future due to irreversible damage, meaning that established order can easily be thrown away as it is no longer of value.

The second political implication of apocalypse is the rising tensions created when influential and powerful actors attempt to silence the weaker actors asking for radical change.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ McQueen, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times*, 198.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 193-194

¹²⁰ Ibid. 193

¹²¹ Ibid. 193-194

To elaborate, I will use the example of recent developments with the Extinction Rebellion group in the UK. This group often stages demonstrations, walk-outs, and protests on and around parliament grounds in attempt for political actors to hear and meet their demands. Recently, police have attempted to claim that their actions were unlawful and placed a ban on the groups right to engage in civil disobedience and protest. Police have gone so far as to arrest hundreds of members of the group for their actions which has proven to be an abuse of power.¹²² The issue was taken to the High Court, which ruled that the protest ban was unlawful.¹²³ This example shows that the powerful actors are experiencing feelings of unease and discomfort by weaker actors gaining influence over them on a particular issue. To respond, they attempt to silence the actors which can lead to political tensions across many levels (security, courts, political, etc.).

The third and final political implication that I will mention, is the potential end of politics as a result of apocalypticism.¹²⁴ This implication only occurs when an issue is truly apocalyptic, and it suggests that people will put their differences aside in attempt to establish radical change; given that politics is largely defined by divisiveness and differences, it could potentially mean the end of politics.¹²⁵ This implication would not be present immediately; therefore, I do not have an example to illustrate this case. This implication would result overtime and would only occur once a majority of the population believes that nothing else matters other than the apocalyptic issue, which in this case is the existence of human civilization on earth due to the increasing effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Again, as I have mentioned, this is not the predominant challenge apocalypticism presents; however, it would be an important

¹²² Damien Gayle, "Extinction Rebellion Protest Ban Was 'Abuse of Power', Court Hears," *The Guardian*, October 24, 2019, sec. Environment, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/oct/24/extinction-rebellion-begin-legal-challenge-against-protest-ban>.

¹²³ "Extinction Rebellion: High Court Rules London Protest Ban Unlawful - BBC News," accessed November 14, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-50316561>.

¹²⁴ McQueen, "Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times," 194.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

consideration if we were to establish a new framework for analyzing contemporary and larger scale securitizations.

Social Implications of Apocalypse

Apocalypticism can be useful for motivating the public to take radical action and promote change; however, it presents more risks socially than it does politically. There are many social implications within apocalypticism, I will elaborate on three of them. There are three social challenges I discuss that include: (1) resignation from action due to fatigue, and a sense of hopelessness; (2) the possibility of excessively high political expectations from the public; and (3) the possibility for deeply entrenched division within society.

The first social implication of apocalypse is the possible resignation from action due to fatigue and a general sense of hopelessness. Since this issue has been securitized in many ways, people become exhausted hearing the same issue reframed time and time again without seeing positive change.¹²⁶ These feelings of hopelessness caused by general fatigue of the issue can lead to resignation of preventative action. If people believe the world really is coming to an end, they most likely believe there is nothing that can be done to change that.¹²⁷ This is a common problem in the apocalyptic debate, because it is the imaginaries of apocalypticism which make a prospective catastrophe like environmental degradation so salient; however, they can also decrease action.¹²⁸ If people believe the end of civilization is nearing, they will not feel motivated to make changes because they may believe any small change they make in attempt to

¹²⁶ Ibid. 198

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 204

improve the circumstances will be obsolete. In other words, if the world really is coming to an end, why spend the last months or years trying to stop the unstoppable?

The second social implication of apocalypticism is the risk that people may develop excessively high expectations about the ability of politics to make radical change towards the issue.¹²⁹ This belief suggests that politics will be able to make sound decisions and actions with outcomes that are entirely predictable, which is untrue given the complexity of the contemporary political systems.¹³⁰ In addition, when a political unit is given too much power or influence in apocalyptic times it will not be able to fulfill the societal expectations due to the political limitations previously discussed.

The final social implication of discussion is the risk of creating deeper division within society.¹³¹ On one hand, apocalyptic tendencies in environmental securitization can be useful because they can inspire and motivate a large percentage of the public to come together in unity and inspire radical change of both the general public and the government. In addition, they also create the sense of urgency that is required to manage the environmental issue.¹³² However, on the other hand it allows opponents of climate change to label the environmental movement as alarmist or even hysterical.¹³³ The opponents are powerful and have organized in well-funded groups with the goal of generating scientific doubt around the issue.¹³⁴ The media has become increasingly attracted to members of the denial movement and used their rhetoric to establish controversy across the globe.¹³⁵ It has led to the issue of the environment becoming a polarizing partisan issue, pitting the political left and right against one another.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 198

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ McNeish, "From Revelation to Revolution," 1037.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ McQueen, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times*, 201.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

As I have illustrated, this emerging macrosecuritization presents many potential implications and challenges of managing the issue because of the apocalyptic tendencies it adopts. However, I fear that the limitations of CS theory prevent us from fully understanding and analyzing this issue. For this reason, in order to manage this scale of securitization while being mindful of social and political implications, we must adopt a new framework within contemporary security studies that has the capacity to analyze issues of this scale.

Part VI- Theoretical Arguments and Analysis of Securitization Theory

All of the securitizations of the environment have proven that CS securitization theory is insightful; however, it is too limited and at times can be counterproductive. Throughout this section of the paper, I first argue that once an issue has become securitized it may vary within the level of extremity to which it has been securitized. I also suggest that level of extremity is associated with the scale of the securitization that is taking place (i.e. the higher the extremity, the larger the securitization). I then argue the current framework of securitization theory does not have the capacity for analyzing macrosecuritization issues within contemporary security studies because there are limitations within CS theory. This is increasingly important as we are moving towards a time in contemporary politics where I predict, issues of this scale will only worsen.

Various Levels of Extremity Within the Securitized

It has been argued by Buzan, Waever and Wilde that the process of securitization can be observed on a scale.¹³⁶ I would like to explore this claim by taking it one step further and arguing that there is also a scale of extremity within the category of securitized. Traditionally, scholars

¹³⁶ Buzan, Waever, and Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*.

have accepted the idea of the process of securitization being on a scale, with one end not securitized, and the other fully securitized. When an issue is considered to be securitized, it means that an object is being existentially threatened and has a legitimate claim to survival; therefore, requires saving by use of emergency actions.¹³⁷ Historically, the argument has never moved beyond this. However, analyzing the level of extremity of a securitized issue can better help us understand the process, the risks, and the limitations of that issue, particularly in contemporary security studies on the environment.

I argue that an issue, once securitized, can be securitized to various levels of extremity. It is important to note here that all issues once securitized fully are considered emergencies; however, not all emergencies are of equal threat. Therefore, not all securitizations are equal. I argue that once an issue becomes securitized, the level of extremity associated with that issue can be determined by the manageability of the issue. On one end of the scale of securitized issues are emergencies that threaten the existence of the referent object but can still be managed in a relatively simplistic way. For example, the securitization of the environment through a national security perspective, as we know, is a narrow issue that can be reasonably managed through policy and military presence. Whereas, the case of the securitization of the environment through an anthropogenic perspective is securitized at near apocalyptic levels of extremity due to the scale of the securitization. This means that it is unlikely that any form of emergency response can effectively work at mitigating such a huge threat unless radical change is adopted immediately. For further clarification, figure 2 illustrates the scale of extremity within the category of the securitized; I have also placed the three securitizations which I have discussed throughout the paper on the scale in approximation.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

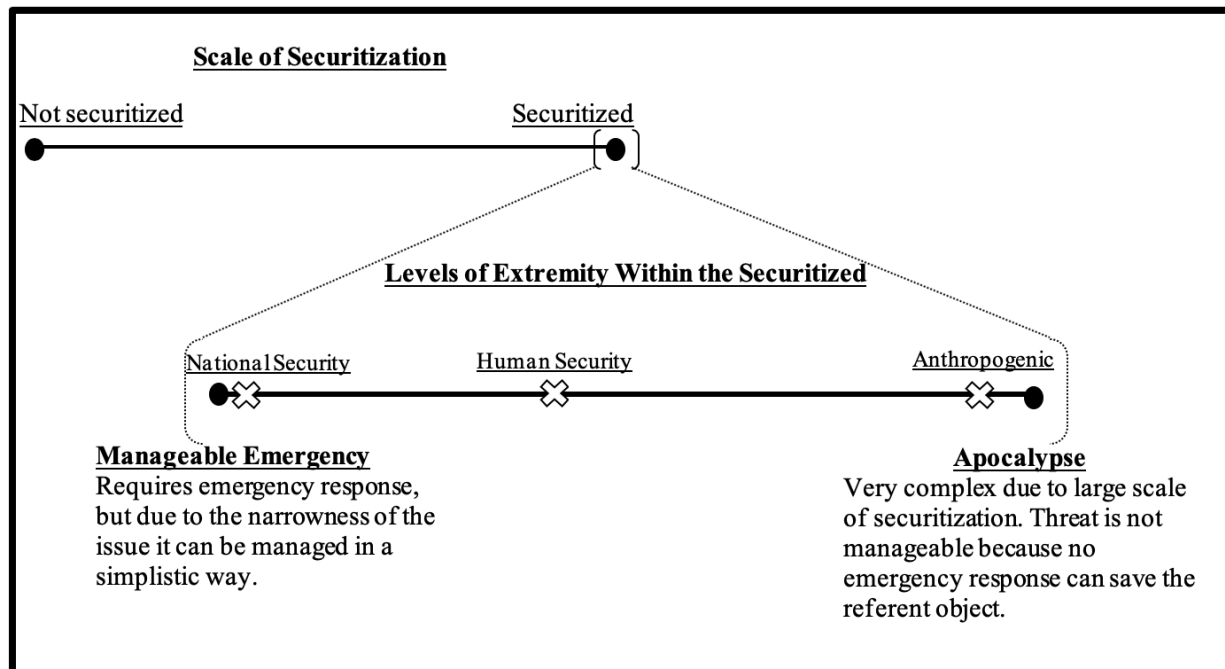


Figure 2. An illustration of the scale of securitization and the scale of extremity within the category of “securitized” with approximate labels of each of the securitizations discussed within this paper.

It is important to note that a greater level of extremity among securitized issues can be associated with a larger scale of securitization. Traditionally, dominant securitizations are mid-level and focused on state relations and/or the protection of individuals.¹³⁸ However, an issue that takes on apocalyptic traits and therefore, significantly higher levels of extremity, is often a macrosecuritization. When an issue such as the environment (through the anthropogenic perspective) is securitized, it moves beyond individuals, politics, and state sovereignty. For this reason, the existing CS framework is far too limited and even counterproductive in its ability to conceptualize issues of this scale.

¹³⁸ Buzan and Wæver, “Macrosecritisation and Security Constellations,” 254.

Macrosecuritizations and the limits of securitization theory

I have argued that securitized issues may vary in extremity, the most extreme being the largest in scale, these securitizations are referred to as macrosecuritizations.¹³⁹ Buzan and Waever argue that the difference between a mid-level securitization and a macrosecuritization is that the latter is often built using previous levels of securitizations.¹⁴⁰ While the use of CS securitization theory is insightful here, this conceptualization of macrosecuritization falls short. This is because a macrosecuritization, when securitized to apocalyptic levels of extremity, challenges other relevant securitizations rather than building upon them. The macrosecuritization of the environment also takes the issue beyond the political unit intended to manage the emergency and deliver a security response. For this reason, CS securitization theory does not currently have the capacity to effectively manage a macrosecuritization issue as large as the environment because of the limitations and challenges associated with it, including: (1) counterproductive or inappropriate responses, (2) the lack of consistency among securitizations, and (3) the inability to conceptualize security threats from a level above the state.

The first limitation of securitization theory is the possibility for it to provide counterproductive or inappropriate responses. When a large issue is too narrowly securitized it leads to counterproductive responses, for example, the national security perspective views climate change as a factor which can lead to dangerous and violent implications for the security of a state. Therefore, the response from the international community is to increase expenditure on military forces to reduce the potential for violent conflict exacerbated by climate change. This response within the national security perspective uses resources for a short-term solution that

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

could have otherwise been used more effectively to establish long-term adaptive measures to climate change and environmental degradation.

The second limitation of CS theory is the inconsistency and disagreement across smaller securitizations within the hierarchy of a macrosecuritization.¹⁴¹ For example, as I argue in this paper, there are at least three known securitizations of the environment, all with different referent objects and identifications of threats. Therefore, these securitizations do not work well together to establish a unified response to climate change and environmental degradation because of incompatible components such as urgency, severity, identified threat, and referent object.

The third limitation of CS theory to macrosecuritizations is the inability to conceptualize security issues beyond the level of the state. Securitization theory currently is designed for the use of state security, and at most, international security. This means that in a typical securitization there is an “Other” with whom we label a threat (typically another state) to “us”, but this is not the case in the newly emerging macrosecuritization.¹⁴² In this case, human behaviour is the threat to the environment, meaning that this securitization labels humankind as the “Other” or more broadly speaking, as the enemy. This is challenging to conceptualize because securitization theory is not designed to be used against ourselves, instead it is often used to create political and economic opportunity to protect ourselves.

Part VII- Conclusion

This paper has analyzed three securitizations of the environment to conclude that the limitations and challenges associated with each have become constraints to productive action on climate change and environmental degradation. The third and emerging securitization is

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 257

¹⁴² Abrahamsen, “Blair’s Africa,” 74-75.

fundamentally different than the other two. This securitization presents a set of unique social and political implications based in its apocalyptic tendencies. It is possible that this securitization could change societal relations and the future structure of political units due to the complexity of the issue; however, it is unclear how soon or to what extent these changes could occur. This is because the current existing framework of securitization theory does not have the capacity to effectively analyze issues as extreme and complex as the securitization of the environment.

I have argued in this paper that the emerging securitization of the environment can be considered a macrosecuritization; however, the existing framework of securitization theory does not have the capacity to analyze issues of this scale. This creates many limitations and shortcomings within contemporary security studies because it limits our ability to understand the complexities of an issue that will only worsen. Therefore, I hope this paper has illustrated the importance of the development of a new framework that has the capacity to analyze larger scale securitizations that will continue to plague contemporary security studies. In developing a new framework to support the analysis of increasingly complex security issues further research and the establishment of a larger set of academic literature on macrosecuritizations, as well as a deeper understanding of contemporary apocalypticism will be required.

I hope the risk I have taken in writing this paper is outweighed by its ability to illustrate the importance of immediate change. The goal of this paper is to stimulate conversations about the possible challenges and implications of securitizing the environment, in hopes that we can find solutions to such problems and allow for productive action towards the issue. Further, I hope this paper inspires individuals within the social science community to consider the importance of a contemporary securitization framework that will better position scholars to analyze macrosecuritizations that go beyond individuals, politics and state sovereignty.

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