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Energy Securitisation: Avenues for Future Research

Andrew Judge, Tomas Maltby, and Kacper Szulecki

1 Introduction

What are the implications of linking “energy” and “security”? The preceding chapters have all sought to examine the interaction between these two seemingly distinctive realms. They have done so in a variety of productive ways that demonstrate both the potential of utilising securitisation theory for analysing what happens when energy is constructed as a security issue and the limitations of the canonical Copenhagen School framework when it is applied to energy issues. One of the key insights, originally

A. Judge (✉)

School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

T. Maltby

Department of Political Economy, King's College London, London, UK

K. Szulecki

Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

argued in Chap. 2 and developed empirically in Chaps. 3, 4 and 5, is that the use of the term “energy security” is not synonymous with “energy securitisation”, at least in how the latter term is conventionally understood. This suggests that if the promise of energy securitisation research is to be fulfilled, it is necessary to have a clearer sense of where further research in this area should focus.

This chapter suggests areas where researchers interested in the social construction of energy as a security issue may want to focus their attention. It does so through both an examination of what Securitisation Studies could learn from the study of energy issues (not least the chapters in this volume) and what insights could be drawn from theoretical developments within Securitisation Studies for the study of energy security. This chapter is structured into three sections. The first provides a brief overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the Copenhagen School framework when it is applied to energy issues, drawing on some of the key insights from the preceding chapters and critiques from across the broader field of Securitisation Studies. The second section outlines two possible avenues for future research that focus on the discursive construction of energy security—an examination of whether energy is a distinct “sector” of security and whether there are alternative logics of security that depart from the Copenhagen School understanding of securitisation. The third and final section adopts a different approach, focusing on the process of securitisation and outlining some of the insights that can be drawn from so-called “sociological” understandings of securitisation.

2 Energy Security and the Copenhagen School: Strengths and Limitations

As demonstrated in Chaps. 3, 4 and 5, the Copenhagen School framework has some important strengths. It has proven to be particularly useful in situations in which actors connect aspects of energy policy to issues of national (military) security. This stems primarily from the central idea of the Copenhagen School—that the concept of security “means” something distinctive which can be examined in a variety of situations:

The answer to what makes something an international security issue can be found in the traditional military-political understanding of security. In this context, security is about survival. It is when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object [...] The special nature of security threats justifies the use of extra-ordinary measures to handle them. (Buzan et al. 1998: 21)

This is, in short, a classic Realist understanding of security based on a traditional conception of national (military) security. While the Copenhagen School is clear that the “essential quality of existence will vary greatly across different sectors and levels of analysis [and] therefore, so will the nature of existential threats”, it nonetheless considers security to have a distinct meaning (Buzan et al. 1998: 21–22). This definitional clarity has a clear methodological advantage—it provides analysts with an explicit standard to compare the discourse of potential securitising actors against (Williams 2011).

Based on this definition, energy researchers have a powerful tool for distinguishing “energy security” as a relatively neutral policy goal, from “energy security” as a rally-around-the-flag performative, meant to mobilise an audience and transcend regular political practice. This distinction between the word “security” and what the Copenhagen School refers to as the “grammar” or “logic” of security is clear in the analogy drawn by Poland’s defence minister Radosław Sikorski between the Nord Stream pipeline deal and the Hitler-Stalin pact (see chapters by both Heinrich (Chap. 3) and Siddi (Chap. 10) in this volume).

It is also important to recognise that the Copenhagen School, with its roots in the experience of the Cold War peace movement, combines this methodological tool with a normative vantage point in its assertion that transforming something into a security issue has the political consequence of removing an issue from normal democratic politics (Buzan et al. 1998: 29). It therefore constitutes a powerful tool for critical energy security studies. If we consider that “extra-ordinary measures” and “exceptional politics” tend to mean the removal of energy issues from public oversight, a number of critical questions come to mind. Who does, and who should, exercise power in governing the energy sector? To what extent is securitisation and expert insulation of energy security

democratically acceptable? Moreover, *cui bono*? And what is there to be gained by making something—a gas pipeline, for example—a security issue to be addressed by extra-ordinary measures (Karyotis and Skleparis 2013)?

Emphasising the national/military logic of security and examining these fundamentally political concerns have a further benefit—as a useful means of integrating energy into Security Studies. As argued in various chapters in this volume, energy security has proven challenging for many International Relations and Security Studies researchers to grasp and understand. One of the clear advantages of the Copenhagen School framework is that it offers a way for these fields to engage with energy issues in a more nuanced way than the traditional “strategic resources” and “oil wars” literatures. This is important because these literatures have very little to say about the relative importance of different vital energy systems, and are incapable of understanding the construction of security vulnerabilities in ways other than those articulated by policymakers. Instead, the Copenhagen School framework offers a means of problematising individual energy policy decisions and, indeed, denaturalising whole energy policy paradigms. This is something which is developed in the second part of this volume, particularly by Szulecki and Westphal (Chap. 7), Kustova (Chap. 8) and Landry (Chap. 11), where the authors draw on securitisation and other Critical Security Studies’ concepts to look beyond the established “facts” of energy policy and taken for granted assumptions about the factors that shape energy security.

There are, however, important limitations to the Copenhagen School that must be acknowledged. Even if we can praise the methodological clarity and critical edge that the framework brings to energy issues, the model can be very rigid and constraining. The fact that the authors of the preceding chapters had to adjust the framework, loosening it in some places and operationalising it more strictly elsewhere, shows just how constraining this approach can be when applied to energy issues. Similar problems have been found when the framework has been utilised in other non-traditional areas of security. There are three questions in particular which help to demonstrate this core limitation.

First, what counts as a securitising move? Does this have to be an explicit security utterance? Does the threat need to be existential and

undermining the physical survival of a referent object? Such ambiguities are clear in the above example of Sikorski's speech about the Nord Stream pipeline. In that particular speech, it is notable that the word "security" is not used, nor is there a direct claim about the Nord Stream pipeline deal constituting an "existential threat" to Poland's survival. Yet the link between energy and national/military security is clear. Moreover, there are numerous other examples from the same time period where Polish government officials claimed that energy was a "weapon" that constituted a "threat" to national security (Judge and Maltby 2017: 195–197). Is this a case of concept stretching, or does any utterance of security have the potential to securitise an issue, regardless of whether or not it follows the Copenhagen School's logic of security (Huysmans 2002)?

Second, does securitisation only occur if extra-ordinary measures are subsequently enacted? In Chap. 2, Heinrich and Szulecki proposed a distinction between security jargon and securitisation proper, the former merely referring to threats to the referent objects but not proposing concrete measures at all—either extra-ordinary or "normal". The empirical chapters, especially by Heinrich as well as Szulecki and Kuszniir, have shown how problematic that distinction can be in practice, especially since framing security and identifying threats can influence the broader discursive and political context in which energy policy decisions are taken. Within the poststructuralist approach of the Copenhagen School, it becomes very difficult to justify a distinction between security jargon and securitisation proper, because the implicit causal link between a securitising move and audience acceptance of extra-ordinary measures is not sustainable. On the other hand, the way an increasingly securitised political debate remoulds actors' identities and perceptions becomes paramount—blurring the conceptual distinction proposed by Heinrich and Szulecki.

Third, what counts as extra-ordinary? Can this be decided *a priori*, or is it dependent on the particular situation in which actors find themselves? In this volume, extra-ordinary measures were categorised based on three types of action: (1) breaking norms (which are explicit or implicit prescriptions about "how things are done"), (2) shifting competences and power towards the executive or a specialised agency and (3) withholding or limiting information. Any one or a combination of these can be seen

as “extra-ordinary measures” if they are legitimised by reference to security; however this might not cover the full range of measures that go beyond the bounds of “normal politics”.

3 Sectors and Logics of Energy Security

This overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the Copenhagen School suggests that although the framework can be useful for examining constructions of energy security, it will often be necessary to go beyond a strict and rigid application of its core concepts. In particular, it is worth considering whether the Copenhagen School’s core logic of security is the most appropriate means of conceptualising securitisation. In this section, we focus on two possible ways of examining the development of (energy) security discourses that build on, but also deviate from, the Copenhagen School—sectors of security and logics of security.

3.1 Sectors of Security

Sectors are an important element of the Copenhagen School, yet they have received remarkably little attention within Securitisation Studies as a whole.¹ This is surprising because the majority of *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* is devoted to an examination of how securitisation plays out within five distinct sectors—military, economic, political, environmental and societal. These sectors are conceptualised as “lenses or discourses rather than objectively existing phenomena [...] defined by particular constitutions of referent objects and types of threats as well as by specific forms or ‘grammars’ of securitisation” (Buzan et al. 1998: 27). As discussed in the previous section, these “grammars” mean that although there is one national/military logic of security, the “essential quality of existence” can differ between sectors. This also has an impact on the “specific types of interaction” between actors within each sector:

The military sector is about relationships of forceful coercion; the political sector is about relationships of authority, governing status, and recognition;

the economic sector is about relationships of trade, production and finance; the societal sector is about relationships of collective identity; and the environmental sector is about relationships between human activity and the biosphere. (Buzan et al. 1998: 7)

The obvious question to ask at this point is: what sector(s) can energy be situated within? The Copenhagen School treats energy as a “tradable good on the global market” and therefore as an economic referent object. Such an interpretation is problematic however, because it reduces energy to oil, and energy security to concerns about oil supplies. This is largely a function of how energy issues entered International Relations in the first place. International Political Economy was, as Hancock and Vivoda argue, “a field born of the OPEC crisis” (2014: 206) which largely reduced the discussion of energy to oil, and viewed energy supply shortages as a problem which could best be addressed through the spread of liberal market norms. When we consider that the Copenhagen School largely rule out the possibility of securitising economic issues under such a liberal world view, it is clear that such a perspective can be limiting and may fail to get to the heart of how energy securitisation functions (Judge and Maltby 2017: 185).

Others have used the concept of sectors more productively when examining energy issues. Natorki and Herranz-Surrallés (2008) argue that energy is a cross-cutting issue which could potentially be examined within each of the five sectors. Christou and Amadides (2013) go one step further, arguing that the sector within which energy is securitised has consequences for the kind of political effects that it generates. Such approaches open up the possibility of different sector-specific grammars of security playing a role in how energy is constructed as a security issue. For instance, if energy is securitised as an “environmental” issue, then the focus may be on mitigating the damaging effects of burning fossil fuels, whereas if it is securitised as a “military” issue, then the focus may be on the potential for external suppliers of a resource to coerce a state.

There is, however, another possibility worth considering—that energy should be viewed as a distinct sector of security. Such a development is not without precedent. Hansen and Nissenbaum (2009) argue that “cyber security” should be regarded as a distinct sector, constituted by a

unique configuration of referent objects and threats. A similar attempt could be made in the case of energy security. One of the benefits of such an approach is that rather than ultimately reducing energy to other sectors, this places the question of what, if anything, is specific about energy security at the forefront of our analysis.

In terms of referent objects, there has been a tendency to view energy supplies as the core referent object within claims about energy security. Such an approach is understandable but is often based on a misunderstanding about what referent objects are, that is, “things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival” (Buzan et al. 1998: 36). In many cases where energy is being “securitised”, it is not the energy supplies that have the legitimate claim to survival. Instead, they are the means through which survival of some other referent object is secured. This similarly applies to other common objects such as energy demand, infrastructure and prices. Bridge (2015) makes this point when he identifies three “logics” of energy security: sovereign state security, population security and vital systems security. Each of these logics is based around different referent objects: states, societies and energy systems. The first two objects could ultimately be traced back to other sectors—military/political and societal, respectively. Energy systems cannot, however, and if we follow Cherp and Jewell in defining energy security in terms of the “low vulnerability of vital energy systems” (2014: 415), then this may provide a basis for a distinct security sector with its own forms of interaction.

Supply interruptions may constitute the main threat to such systems; however, the sources of such threats and the degree of harm they cause may vary. A temporary blackout in the power grid, an inadequate supply of gas during a cold winter, volatile prices disrupting the economic rationale for different energy sources, or a terrorist attack on a nuclear power plant are all threats to energy security, but all have different real impacts on energy systems.

What we mean by “energy systems” is fundamental for whether we can entertain the possibility of energy as a distinct sector. Cherp and Jewell define these as “resources, materials, infrastructure, technologies, markets and other elements connected to each other stronger than they are connected to the outside world” (2013: 151). The idea that energy systems

are a set of distinctive referent objects means that we can disentangle securitising moves that refer specifically to these systems from moves about other objects (e.g. framing “negative” energy prices as a threat to national security might actually refer to the economic sector; securitising greenhouse gas emissions as a major cause of climate change might refer to the environmental sector, etc.). This helps to maintain the normative edge of Securitisation Studies, by helping to specify which vulnerabilities can—intentionally or not—be exaggerated. Moreover, the perception and treatment of an energy system as “vital” could be a prerequisite for its securitisation. This suggests that one avenue for future empirical research would be to examine which energy systems are considered “vital” and why. This is an avenue where some of the empirical studies in this volume have already made important progress.

3.2 Logics of Security

Regardless of whether energy is seen as a distinctive sector or not, another promising avenue is to examine what logics of security are most common in attempts to securitise energy. Logics of security go beyond a focus on referent objects and threats, to examine what may be termed the underlying rationality embedded within a security discourse.² Rather than reducing all security discourses to sector-specific variations on the Copenhagen School logic of existential threats that lead to extra-ordinary measures and political action, they open up the possibility of alternative logics that deviate from an exclusive focus on existential threats to survival. These could take the form of general logics of security that are applicable to multiple sectors, or logics that are specific features of a sector and may indeed strengthen the case for considering that sector as distinct from others. We consider both these options below.

The idea that there may be other general logics of security is at the core of many critiques of the Copenhagen School. In particular, the Paris School has criticised the Copenhagen School for privileging an understanding of security which is derived from how the term has been used in the realm of “international security” to the exclusion of meanings derived from the field of internal security, where the policing of risks and vulnerabilities have arguably

been more prevalent (Bigo 2002). Risk is perhaps the most notable alternative to a Realist logic of security because, as Williams argues, since the end of the Cold War, western security policies and institutions have become increasingly orientated towards the management of risks rather than the elimination of existential threats to survival (Williams 2008). The policies adopted during the War on Terror are frequently cited as examples of constructing and dealing with insecurity, through precautionary actions to insure against potential harm and increase the resilience of political systems (Rasmussen 2004; van Munster 2005; De Goode 2008).

Corry argues that such security constructions and policies can be understood as part of a distinct logic of riskification, which focuses on indirect causes of harm that put the governability of referent objects at risk, in contrast to the focus of the Copenhagen School on direct threats to the survival of a referent object (Corry 2012). Such a logic leads in a different policy direction than existential threats towards, “programmes for permanent changes aimed at reducing vulnerability and boosting the governance-capacity of the valued referent object itself” (ibid: 248). A logic of riskification may, at least at a discursive level, more accurately describe the form that security constructions take within the energy sector, although this is fundamentally an empirical question (Judge and Maltby 2017: 183; Lis (Chap. 4) in this volume). Examining whether energy security is constructed in terms of existential threats or risks in different contexts may allow for a more accurate account of what kind of security concern energy is regarded as in different contexts.

That being said, drawing a sharp distinction between these two logics is not without its problems. It makes the somewhat questionable assumption that risk can be reduced to a single essence—the very same problem with the Copenhagen School’s logic of security. Risk is, of course, a much more complex and varied concept than this implies (Petersen 2012), as are risk-related concepts such as “resilience” (Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams 2011; Bourbeau 2013). This could be viewed as a key avenue for future research on energy securitisation/riskification—an examination of how risk is constructed in various contexts. Indeed, because of the prevalence of risk-related discourses and practices within the energy sector, it could serve as a useful empirical site for developing how the concept of risk is understood within Security Studies.

Rather than deductively applying general logics to the energy sector, an alternative approach would be to examine inductively how security is constructed within the energy sector itself. This would make it possible to develop a more empirically grounded understanding of what energy security signifies in different contexts, or to highlight the contested nature of energy security within those contexts. The most fully developed attempt at such an analysis is by Ciută, who has examined the various ways in which the concept of energy security is used by academic researchers and political organisations. He distils these into three distinct logics of energy security, which involve different configurations of threats, political values, policy measures and forms of political action—war, subsistence and total/banal security.

The logic of war portrays energy as, “a cause or an instrument of war or conflict” (Ciută 2010: 129). It includes constructions of energy as a weapon that can be deployed against dependent consumer states, as well as the idea of resource wars or as an indirect cause of conflict through environmental degradation, political strife within states and competition for resources. It is an inherently geopolitical, and often militarised, understanding of security that involves a distinct rationality of political action based on the application of strategic and military thinking to energy issues. It therefore involves the subordination of the concerns of various actors to the geopolitical objectives of the state.

The logic of subsistence, in contrast, views energy as a public good which people need rather than being bound up in war and conflict. Such a need “is not driven by the imperative to survive, but by the functional demands of various sectors of activity, which means its absence does not lead to extinction, but to dysfunction” (ibid: 132). Moreover, because it is a public good, it involves a wide range of actors across different fuel types (gas, nuclear, wind, solar, etc.) and sectors of activity (production, transport, etc.). As a result, the specific meaning of energy security can vary substantially between these actors due to their different levels of involvement. Perhaps more importantly, it also does not result in a particular type of policy response because, “energy security policies [are] non-specific as *security* policies. If market failure is the key problem for energy security, then the solution is application of generic policies designed to improve market functionality” (ibid: 134, emphasis in original).

Finally, the logic of total or banal security is an extreme extension of the previous logic. Because energy is an essential public good that involves such a plurality of actors, there are a huge number of potential threats to different aspects of energy supply, and potentially every actor can be called upon to change their behaviours to increase security. This in turn leads to investing “every single object of any kind with and in security”, resulting in the “security of everything...everywhere...against everything” (ibid: 134).

As Ciută notes, both the logics of subsistence and total security overlap with a risk-based approach to security (see Heinrich and Szulecki (Chap. 2) in this volume). Likewise, a logic of war overlaps quite clearly with the Copenhagen School logic of security. Ciută’s logics are, however, more nuanced than either of these two approaches, and more likely to capture the specific dynamics of the energy sector. The extent to which these logics can be identified in attempts to securitise energy would, moreover, lend even greater support to the idea that energy represents a distinct sector of security composed of different referent objects, threats and logics. Examining whether this is the case should be a major focus of future research on energy securitisation.

4 The Process of Securitisation: Audiences, Context and Causality

So far, we have examined alternative ways in which discourses of energy security can be analysed, through sectors and logics of security. While such avenues are undoubtedly worth pursuing, a focus on discourse risks losing sight of the fact that securitisation is an inherently social process. Many critiques of the Copenhagen School have sought to address this shortcoming, which has led to various sustained efforts at rethinking major elements of the theory that have pushed the field in a more “sociological” direction.

“Sociological” approaches place a far greater emphasis on the process of securitisation. Such approaches, which are often contrasted with the “philosophical” approach of the Copenhagen School (and Corry’s riskification

framework), downplay the performative force of speech acts uttered by securitising actors and instead engage in a deeper examination of the role that audiences and contextual factors play in shaping this process. As Balzacq argues:

securitisation is better understood as a strategic (pragmatic) process that occurs within, and as part of, a *configuration of circumstances*, including the *context*, the *psycho-cultural disposition of the audience*, and the *power that both speaker and listener bring to the interaction* [...] Securitisation can be discursive and non-discursive; intentional and non-intentional; performative but not ‘an act in itself’. (Balzacq 2010b: 1–2, emphasis added)

Within this understanding of securitisation, discourses of security remain central but they are also not theorised according to a simple sender-receiver model of communication between an empowered securitising actor and a passively recipient audience. Instead, they are influenced by the circumstances within which this communication occurs. In other words, both the social interaction of actors and audiences and the context features of the situation in question. In this section, we focus on these two features before returning to an issue raised in the first section of this chapter—what this means for whether or not we should regard securitisation as a causal theory.

4.1 Audiences

The most obvious way in which most sociological approaches depart from the Copenhagen School is in their more extensive theorisation of “audiences”. Their central insight is that although particular authoritative actors may be dominant in some circumstances, in many cases, securitisation success or failure will be a result of a network effect based on the dispositions of, and power relations between, multiple securitising actors and audiences. As a result, audiences should be regarded as the central actors in the securitising process, because ultimately their acceptance or rejection of securitising moves will be decisive in whether securitisation is successful or not (Balzacq 2010a: 8–11).

Shifting the focus of analysis from securitising actors to audiences could be a particularly useful research strategy when examining energy securitisation because in the energy sector, multiple actors beyond “the state” may claim the right to “speak security”, and deliberations among these actors are likely to lead to different conceptions of energy security than standard or alternative logics of energy security would suggest. Indeed, Ciută (2010) argues that one of the defining features of the logics of subsistence and total security identified in the previous section is that they are constituted by a plurality of actors/audiences who are involved across multiple sectors of activity. There are at least two areas where analysts may then want to focus their attention.

First is by differentiating between different types of audience that play a role in the securitisation process. In various empirical studies of securitisation across a wide range of issue areas and types of political system, it is clear that there is no single “type” of audience that is always the most important for accepting or rejecting securitising moves. Wæver himself has acknowledged that the lack of differentiation between types of audience is a shortcoming of the Copenhagen School framework, not least because what counts as a “relevant” audience will differ between sectors and contexts (2003: 25). Identifying such audiences can be difficult because, as Vuori argues, audiences have different abilities to, “provide the securitising actor with whatever s/he is seeking to *accomplish* with the securitisation” (2008: 72). An important step, however, is to develop a clearer understanding about what types of audience could in principle “matter” in concrete situations. One attempt by Salter (2008) distinguishes between popular, elite, technocratic and scientific audiences. These categories are derived from the specific field of airport security, but are designed to be general enough to apply to a variety of security issues across sectors. One of the core questions for analysts of energy securitisation is whether these categories are appropriate or if alternative categorisations, perhaps incorporating military, economic, and activist audiences, would be more suitable.

Second is by paying greater attention to power relations between securitising actors and audiences. Not only do different audiences play different roles, they also have different kinds of relationship with securitising actors. These are structured by both formal and informal power relations,

which, in most cases, pre-date attempts at securitisation and are often institutionalised within particular political systems even if one of the possible outcomes of securitisation is that those power relations are subject to change. The relations between actors and audiences should not be understood in a static and unidirectional manner, where a securitising actor has the power to compel or influence different audiences to varying degrees. Instead, it is important to recognise, as Côté (2016) argues, that audiences are active agents that can contest, develop, and potentially transform securitising moves in a process of deliberation. Rather than being passive recipients of securitising moves, audiences have agency, and there is no reason to assume that securitising actors will always get their own way. A key task for future research on energy securitisation is to pay greater attention to the power relations between securitising actors and different types of audience.

There are significant methodological challenges involved in measuring audience acceptance. How do we know if a given securitising move is accepted by the expert community and the society at large? This question is of fundamental importance to all causally oriented and explanatory studies of securitisation, but there are no easy answers. Rather than focusing on the acceptance of a single move, however, we can approach the question slightly differently. Instead, one can look at the wider acceptability of expressing energy issues in the language of security and applying extra-ordinary, non-political measures outside democratic control to the energy sector. To grasp the acceptability of a securitising move—understood as the willingness of a relevant audience to agree on a securitising frame—we need to disentangle securitisation as a process that takes place in a broader context, both material and ideational, which is difficult to change with individual speech acts (McDonald 2008). Thus, by studying discourses dominant in the energy sector, security imaginaries or other intersubjective structures of meaning, we can establish whether certain audiences are more or less prone to accepting securitising moves.

An example of moving energy security studies in that direction is perhaps the research of Fischhendler et al. (2015). They point to the fundamental importance of national security discourses that dominate other debates, serving as a reservoir of narratives and rhetorical commonplaces that spark securitisation in areas far from usual security concerns. These

observations are very important for studying energy securitisation beyond the usual “high politics” of oil and gas, but also for understanding different securitisation modes in these sectors. That is in turn illustrated by Fischhendler and Nathan’s (2014) study of Israeli natural gas exports as an issue of “national security”. Together with Casier (2011), Godzimirski (2009), Judge et al. (2016) as well as Siddi (Chap. 10) in this volume, and echoing Guzzini’s (2013) and colleagues’ analyses of the “return of geopolitics”, Fischhendler et al. provide us with much food for thought about how securitisation of different issues—including energy policy—seems to be facilitated in some contexts while it is less probable in others.

4.2 Context

It is clear that securitisation does not occur in a vacuum, but within a social situation that undoubtedly shapes the manner in which this process unfolds. This is not reducible to the relationship between securitising actor and audience(s), but can involve factors ranging from proximate features of the particular “setting” where securitisation occurs to more distant elements such as political, economic and cultural environments (Balzacq 2010b: 37). This poses additional methodological challenges for analysts, because it is impossible to account for the influence of every single contextual factor on any social process. It should, however, be possible to identify some of the most important factors within particular sectors of security by focusing on relatively stable features or characteristics of the major referent objects. This is the approach taken by Judge and Maltby (2017), who argue that in the energy sector there are at least two sets of relevant contextual factors that can be derived from the observation that energy is a socio-technical system—technical and political economic (see also Szulecki 2016).

Technical factors—or to use language drawing on Bruno Latour (2005), the materiality of energy systems—are concerned with what is often referred to as the “geography” and “hardware”. Judge and Maltby describe these as:

an assemblage of a particular mix of fuels in overall consumption and electricity production, the sources of these supplies (imported/domestic),

established roles for particular types of energy in particular economic sectors, and a configuration of physical infrastructure including the capacity to import, produce and transmit. (2017: 184)

However, it is important to not simply view technical factors as “material facts” which place hard limits on the kinds of discourses and social dynamics that are possible. Discourses about energy, regardless of whether they embody claims about security, or not, all represent the elements of this space and materiality in various ways. However, their representations are also constituted by these material conditions. While a state can claim that it wants to be energy independent regardless of whether it has the physical resources to do so, these material conditions also play a role in the plausibility, sustainability and contestability of these claims. As is often observed, transformations of energy systems are highly path-dependent social processes, as changes through the development of new generation or transit infrastructure are often difficult, time-consuming and expensive (Stirling 2014).

Political-economic factors, by contrast, are concerned with the conditions under which energy is produced, traded, and used, and how those activities are regulated (Judge and Maltby 2017: 184). Dannreuther similarly argues that political economy, “has a determining effect on which particular securitisation of energy assumes dominance” (2015: 467), and that “what actually gets securitised is decisively shaped by material power relations” (2015: 468). While this may be too deterministic a reading, it is nonetheless important to examine how pre-established structural conditions may play a role in shaping the form, dissemination and success or failure of securitisation. At a minimum, the power relations between actors are shaped by their positions and roles within a particular political economic system. However, this type of contextual factor goes further, by focusing on how systems of energy governance structure actor interactions in ways that are not reducible to power relations. They include norms, policy paradigms, and institutionalised systems of regulation that together constitute the “rules of the game” (Belyi and Talus 2015; Kuzemko, et al. 2016).

Judge and Maltby distinguish between two main systems of energy governance: “market-led governance” based on a deregulated economy in

which market participants are the primary actors and “state-led governance” based on tightly regulated economy in which markets are subservient to the political objectives of the state (2017: 184–185). These are, of course, somewhat crude ideal types, and future research in energy studies as a whole would do well to better differentiate between systems of energy governance. Moreover, it is not clear that systems of energy governance are confined to the internal political economy of a state. Multilateral and supranational institutions also play a structuring role, as do the ways in which international actors of all kinds pursue their foreign policies. In a recent article, Prontera (2017) argues that in Southeastern Europe there have been three forms of “state model” in the gas sector, which he associates with different patterns of energy diplomacy: partner states, provider states and catalytic states. The latter is particularly interesting, as it combines a network form of energy diplomacy with an active role for government within a market structure. This would suggest that future research should develop more precise and nuanced conceptualisations of systems of energy governance, as a first step towards examining what role they place in the process of securitisation.

4.3 From Audiences and Context to Securitisation Dynamics

Our discussion of “sociological” approaches has focused primarily on paying greater attention to key factors that were undertheorised in the Copenhagen School’s original securitisation framework. What has not been examined is the way in which sociological approaches understand causality. More precisely, what are the implications of shifting from a mainly poststructuralist understanding of securitisation (performative speech acts) to a more sociological approach in which multiple factors may potentially have an influence on the securitisation process? This may seem like a somewhat abstract question, but it actually goes to the heart of what distinguishes sociological approaches from the Copenhagen School and other philosophical approaches. It also has major implications for future research on energy securitisation and the wider field of Securitisation Studies, because empirical research that is unclear about its

methodological assumptions is likely to be logically inconsistent and potentially flawed (Jackson 2011).

The Copenhagen School has a somewhat ambiguous understanding of causality. On the one hand, from a soft constructivist standpoint, it outlines a causal sequence: securitising move, acceptance by an audience, creation of a platform where the adoption of extra-ordinary measures becomes possible. This is the approach adopted by Heinrich and Szulecki when building the framework for the empirical studies presented in Chaps. 3, 4 and 5. This causal sequence is what allows securitisation theory to be considered an explanatory theory—the completion of all these steps leads to successful securitisation and the production of substantial political effects. On the other hand, from a poststructuralist standpoint, the Copenhagen School cannot meaningfully develop such a causal sequence because discourses are unstable and incomplete structures of meaning which cannot be traced back to a set of initial causes. Moreover, they are constitutive of social action rather than being distinct from such actions, and therefore cannot be said to “cause” the substantial political effects that are associated with securitisation. This tension between understanding the Copenhagen School framework as a causal or constitutive theory is at the heart of Heinrich and Szulecki’s distinction between security jargon and securitisation proper in Chap. 2.

Sociological approaches attempt to resolve this tension by developing a different understanding of causality. Balzacq, for instance, in pushing securitisation theory away from a focus on the “security speech act”, argues that a causally deterministic account of securitisation is untenable. Instead, he proposes that researchers investigate the, “degree of congruence between different circumstances driving and/or constraining securitisation” (Balzacq 2010a: 18). This makes sense if we consider that under a sociological understanding, multiple actors and audiences may be involved in deliberations about whether something is a security issue or not and what that means, while these interactions will be shaped by the full range of contextual factors identified above. This is why Balzacq views these various factors as part of a “network of causality”, which it is the task of analysts to examine rather than assuming there is a single factor which is causally significant to the exclusion of others (*ibid.*, 18).

An alternative and more sophisticated approach to understanding causality comes from Guzzini (2011), who suggests that there may be value in reconceptualising securitisation as a “social mechanism” as a sounder basis for viewing it as an explanatory theory. Balzacq has also used the terminology of “mechanisms”, by which he means the processes of persuasion, propaganda, learning and socialisation that may be involved in the process of securitisation (2015: 106). That idea is somewhat debatable however, as it would either make securitisation a mechanism of some higher echelon—a kind of “molecular mechanism” to use Elster’s term (2007: 42–44)—or an unspecified theoretical construct that is reducible to more foundational mechanisms.³ Guzzini develops a richer account of securitisation as a social mechanism, based on the understanding of mechanisms as focused on “how” causality rather than the “what” causality of correlational analysis (including Balzacq’s examination of the congruence of different forces).

“How” causality allows for the analysis of action “embedded in a process that, despite its focus on structures (security imaginaries, identity discourses, cultures of anarchy), institutional processes and their path dependencies, is basically open, since it is contingent on a series of contexts and factors” (Guzzini 2013: 276). This opens new spaces for reconstructing securitisation as an explanatory theory, which can account for certain outcomes and explain the causal pathways that lead there. His article can be read both as a plea for critical realist or analyticist reframing of securitisation.

Two important points have to be made clear. Firstly, both Guzzini’s “mechanismic” securitisation and Balzacq’s “sociological” securitisation move the emphasis away from the securitising speech act. Guzzini suggests that “the idea of a speech act refers here to a process, not a kind of single bombshell event” (2011: 334). The latter seems to have been the most common misinterpretation of the initial theorisation by the Copenhagen School scholars—and one with far-reaching consequences. In a similar vein, Balzacq does not mention the actual speech act among the “essentials” of his ideal type of securitisation outlined above (Balzacq 2015).

Understanding securitisation as a process or a mechanism, with the speech act becoming of lesser importance, we have to bear in mind that

the kinds of evidence we are after is not as simple as “I hereby declare this a security matter”. In fact, the word security does not have to be uttered at all for a specific statement to add to a gradual buildup towards security, and clearly does not have to be mentioned in de-securitising moves. Approaching energy securitisation from this perspective helps us overcome the theoretical and methodological problem signalled earlier in this chapter, regarding the definition of a securitising speech act. This idea is well captured by the empirical study by Fischhendler and Nathan (2014: 156), who cast their net widely in a meticulous content analysis of committee public hearings. For them it was not “security” as such, but “existential language” that was the indicator of securitisation—“a sense of urgency, prioritisation, and/or survival, [expressions] centered on threat and risk”, etc.

What we are left with, however, is an unresolvable methodological question in the broader, philosophically derived sense of “methodology” as proposed by Jackson (2011): do we want an explanatory theory of (energy) securitisation? This is often a matter of individual preference, but there is also an important dividing line running between the philosophical and sociological approaches as well as the “thinner” readings of the Copenhagen School. Floyd has argued against the inclusion of context in securitisation as that “would change the theory beyond recognition, moving the focus away from the act that is securitisation, toward a causal theory of securitisation instead” (2010: 21). Yet this supposedly destructive move is, from a different point of view, the only sensible one, as securitisation theory has arguably always been a causal theory. If anything, it carries a “hidden causal argument” and an implicit explanatory aim (see Jackson 2017). Building on Balzacq and especially Guzzini’s proposals allows us to be more outspoken about the non-positivist causality of the securitisation model, and explore the ways in which energy becomes security through interpretive process tracing, possibly in combination with other methods such as discourse or content analysis (Szulecki 2016). This will allow us to both understand specific examples of energy securitisation, and explain how certain outcomes came about at that particular moment and in that context.

Notes

1. The other theory that is examined with the Copenhagen School's 1998 book is Regional Security Complex Theory. Space precludes a discussion of this theory; however there has been some interesting work on how a regional security complex centred around energy supplies has emerged between the EU and Russia (Kirchner and Berk 2010; Maltby 2015). There is clear potential for further work in this area in light of developments since the 2009 gas supply disruption.
2. Although as noted above, Bridge (2015) refers to different logics of state, population and vital systems security, his primary concern is with the different referent objects that these entail rather than alternative security rationalities.
3. In much the same way as Schelling proposed that "theory may comprise many social mechanisms, but also a social mechanism may comprise many theories" (1998: 33).

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