

# Editorial of special focus: Securitisation and its impact on human rights and human security

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We are academics who want to change the world.  
(Tadjbaakhsh & Cherby 2006: 6)

## 1 Introduction

No, the articles in this issue of the *Global Campus Human Rights Journal* dealing with securitisation are not a manifesto. If I start the introduction with this provocative statement, it is because it summarises our double aim: theoretical and normative. We have the advantage of not being security scholars. We belong neither to the classic school of thought, nor do we embrace the new conception of security. We quote and share definitions and insights of the Copenhagen School, but do not subscribe to it, nor to its numerous critics. We critically question the securitarian paradigm through the assumed normative lenses of human rights and human security. We understand the critique in a Foucauldian sense as constructing a field of facts, practices and reflections that pose problems to politics and policies.

Why and how – these are the two major lines of the problematisation of securitisation. What are the reasons for the transformation of securitisation into a hegemonic discourse and policy? What are the conditions that made this fundamental change possible and the factors that catalyse and accelerate it? The main focus of the present volume is to examine how securitisation affects human lives and human rights. Human rights are not only the normative 'measure' to assess securitisation, but also to examine the capacity of civil society to produce alternative discourses and mobilise resistance through various forms of civic activism, mobilisations and popular protest. The two lines of research – securitisation and civic resistance – are not structured separately in the special focus part of this issue of the *Journal*, and are interwoven in various case studies.

## 2 From securitisation as panic politics to the normalisation and hegemonisation of securitisation

### 2.1 Hegemonisation of securitisation

How does a phenomenon come to be defined as a security phenomenon (Buzan, Waever & De Wilde 1998; Balzach 2016)? Who or what is being

secured and from what (Abrahamsen 2005: 57-58)? Securitisation occurs when an issue 'is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure' (Buzan et al 1998: 23-24). By portraying an issue as a security issue, it removes the issue from ordinary politics to emergency politics or 'panic politics', where it can be dealt with outside the sphere of the rule of law. The constructivist understanding of the very nature of the securitarian fact is crucial for a better understanding of the articles. Our interest is concentrated in two directions: the securitarian turn as the transition from security policy as one public policy among others to its dominant, hegemonic role; and the redefinition of the political by the securitarian turn.

The African article eloquently illustrates the securitarian turn (Appiagyei-Atua et al):

First, during the Cold War era, Africa was inserted into the Cold War politics to fight proxy wars for either the west or the east. As a result, the big powers overlooked human rights and democratic concerns on the continent and focused on promoting their security interests by propping up dictatorial and predatory regimes to do their bidding. The declaration of the 'war on terror' has moved the focus toward a 'risk/fear/threat' project. In response, most African leaders have adeptly exploited this new environment to their advantage by shrinking the political space and criminalising dissent. The securitised environment has done little to solve many of Africa's development problems. Rather, we see the rollback of advances made in human rights, democracy and respect for rule of law.

Several theoretical lessons can be learnt from the African study. The source of securitisation can be different, even opposite – 'from outside' and 'within' – the outcomes and implications are similar and equally negative. The security agenda dominates all other priorities, including development, and thus establishes itself as hegemonic. Human rights, democracy, the rule of law are marginalised. These trends have a larger validity and the study identifies different expressions in various geopolitical regions – from the Balkans to Asia Pacific; and from Latin America to the Arab region.

Hegemonising securitisation establishes itself as the new anti-pluralist ideology. It is anti-pluralist in two fundamental ways. All other policies – migration, integration, labour – tend to be more and more subordinated to the dominant securitarian logic. The classic ideologies – liberalism, conservatism, socialism – coexist peacefully as alternative world views and political values. The hegemonisation of securitisation undermines the ideological pluralism and transforms the very way politics are perceived, understood and managed. The state of emergency and the extraordinary measures lead to the 'the vicious circle by which the exceptional measures attempting to justify the protection of democratic rule are the same that lead to its ruin' (Agamben 2005). The renaissance of Carl Schmitt's (2007) conception of the political testifies of the triple turn: the understanding of politics as politics of enemies; the overproduction of enemies as security threats; the multiplication and strengthening of the borders between 'friends' and 'enemies', conceptualised in the triad Bordering-Othering-Ordering (Houtum & Naerssen 2002).

## 2.2 Liquefaction of securitisation

Securitisation is the rhetorical strategy of presenting certain issues as security threats in opposition to others (Buzan, Waever & De Wilde 1998). Securitisation as speech act is the most problematised and contested concept (McDonald 2008; Bigo 2002). We do not enter the bipolar theoretical controversy and prefer to interpret it from a different angle. We understand security to become a speech act as theoretical metaphor, marking the transition from 'ontological' to 'liquid' securitisation. Surveillance is the conceptual and political prism for understanding the 'liquefaction' of securitisation.

Lamer examines the interlinkages between securitisation and surveillance in the European context, and argues that the 'implementation of mass surveillance measures in Europe shows that the continent is drifting into a permanent state of securitisation that threatens not only certain human rights, but the very foundation of democratic societies by permanently altering state-society relations'. The surveillance case study illustrates three facets of the transition from 'ontological' to 'liquid' securitisation: the changing object of the security threats; the 'normalisation' of securitisation; the disempowerment of citizens.

'Ontological' securitisation focuses on hard risks and 'objective' threats – wars, war on terror, wars on drugs: 'In 2016, the war on drugs in Mexico became the second most lethal conflict in the world (only surpassed by Syria)' (Lopez). It is characterised by the domination of the most archaic and the most ontological challenge to security – war. The new security threats, such as terrorism and the war on drugs, are also 'translated' into the language of war. In the new epoch of 'liquid' securitisation, everybody could be declared an enemy; everything could be transformed into a security threat; and, hence, surveillance is becoming more and more comprehensive and *en masse*, from one side, and accepted, from another. The changing object of the security threats leads to the *normalisation of securitisation*; to the shift from state of emergency to the normalisation of the exceptional; from 'panic politics' to the nexus securitisation – surveillance and the transition from the 'rule of law' towards the 'rule by law' (Treguer 2016: 7). Previously illegal surveillance practices were increasingly legalised. 'Over time, and repeated often enough, this can create a "new normal"' (Tarrow 2015: 165-166; Lamer). Security is routinised rather than narrowed down to a specific thread that enables emergency measures (McDonald 2008: 570).

Brad Smith, president of Microsoft, sums up the paradox of the surveillance society as follows: 'If you can't plan in private, you can't act in public.' 'People who are watched or who think that they are being watched behave differently from their unwatched selves; they exercise self-control and self-censorship' (Lamer). The permanent state of securitisation threatens the foundation of democratic societies – the civic agency and the sphere of its activity.

The disempowerment of citizens takes a variety of forms: decreasing capacity of deconstructing the securitisation discourses because of a lack of imagination for better alternatives to safeguard human rights while employing surveillance technologies (Dencik & Cable 2017: 778).

### 2.3 More securitisation – less security

The more securitised the governmental policy, the less security for the citizens. The articles in this issue of the *Journal* exemplify this paradox by a variety of cases. Avetisyan et al provide evidence that the better funded the police is in Armenia, the more crime increases in the country, and conclude that the enhancement and militarisation of police forces are the major challenges to human security.

Two social groups need special protection – vulnerable communities and the activists acting and fighting for the right of all to have rights. The study demonstrates a paradoxical phenomenon: Instead of becoming a privileged target of protection, they are among the most securitised targets.

Hayes et al analyse the impact of securitisation on four marginalised groups in the Asia Pacific: abused children; trafficked women refugees; killed human rights defenders; and harassed lesbian, gays and transgender persons. 'It is difficult to see how the four groups who are attacked by security measures could realistically be conceived as threats given their relative lack of power. Rather, the conclusion must be made that they are attacked through securitisation precisely because of their disempowerment.' Attacking the most vulnerable instead of protecting them is the first paradox that the authors address. The second is the use of illegal or quasi-judicial measures by democratic states: vigilante extra-judicial executions in the Philippines; religious groups' homophobia in Indonesia; and the physical and sexual abuse of children by state security officers in the Philippines.

From the Asia Pacific to the Balkans, Africa and the post-Soviet space, human rights defenders are among the most securitised groups. Krasteva and Vladiljavjevic observe that in South-Eastern Europe, civic and human rights activists are systematically targeted by policies and practices of Othering and Ordering, whereby they are constructed as traitors to national identity and cohesion. The actors of humanitarian activism are ridiculed as promoters of failed multiculturalism and are marginalised in the public space. Lopez concludes that 'in Latin America today criminalisation of human rights defenders is the backlash of bringing complaints against public officials in cases of corruption, or in the context of the investigation of serious violations of human rights, or of international humanitarian law in the context of internal armed conflicts or past democratic collapses'.

If security risks did not exist, securitising agents would have invented them.

Sartre said that if Jews did not exist, anti-Semitism would have invented them. If I paraphrase Sartre, it is to emphasise that securitising agents need security threats in the same intense political and symbolic way as anti-Semitism needs Jews.

The transition from the classic security policy to normalisation and hegemonisation of securitisation is paved by the reversal of the political logic and causality: Security is not introduced in response to a threat, but rather a threat is created to justify the security (Hayes et al). The Asian Pacific case illustrates this major conclusion about the changing nature of legislation and policies: The laws during the Cold War or colonialism are conceived as a response to the threats of communism or self-determination. However, at the end of colonialism or the Cold War, rather

than considering the end of the threat and thus deleting the laws, states went through a process of inventing new existential threats to justify these laws.

The reversed logic of securitisation impacts the beneficiaries: Instead of the state protecting the citizens, the elites start protecting themselves: 'Despite all the funding and serious aid from the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), the Armenian police have chiefly been focused on ensuring regime survival rather than public order and fighting crime' (Avetisyan et al). The triad of overproduction of threats, authoritarian leaders and elites, and undemocratic regimes constitutes the vicious circle of the hegemonised securitisation. The article dealing with the post-Soviet context illustrates how securitisation techniques are mobilised by (semi)-authoritarian leaders to ensure regime endurance. The article about the Western Balkans examines the populist misuses of security threats and the passage of the populist, nationalist and authoritarian politics from the periphery of the political scene to the mainstream.

### 3 Are emancipatory alternatives to hegemonised securitisation possible?

'No emancipatory alternative, no critical security studies': Hynek & Chandler (2013) emphasise that a fundamental aim of critical security studies is to elaborate alternatives to securitisation. The authors contributing to the present issue develop them from two perspectives, human security and active citizenship, both emancipated from the securitised state.

#### 3.1 Human security as human right in the epoch of hegemonic securitisation

Securitisation means securitisation. Today tautological statements make headlines.<sup>1</sup> If I paraphrase Teresa May, it is to emphasise that the hegemonisation of securitisation aims at delegitimising alternative discourses, especially those of a normative nature, such as human rights. The choice of human security as a key concept of our study of securitisation is substantiated by three arguments. First, there is a need to adequately develop the language of human rights in the time of securitisation; second, the critical implementation of the concepts to test and verify its sphere of validity; third, it is imperative to set normative standards to security policies.

Human security is the 'translation' of human rights in the context of hegemonic securitarian discourse. Human rights are the normative discourse of the 'end of history', of the non-contested legitimacy of liberal democracy, and of the globalisation of democratisation. Today, securitisation, mainstreaming of populism, elected authoritarianism and illiberal democracies are the new games in town. For a normative discourse to be accepted in the new political arena of hegemonic

1 Teresa May: 'Brexit means Brexit.'

securitisation, it should incorporate ‘security’ in the main message (Annan 2000):

Human security, in its broadest sense, embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potential. Every step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict. Freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment – these are the interrelated building blocks of human – and therefore national – security.

Human security conceptualises our approach to security from below, ‘bottom-up’, from the perspective of citizens: ‘Security is not about how a threat is conceived by a state, nor about the capacity and legitimacy of the security forces, but it is about the people who suffer the consequences’ (Hayes et al).

The second perspective of our constructive problematisation of the human security concept is to test it in different contexts (Avetisyan et al):

The Belarusian case is especially interesting as it testifies against the optimistic assumptions that human development and human security are mutually reinforcing. Belarus has the highest HDI in the post-Soviet space and literally is knocking at the basket of “Very High Human Development”. The achievements in economic security, accessible healthcare and education wrapped in President Alexander Lukashenko’s socially-oriented economy building (Belta 2017) is willfully opposed to civil-political freedoms.

The third dimension is the citizens’ empowerment through human security as normative standard (Appiagyei-Atua et al):

The shift in focus from the state to the individual affirms the recognition of the latter as possessing legal personality in international law, unlike previously where they could only act on the international plane through their states, as enunciated in the concept of diplomatic protection. Through this extension of legal personality in international law, the individual is equipped to bring action against his or her own state as well as other states.

### 3.2 Citizenship – Emancipated from the securitised state

A second perspective of the citizens’ empowerment for civic resistance to securitisation is through the concept of citizenship. The study unfolds in two steps. The first is the critical deconstruction of the concept of audience in the securitisation theory: ‘The audience does more than merely sanctioning a securitising move. The audience can actually fulfill different functions, namely, providing moral support and supplying the securitising actor with a formal mandate (such as a vote by the legislature), without which no policy to address the threat would be possible’ (Balzacq et al 2015: 500). The authors of the present study do not subscribe to this homogenised understanding of audience for two reasons: It transforms the citizenry into passive spectators of securitisation; and it undermines the capacity of civic resistance to hegemonised securitisation. The active understanding of citizens in their capacity of imagining and creating alternatives is conceptualised through citizenship and studied comparatively by distinguishing contestatory and solidary citizenships (Krasteva).

## 4 Conclusion

With 17 countries, and seven geopolitical regions – Latin America, Western Europe, South-Eastern Europe, both the Western and Eastern Balkans, Africa, the Asia Pacific and the Arab region – the coverage is global, and the articles in this issue collectively satisfy any hunger for geopolitical diversity.

Just as security has to be understood as a process of securitisation/insecuritisation/desecuritisation, so has freedom to be understood as a process of freedomisation/unfreedomisation and defreedomisation (Bigo 2006: 38).

The authors of the human security share the dynamic logic of hegemonisation of securitisation, but opt for refreedomisation, for the empowerment of human rights defendants and active citizens for deconstructing and resisting securitisation, for imagining alternative discourses and policies. Because we are also academics aspiring to change the world.

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