The Copenhagen School on Tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is Securitization Theory Useable Outside Europe?

CLAIRE WILKINSON*

*Centre for Russian & East European Studies,
University of Birmingham, UK*

The article argues that the theoretical framework presented by the Copenhagen School is currently unsuited to empirical studies outside the West owing to two factors. First, the presence of the 'Westphalian straitjacket' has prevented explicit interrogation of the normative concepts underlying the framework: there is a presumption that European understandings of society and the state are universal. Second, the centrality of the speech-act for securitization to the exclusion of other forms of expression, such as physical action, results in the theoretical framework producing a Westernized description of a given situation. The extent to which these factors limit the utility of the concepts of securitization and societal security in a non-Western setting is illustrated through the case of the overthrow of the government in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005. This example forms an empirical critique to highlight how theoretical shortcomings result in a simplified and Westernized description of the situation that does not take into account the specific local socio-political context. The article concludes that if the Copenhagen School's theoretical framework is to be considered suitable for universal application, future theoretical developments must explicitly address the issues discussed to enable progress in escaping International Relations' Westphalian straitjacket.

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Escaping the State?

DESPITE THE INCREASED PROMINENCE of security discourses in the post-Cold War and especially in the post-9/11 world, 'security' remains a controversial concept, with a sufficient number of definitions being proposed to warrant David Baldwin's (1997: 5) observation that

'redefining "security" has recently become something of a cottage industry'. One of the most successful 'redefinitions' has been the work of the Copenhagen School, which has centred around addressing the need to include so-called new security issues such as migration, transnational crime and intrastate conflict in any security analysis, while avoiding a move to either a global or an individual conceptualization of security that certain scholars have advocated (Wæver, 1995: 47–49). In developing their three main concepts of securitization, sectoral security and regional security complex theory (Buzan & Wæver, 2003), a primary motivation has been the inability of traditional International Relations to accommodate these new threats theoretically or empirically due to an almost exclusive focus on the state and the military (Buzan & Wæver, 1997: 242).

The debate in security studies over what should and should not be defined in 'security' terms has reflected wider IR debates about the role and position of culture and identity in the discipline ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically. The 1990s saw a considerable amount of engaged debate on these two phenomena, with adherents of traditional IR either railing against these seemingly fuzzy and ephemeral concepts for being, variously, unscientific, subjective and undefined, or, at best, seeking to recast them into a more objective and essentialist mould (McSweeney, 1996). Nevertheless, a growing number of scholars view identity and culture as central concepts for understanding and explaining the contemporary world, as the increased prominence of feminist, constructivist and post-structuralist writings attests (Krause & Renwick, 1996; Hopf, 1998; Bøås, 2004; Tickner, 2004).

Nevertheless, the debate within IR's subdiscipline, security studies, between traditionalists, wishing to maintain a focus on the use of military force and interstate politics, and the non-traditionalists, who wish to redefine the security agenda by either broadening or deepening it, appears to have resulted in a stalemate: dialogue has given way to a 'you go your way, I'll go mine' attitude, described by David Campbell (1998: 215):

> Where once we were all caught in the headlights of the large North American car of international relations theory, now the continental sportster of critical theories has long since left behind the border guards and toll collectors of the mainstream – who can be observed in the rearview mirror waving their arms wildly still demanding papers and the price of admission – as the occupants go on their way in search of another political problem to explore.

At first glance, it would seem that non-traditional approaches to security studies are forging bravely ahead, taking matters like culture and identity in their stride. Yet, Campbell's analogy hints at the fact that commonalities between the 'large North American car' and the 'continental sportster' still exist: they are both generically still cars – different models, but the same mode of transport, with no thought given to whether it is the most effective mode for reaching the selected destination.

Similarly, the various 'new' approaches that have developed since the early 1980s are still fundamentally part of the discipline of IR and, more importantly, its culture. This culture *of* IR (Valbjørn, 2004) suggests that although new epistemologies are introduced, the underlying assumptions on which these are built are rarely questioned. To return to Campbell's motoring analogy, few people have considered whether Western cars are the best way to reach a particular destination, particularly when journeying beyond the asphalted roads of Western Europe and North America, nor whether they cope effectively with the terrain. In the same way, it is often assumed that theories and concepts developed in the West can and do accurately portray conditions in the non-Western world, with at best only surface consideration given to precise socio-historical circumstances.

Barry Buzan and Richard Little described this phenomenon as IR's 'Westphalian straitjacket', defining it as 'the strong tendency to assume that the model established in seventeenth century Europe should define what the international system is for all times and places' (Buzan & Little, 2001: 25). In the contemporary world, this Westphalian straitjacket continues to constrain IR in several ways. Most fundamentally, it manifests itself in the assumption that the 'European' or, more accurately, the Euro-American model of the state and the accompanying political culture is valid globally. Thus the use of words such as 'state' and 'society' take on a normative dimension, the assumption being made that they can be used directly and are understood in 'Western' rather than local terms and contexts. Moreover, where there is a mismatch between theoretical expectations (i.e. that a system operates in a Western way) and empirical evidence, IR theory's normative Westphalian straitjacket acts as an editor, highlighting similarities to the Euro-American model, rephrasing to better suit Western understandings and excising specificities deemed irrelevant to the Western model. The question, therefore, is whether non-traditional approaches to security – and in this case specifically the Copenhagen School – have actually managed to break free of this contemporary Westphalian straitjacket.

This article seeks to critique the Copenhagen School's efforts to produce a conceptualization of security that can include 'new' issues and escape the Eurocentrism characteristic of the Westphalian straitjacket. Following an initial consideration of the School's theoretical development, with reference to critiques and empirical applications of the main concepts, especially securitization, discussion will focus on an empirical 'road test' of the Copenhagen School's theoretical approach based on Kyrgyzstan's 'Tulip Revolution' of March 2005. There are two main aims. First, to demonstrate how a situation in a non-Western setting can be described with the framework provided by the Copenhagen School. Second, to facilitate an examination of the School's strengths, weaknesses, and, most significantly, oversights and presumptions that may indicate the continued presence of the Westphalian straitjacket

despite the conscious efforts of theoreticians to counter Buzan & Little's (2001: 25) charge of 'a-historical and Eurocentric arrogance'.

This empirical problematization will then be drawn upon to discuss the applicability of normative concepts such as 'security', 'society' and 'identity' outside of Euro-American contexts and the issue of institutionalized Eurocentrism. It is argued that the Copenhagen School has yet to actively escape from the Westphalian straitjacket owing to this institutionalized Eurocentrism. Contrary to claims by the Copenhagen School (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 86), this latent Eurocentrism contributes to a portrayal of a situation that is by default cast in Western terms and that 'edits' the processes of securitization into a linear and simplified version of events owing to the emphasis on outcome – that is, a successful securitization – rather than on the processes involved.

Contextualizing the Copenhagen School

The Copenhagen School's approach to security is founded in the concepts of securitization, sectoral security and regional security complex theory, with theoretical development evident in the School's successive individual and collective works.[1] It is worth noting that the self-referential nature of securitization lends the approach something of the character of a research programme in terms of creating a framework for the further exploration of security dynamics, rather than providing a definitive answer from the outset: the aim is not to simply apply the theories to a given situation, but also to examine any problems that arise and attempt to explain them (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 49), creating a potentially reflexive approach to analysis.

This progressive perspective is reflected in the Copenhagen School's theoretical development in key publications. These works have focused variously on the three central concepts – Ole Wæver's idea of securitization, societal security within Buzan's conception of sectoral security, and, most recently, the extension and development of the concept of security complexes into regional security complex theory. Thus, there is little point in talking in abstract terms of a Copenhagen School 'theory' *per se* without further reference to particular concepts and, in many cases, their accompanying critiques and applications. In this respect, even opponents of the Copenhagen School and of any broadening of the security agenda beyond the state have conceded that the 'spirit' of the School is 'to invite and open up the discussion of security rather than to entrench into a fortified position' (Eriksson, 1999: 349).

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[1] Namely Buzan's (1991) second edition of *People, States and Fear*; Wæver et al.'s (1993) book *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*; Wæver's (1995) chapter 'Securitization and Desecuritization' in Lipschutz (1995); Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde's (1998) book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*; and, finally, Buzan & Wæver's (2003) aforementioned *Regions and Powers*.

It is the Copenhagen School's ability to stimulate debate both directly and in the context of broader ongoing debates in IR (Williams, 1998: 436), as well as its members' efforts to accommodate actors and referent objects other than the state, that in principle makes the School well-placed to consider security in any locale. The key analytical tool is provided by securitization, which conceptualizes the process of invoking 'security' on behalf of a particular referent object such as the state or a group identity. Securitization conceptualizes security as a 'speech-act', in which the 'utterance itself is the act. By saying the words, something is done (like betting, giving a promise or naming a ship)' (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 26). The 'security' part of the act is taken to signify the presence of an existential threat to the referent object, or, more simply, a threat to its survival.

Traditionally, the referent object has been the state. Within the analytical framework proposed by the Copenhagen School, it is recognized that different sectors – political, military, economic, societal and environmental – have different referent objects. What all referent objects have in common is that this object must be designated as facing 'an existential threat requiring emergency action/special measures and the acceptance of that designation by a significant audience' (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 27). In other words, it has to have a certain level of support to be securitized insofar as securitization 'is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special sort of politics or as above politics'. Thus, it is possible to distinguish between a successful securitization and an 'unsuccessful' securitization or 'securitizing move' (when the audience does not accept the discourse presented).

The purpose of the sectoral framework is to highlight a particular security logic based on the sector's characteristic relationships. In the case of societal security, this means analysing systems 'in terms of patterns of identity and the desire to maintain cultural independence' (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 8), rather than assuming the state is the referent object. The creation of an alternative referent object is particularly welcome in the case of situations where states lack legitimacy and non-state actors consequently have greater potential to act as alternative loci of legitimacy. The fact that a specific identity is often invoked as the referent object of a securitization relating to the societal sector points to the importance of conceptualizing security dynamics beyond the traditional level of the state and the military.

This is not to say, however, that there are no theoretical restrictions regarding what can constitute a referent object. As noted earlier, identity is the organizing concept of the societal sector, since

> society is about identity, the self-conception of communities and of individuals identifying themselves as members of a community. These identities are distinct from, although often entangled with, the explicitly political organizations concerned with government. (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 119)

Thus, societal *insecurity* occurs 'when communities of whatever kind define a development or potentiality as a threat to the survival of their community' (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 119), or more accurately, the identity of their community as such, hence Wæver's assertion that one could equally talk of 'identity security' (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 120). The key point is that the identities in question are *collective* identities, rather than simply those of individuals, so there is a 'we' identity that can be invoked as requiring protection to ensure its existence. In the case of Europe, these identity units have most traditionally been nations, but they can also be religions, ethnic groups, tribes, clans or, in principle, regional or family groups. Whatever the foundation of the identity, group members must, as Wæver explains, 'have a feeling of together constituting an entity: a people, a nation, a community. . . . a feeling that "we are *x*" and that this is of value to the individual' (Wæver et al., 1993: 18).

The Copenhagen School and the Westphalian Straitjacket

The constitution of a societal referent object involves a logic that is founded on a certain normative understanding of society and its identity that suggests the continued presence of the Westphalian straitjacket. Despite the Copenhagen School's explicitly stating that referent objects at the supra- or substate level are possible, subject to establishing security legitimacy within socially defined boundaries (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 39), the assertion that a society 'differ[s] from social groups in having a high degree of social inertia, a continuity often across generations and a strong infrastructure of norms, values and "institutions" in the wider sense' (Wæver et al., 1993: 21) assumes a degree of continuity, stability and cohesion that is not present in many Second and Third World countries, if indeed it is present in all Western countries.

  This presumption about the nature of society is compounded by the tendency to focus on inherently European understandings of identity, first and foremost nations and ethnic groups, drawing on the ideas of the nation-state and national self-determination. Such identities can arguably be seen as being linked to the state, since citizenship and nationhood/ethnicity are viewed as overlapping, if not contiguous, identities, whose bearers comprise 'society' within a given politico-territorial entity, most often a state. Moreover, these identities are viewed as largely stable, 'often solidly sedimented' (Buzan & Wæver, 1997: 244), a stance that neglects their potentially contingent and reflexive nature. Identity and society are therefore still in danger of being seen in essentialist terms and as inherently linked, in terms of both how they operate and what they signify, owing to Western assump-

tions about how people conceptualize and prioritize their identities based on the Westphalian notion of the nation-state.

The result is that the societal sector is less able to accommodate identity groups that do not operate in parallel to the state, or at least on a similar level, owing to both normative understandings of what 'identity' and 'society' mean and, as shall be seen, the privileging of speech over other forms of expression. This is not to say that potential societal referent objects cannot be constructed within the theoretical framework provided by the Copenhagen School. What must be questioned, however, is whether the criteria and mechanisms provided for their construction and securitization are able to accommodate different interpretations of normative concepts, rather than automatically using Western interpretations and understandings, as Grete Bille (1996: 4) explains:

> What is needed is emic studies exposing if the local communities do have concepts of race and ethnicity, and of religion for that matter, as an element of their understanding of self and other, as well as a solution to the problem . . . of finding both adequate and agreed definitions of the key concepts in order to incorporate these local understandings in an analysis of their importance to conflict relations and solutions.

Despite the apparent theoretical flexibility of designating identity as the referent object of the societal sector, it is here that the Westphalian straitjacket is most restrictive. More than in any other sector, there is a need to consider local context and particularities, rather than assuming commonalities exist: while comparison may serve to emphasize similarities between economies and militaries, for example, it often highlights the individuality of local cultures, with which understandings of identity are inextricably linked. Thus, paradoxically, the societal sector has both the greatest potential to accommodate 'glocalization', but also the greatest limitations – if the socio-cultural context is not explicitly examined.

The use of the concept of securitization within the societal sector further raises the stakes. Critiques of securitization indicate the continued presence of a normative Westphalian straitjacket in the form of inherently Eurocentric assumptions about the social and political context in which any securitization occurs. There are two key issues. The first is that an explicit link between securitization and the construction of *both* the referent object and the securitizing actor needs to be made in order to avoid oversimplification by presenting securitization as a unidirectional and entirely linear process; as Jef Huysmans (1998: 494) points out:

> in the Copenhagen School's project the dualistic constructivism leads to a downplaying of the internal relationship between a process of securitization and a process of identification of both agents (the self-understanding of state or society) and system (the specific organization of the relationship between these agents). [Securitization] . . . simultaneously constructs the identity of the referent object (society, nation) and the agents speaking for that object (governments, bureaucrats, social movements, etc.).

The second issue is the privileging of speech over other means of expression. The implications of this narrow focus on speech have been explored by Lene Hansen, who considers the notion of a 'silent security dilemma', signifying a situation when 'raising something as a security problem is impossible or might even aggravate the threat being faced' (Hansen, 2000: 287). At the heart of Hansen's discussion is the issue of 'voice': who can and cannot 'speak' security. In this respect, the Westphalian straitjacket manifests itself in the Copenhagen School's presumption that speech is possible and desirable (Hansen, 2000: 285).

This may be broadly true in Western countries, where principles of democracy and free speech are *de facto* as well as *de jure*, but is often not the case in non-Western countries, where significant sections of the population may not be afforded the ability to express societal security concerns actively (censorship, imprisonment, threats) or passively (political/social disenfranchisement). In such cases, other forms of expression may – or may not – be used to express security concerns: physical migration or protest actions, for example. These actions logically point to the fact that a community perceives an existential threat and feels the need to act against it. However, on a basic level such physical expressions cannot be accommodated by securitization unless someone verbally interprets the reasons for the behaviour in question, at which point a securitizing actor, referent object and threat discourse may be created in accordance with the securitization framework.

The central position of speech in the School's conceptualization of security thus sets overly restrictive criteria for an analysis of security. Michael Williams (2003: 512) takes up this point with reference to the increasing prevalence and importance of media images in political communication, arguing that

> securitization theory must develop a broader understanding of the mediums, structures, and institutions, of contemporary political communication if it is to address adequately questions of both empirical explanation and ethical appraisal in security practices.

This is especially important in settings where politics is not a public and/or participatory process and access to traditional forums such as print media is limited. Such limitations may not involve direct action like censorship or prohibition; even underdevelopment of a country's infrastructure or high levels of poverty can effectively 'silence' people, potentially leading them to seek other means of expressing concerns and gaining support. Thus, security discourses are constructed, to echo and extend Williams's (2003) title, via words, images and actions. Therefore, it is necessary to consider, first, by what means 'security' is expressed, and second, how securitizing actors and referent objects are constructed, given that they are mutually reinforcing. A consideration of these questions in any empirical study is an important step towards at least 'subtitling' – if not 'translating' – and 'glocalizing' the

security speech-act and loosening the Westphalian straitjacket of normative assumptions.

The Copenhagen School has taken an important step towards addressing latent Eurocentrism with Buzan's distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' states. Buzan & Wæver (2003: 21–22) point out that the presumption that all states are fundamentally alike is 'hugely distorting' and suggest that the strong/weak distinction be viewed as a spectrum, indicating 'the degree of socio-political cohesion between civil society and the institution of government'. While this conceptualization is undoubtedly a useful differentiation to make with regards to providing some contextualization of a country or region's security dynamics, it nevertheless remains within the normative Westphalian straitjacket:

> the multiple adjectives and classification schemes employed – weak, quasi, failed, corrupt, incomplete, backward – make use of dichotomous, evolutionary language that suggests that third world states simply fail to live up to the basic standard of modern civilisation. (Tickner, 2003: 315)

The conceptualization of the state has been explored by Anna Grzymala-Busse and Paula Jones Luong specifically in the post-Soviet context, challenging the idea of the state being a 'coherent and unitary actor'. In many of the USSR successor states, 'no one single agent has uniform influence or authority across all state sectors, and state action is neither centralized nor coherent' (Grzymala-Busse & Jones Luong, 2002: 532–533). Thus, there are multiple and competing loci of authority-building as state-building progresses. While securitization theory is well equipped to deal with the official or formal level – indeed, it is ideally suited to an exploration of security discourses and their relative successes – this focus on state-level politics means that the analysis is in danger of obscuring informal politics and their dynamics, which can possess significant influence and legitimacy. With reference to clan influence on formal institutions in Central Asia, Kathleen Collins highlights the importance of taking other levels and forms of politics beyond the official level into account. Discussing regime consolidation in the Central Asian republics, she comments that 'formal appearances, in short, were deceptive. For the effectual reality of Central Asian politics – at the crucial level of *informal* regime behavior – was nonconsolidation' (Collins, 2002: 145).

This need to consider informal dynamics becomes even clearer at the empirical level. While it is possible to problematize the Copenhagen School's conceptualization of security in a theoretical discussion, any empirical operationalization is nevertheless bounded by securitization's internal logic, including its implicitly Westphalian assumptions. It is therefore necessary to examine the actual impact of the Westphalian straitjacket when the concepts of securitization and societal security are operationalized in specific contexts, particularly non-Western, non-democratic ones.

Going Beyond Concepts

The question of the Westphalian straitjacket's impact on empirical opera-tionalizations is the subject of the second part of this article, with the case of Kyrgyzstan's so-called Tulip Revolution of March 2005 providing an empiri-cal critique. This case study will focus on the two months prior to the ousting of then president Askar Akaev and his government, paying particular atten-tion to the local context and conditions. Drawing on reports from local and Russian newspapers, articles in the international media and material pre-sented in locally published books on the 'March events' (Kazybaev, 2006; Knyazev, 2005; Shishkareva, 2005), the development of these narratives will be mapped out using the framework provided by securitization and societal security, with the purpose of critiquing the theoretical conceptualization.

In conjunction with an initial contextualization of how the Central Asian region is conceptualized by the Copenhagen School in *Regions and Powers* (Buzan & Wæver, 2003), as well as in IR more widely, this will serve to high-light many of the points raised in the previous discussion, illustrating how the Westphalian straitjacket results in an edited version of events that may not fully capture local security dynamics. The article will conclude with a brief consideration of the implications of 'institutionalized' Eurocentrism, and of how the Copenhagen School can move towards actively escaping the normative Westphalian straitjacket.

Regions and Powers represents the Copenhagen School's comprehensive attempt to bring together the School's theoretical components and its empiri-cal studies of specific geographical regions. Regional security complex theory uses the mechanism of securitization to answer the question 'Are the threats that get securitized located primarily at the domestic, the regional, or the system level?' (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 13). These levels – the domestic, state-based, regional, interregional and global – in turn provide the organizing dynamic for analysis. However, the authors' premise that the regional level has gained greater autonomy and prominence in international politics and the privileging of an approach founded on the idea of bounded territoriality, insofar as all states must be located within only one regional security com-plex (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 3–4), threaten to tighten the normative Westphalian straitjacket: states and their groupings become the default unit of analysis as the distribution of power is envisaged in broadly neorealist terms (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 4).

Thus, even before reference is made to any region, there is an additional tension created between the largely constructivist approach of securitization theory and the more realist-oriented regional security complex theory it is contained in: the return of the state and its accompanying entourage of assumptions clearly favours the regional level, using states as the building

blocks for each region and in the process curtailing the influence of specific circumstances to determine the dominant level(s) (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 12). Indeed, an examination of their interpretation of security dynamics in the former Soviet Union – described as 'a regional security complex around Russia' (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 397) – can arguably be seen as being directly contradictory to the assertion that regional security complex theory helps ensure local factors are properly considered and the role of great powers not overemphasized (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 46–47). Central Asia is characterized as a weak subcomplex of weak 'not very state-like' states and weak powers, with the potential for external powers to penetrate high and Russian involvement still strong (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 423–426). The resulting interpretation of Central Asian security discourses is thus presented through the prisms of the main power (Russia), external powers and the formal statehood of the republics. The Westphalian straitjacket is thus not only a conceptual constraint, but also a powerful operational one as it filters security narratives for 'suitable' – that is, Euro-American – content and context.

Such a collective portrait of the five Central Asian republics, while undoubtedly concurring with portrayals of the region in much of the 'New Great Game' literature that has emerged since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Menon, 2003; Omarov, 2005), effectively obscures local 'facilitating conditions' in favour of focusing on primarily geostrategic regional dynamics. Security is seen from the point of view of outsiders and using their terms and interpretations rather than local ones. Empirically, securitization is further restricted to the realm of high politics at the level of the state, with little potential for including substate actors that do not interact with official politics, leaving security sectors to merely describe various aspects of the state's security as non-state actors and groups are left in the analytical shadows.

Kyrgyzstan in many ways provides an ideal case against which to test the Copenhagen School's concepts and assess the degree to which the Westphalian straitjacket continues to affect them. For, as Aleksandr Knyazev (2005: 11) writes,

> In reality in Central Asia, in contrast to the party-political factor familiar to Anglo-Saxon civilisation, internal politics are defined by a reasonably complicated complex of regional, clan, tribal, ethnic, criminal and other, most frequently latent, connections. Only the laziest political scientist talking about events in Kirgizia up until March 2005 did not pay attention to the particularities of the political and social culture.

Indeed, it was the 'March events' of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan that particularly highlighted the imbalance caused by paying insufficient attention to the domestic level of security analysis in favour of focusing on regional dynamics and formal politics. The ousting of the president was largely unexpected, both domestically and internationally, until the storming of the main government building in Bishkek, the White House, was under way on 24 March. This was the culmination of a series of securitizing moves over a period of almost three

months in which the government – and particularly the incumbent president, Askar Akaev – was successfully cast by Akaev's opponents as a threat to the well-being of the Kyrgyzstani people and the republic itself, meriting physical removal. Yet, a closer look at how events progressed, and how the various securitizing actors constructed – and were constructed by – securitizing narratives, suggests that the processes was not as linear and clearcut as the concepts of securitization and societal security might make them seem in a retrospective application, thus highlighting once more the need to question underlying assumptions at all stages..

Despite hopes in the early 1990s that this former Soviet republic might undergo a successful transition to a market economy and democratic political system in the Western model, by the mid-1990s the republic appeared to be in state of economic stagnation and de-democratization as President Akaev consolidated his power-base within his and his wife's respective clans. In Western terminology, the state had regressed from being simply 'weak' – a condition attributable to state-building still being in the early stages – to 'failing' or, more recently, 'faltering' (International Crisis Group, 2005b) as informal systems of patronage rendered formal institutions increasingly impotent. Thus, beyond the formal level of sovereignty and limited domestic functions, such as the issuing of laws that could rarely be enforced, the state was, to quote Buzan and Wæver, 'not very state-like'. This loss of *de facto* legitimacy in turn meant that patronage networks took on even greater significance and a further distancing of the people from the state occurred. Terms such as 'society' and 'civil society' were largely empty of meaning, and certainly did not correspond with the social reality beyond the formal level of high politics.

Against this background, some political opposition did emerge, despite increasing government efforts to suppress dissent. However, prior to the protests during the parliamentary elections, which grew in scale and demands throughout January, February and March, the lack of cohesion among the various politicians identified as being 'opposition' members meant that they did not have sufficient legitimacy to be seen as a credible collective political actor (Rodionov & Neshkumai, 2005). People's participation in the majority protests was based on some personal affiliation to the figure in question, as one woman from the northern town of Talas explained:

> Ravshan has his own voters, Imanaliev his own. Borubaev has his own voters, and Sherniyazov his own, but Talas is small. Overall, the town broke into six or seven groups. . . . I didn't want to vote for anyone [in the second round of elections]. . . . But then I had to vote for someone and as Imanaliev came from my village, I voted for him. (Shishkareva, 2005: 26)

Nevertheless, owing to changes in the electoral system prior to the parliamentary elections that further enhanced political individualization and the importance of patronage networks (International Crisis Group, 2005a), the

initial securitizing moves that occurred effectively constructed not only a referent object and narrative of threat, but also the securitizing actor itself in the form of 'the Opposition'.[2] As noted above, local issues and loyalties originally brought people out on to the streets; it was only as protests grew in scale and spread in various regions, particularly the south around Osh and Jalalabad, that the focus moved from individual figures to an Opposition as a collective entity. In effect, protest actions and narratives constructed the Opposition as the securitizing actor – a role opposition figures were initially reluctant to be cast in. Roza Otunbaeva, later dubbed the 'locomotive of the revolution' (Abdyrazakov, 2005), explicitly rejected the idea of going beyond the bounds of 'normal' politics by staging a revolution: 'we are not talking about a revolution, but about a peaceful, orderly and constitutional transfer of power' (cited in Ragozin, 2005). Similarly, Topchubek Turgananliev stressed the need to remain within the law: 'Thousands of people can come out to support their candidates. But we should keep in mind that we can only act by lawful methods' (cited in Gordeyev, 2005).

The securitization narrative developed through a number of stages and levels as events progressed, and was increasingly able to use the government's counter-securitizing moves to consolidate all aspects of its own narrative and construction of both the referent object and its securitizing actor. The culmination was the overthrow of the government when people finally responded to the threat narrative, physically affirming the securitization with the storming of the White House and overthrow of the government. However, as will be seen, this event was only belatedly incorporated by the securitizing actor – the Opposition – into their narrative of events as a justified action beyond 'normal' politics. As Roza Otunbaeva asserted on 12 April, 'on March 24 a popular revolution was made, we call it so, no matter what you call it' (cited in *RIA Novosti*, 2005).

The initial securitizing moves were constructed on the local level by a number of candidates broadly seen as being either non-pro-government or opposition who had been barred from standing in the elections. They called on their supporters, whose responses were based as much on personal connections as on an evaluation of the arguments, to protest the decisions of the Central Elections Committee, which was portrayed as acting in favour of the government (Gordeyev, 2005). This began the process of constructing a narrative of threat, based on the implicit and explicit message that the government did not have the interests of the people at heart since it refused to allow 'the people's choices' to stand. This narrative gained ground throughout January and February among protestors, particularly as the government

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[2] Throughout this article, 'Opposition', with a capital letter, is used to refer to the collective entity and identity of opposition politicians and their supporters as an actor in securitizing moves/securitizations. In contrast, the use of 'opposition' merely indicates that the person/group in question was not seen as being pro-government.

did not appear to take the protests seriously and responded only arbitrarily.

The fact that media access was severely limited, even in the capital, meant that people's perceptions were influenced by what they heard at protests and via social networks. An increasing sense that the government was responsible for the media blackout also served to strengthen the narrative considerably, not least with incidents such as electricity being cut off to the US-funded publishing house where several pro-opposition newspapers were printed, and Radio Azattyk, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Kyrgyz service, being prevented from broadcasting when an auction for its wavelengths was announced (Reporters Without Borders, 2005). However, at the end of February, it was difficult to identify the actors involved in any securitizing moves: the government denied involvement, and the opposition was still recognizably fragmented. Alymbek Akunov, from Naryn oblast, described the situation: 'Our people could not do that [choose one opposition leader]. In Ukraine, in Georgia, they chose one colour. . . . We have six colours. Atambaev came with one colour, people from Talas came with green, Bakiev's group with orange. It was multicoloured, but it was clear that it was not friendly' (cited in Shishkareva, 2005: 31).

The first signs that these securitizing moves could coalesce into a successful securitization came in early March, when the supporters of a number of candidates physically occupied local administrative buildings and chased local governors – seen as government lackeys – out of towns. At least on a local level, it appeared that people had accepted the security narrative presented, and, indeed, had progressed to taking measures to counter the constructed threat, signified not least by growing demands for Akaev's immediate resignation (*Kyrgyz Weekly*, 2005: 1,13, 16–19, 26).

The government's response was to try and counter the original narrative with its own securitization. It attempted to cast Kyrgyzstan as its referent object, arguing that the protests were a threat to the republic's existence: as government officials threateningly warned, those who wanted to see Ukraine 2004 could end up with Tajikistan 1992 – a thinly veiled reference to the possibility of civil war (*Kyrgyz Election News*, 2005). Those leading the protests were accused of being provocateurs and of being unpatriotic and self-interested political mercenaries who had no greater motive than to gain power themselves at the cost of the people (Akaev, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005).

This counter-move failed, and in fact ended up strengthening the original threat narrative by increasing perceptions that President Akaev's main concern was to hold on to power at any cost, a view openly voiced in a statement by one opposition group that concluded 'the future of the country is in danger!' (*Moya stolitsa novosti*, 2005). More significantly, this counter-move served to consolidate the Kyrgyzstani people as the referent object. It also effectively constructed the securitizing actor in the form of the Opposition, to some extent moving the focus away from specific individuals – develop-

ments on the ground among the hitherto incohesive opposition leaders reflected this new legitimacy several days later when the Co-ordinating Council of Kyrgyz National Unity was founded in Jalalabad on 15 March, creating a focal point for the Opposition.

Even so, at this stage the transformation from securitizing moves to securitization had still not been made: while local audiences had accepted the security narrative, which had been increasingly collectively constructed, it was not yet significant insofar as endorsing the need to take action against the perceived threat: protests were still in response to locally based issues. In other words, on a national level, the audience was content to call for immediate resignations, but did not at this point see the need to move beyond this to actually accept the idea of using politically extraneous measures to eliminate the perceived threat. The success, or otherwise, of the cumulative securitizing moves remained undecided, particularly in the capital, as was noted in an article published in the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya gazeta*: 'The very first protest actions showed that the opposition could not count on widespread support in the capital.' Even so, the same article noted that the opposition had resorted to force in Osh and Jalalabad to occupy local administrations, noting the departure from peaceful methods of achieving their aims (Panfilova, Sas & Gordienko, 2005). However, others questioned the degree of control the opposition had over events (Shermatova, 2005), raising the question of whether the opposition was only actually formed as a securitizing actor retrospectively, rather than during events.

Finally, 24 March saw the default completion of the securitization as 'extraneous measures' were carried out. Opposition leaders had organized a mass rally in the capital, Bishkek, with people being bussed in from southern regions of the country to join the opposition's supporters. The rally began peacefully, with leading opposition figures using a series of speeches to reiterate their message that Akaev must relinquish power sooner, by resigning, or later, at the presidential elections scheduled for December 2005. It appeared that the securitizing dynamic had begun to abate, and that events could be brought back into the realm of 'normal' politics. Certainly this appeared to be the opposition's intention:

> It is particularly worth noting that the opposition leaders held a coordinating council meeting 24 hours prior to the protest to agree on actions. Agreement was reached only over THE CONDUCTING OF A TERMLESS PROTEST OUTSIDE THE 'WHITE HOUSE'. ITS STORMING WAS NOT PLANNED. Protesters planned to erect yurts and tents on the square and await a peaceful outcome. But. . . . (Gruzdov, 2005; emphasis in original)

This impression changed rapidly with the arrival of a large group of protesters from the southern city of Osh. Eyewitness accounts recounted that, rather than joining the existing rally, they continued to the White House, their numbers swelled by the addition of youths who had grown tired of

listening to speeches in the face of 'white-hat' provocateurs allegedly hired by the incumbent regime. Clashes ensued between this group of demonstrators and the police before the latter, under orders not to use force, fled (Zygar, 2005). This left the way open for the White House to be stormed by this 'significant' – though not majority – audience, whose actions in effect completed the securitization, although it was only constructed in speech-act terms by the Opposition after the event. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath, opposition leaders seemed shocked by what had happened. Kurmanbek Bakiev, now President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was widely quoted as saying that 'he had not even imagined how it would end' (cited in Akilova, Tokombaeva & Taranova, 2005), while Anvar Artykov reflected that 'we just intended to weaken their hold on power' (cited in Shishkareva, 2005).

  With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to use the framework provided by securitization to conceptualize Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution, identifying the securitizing actors and the final successful securitization. Indeed, the fact that the precise dynamics of a securitization often do not become clear until after the event has long been acknowledged by the Copenhagen School (Wæver et al., 1993: 188; McSweeney, 1996: 84). Even so, as can be seen from the evolution of events described, the conceptualization is not trouble-free in terms of accurately describing the development of the securitization and its constituent parts. Contrary to the linear dynamic described by securitization, starting with a securitizing actor who then constructs a referent object and threat narrative to be accepted or rejected, the process may in practice start at any point, with the component parts developing simultaneously and contributing to each other's construction. Furthermore, securitizing moves do not exist in isolation and may be simultaneously or subsequently linked to other securitizing moves that in total contribute to a securitization even if they are individually unsuccessful. In the Kyrgyzstani case, while the referent object was relatively quickly constructed, the threat narrative took far longer to develop as it effectively co-constructed the securitizing actor in the form of the Opposition, who gained legitimacy only as the narrative began to be accepted and expanded from multiple locales to the national level after 24 March.

  Most significantly, at several stages physical action overtook any speech-act interpretation, and was only reincorporated into the overall securitization structure with retrospective narrative interpretation on the part of the opposition positing itself as the securitizing actor. Securitization is currently unable to describe such a sequence of events without 'cleaning up' the order of events to fit the need for the speech-act to have chronological precedence. This fact, as noted earlier, is likely to have a far greater impact in non-democratic contexts, since it is under such conditions that freedom of speech is likely to be restricted, especially for non-state actors. Moreover, even if speech is in principle an option, it may be rejected as being ineffective or pointless, hence Otunbaeva's labelling of protests as 'street democracy'. As

she explained, 'people here have no other option but to go out on the square and demand power back' (cited in Grigorieva, 2005). Such a potential effect is unacknowledged by the Copenhagen School, showing the continuing effect of the Westphalian straitjacket.

The move from speech-act to physical action highlights securitization's over-reliance on the medium of speech, as discussed in the first section of this article. People felt unable to get their security concerns addressed adequately through politics, official or otherwise, resulting in a leapfrog over securitization into physical action, first peacefully, then involving the use of force. Tempting as it is to assume that this was mainly the result of the political realm being largely closed off to all but a small political (clan-based) elite in the republic, it is also a result of Kyrgyzstani society having a far more localized and fragmented character than Western conceptions of society, with transitions between the various spatial scales (local, provincial, regional, national) often being disjointed physically, mentally, culturally and linguistically, making talk of 'society' meaningless without qualification. Such fragmentation also renders the theoretical mechanism of securitization unstable, since fundamental assumptions about legitimacy and the norms of political behaviour are thrown open to question and multiple levels must be considered.

The events of 24 March in Bishkek showed the effects of this fragmentation very graphically: even though in theory all the protesters were there for the same reason – to call for Akaev's resignation and protest election violations – they had been motivated to attend on the basis of support for individual opposition leaders (personal/local loyalties). Furthermore, it was the protesters from Osh, not inhabitants of Bishkek, who it appears eventually led the storming of the White House after clashes with police, while many of the city's inhabitants remained uninvolved, fearing further violence and instability. This 'southern' role was noted by some politicians, including then vice governor of the southern Osh oblast Mirlan Bakashov, who asserted that 'if our people had not gone to Bishkek, nothing would have happened' (cited in Shishkareva, 2005: 44). The country's population remained divided even as the securitization was completed.

Evidently, in this case, the dynamics assumed by the concept of securitization do not reflect how events actually happened, even on the basic level described above. Securitization provides a tidied-up, simplified view of things by concentrating on the outcome rather than the process. Local specificities that do not comply with the underlying Westphalian presumptions are conveniently overlooked at best, and at worst reinterpreted or 'edited out' to fit linear analytical assumptions regarding how the different constituent parts of a securitization are constructed: as has been shown, the relationships between the securitizing actor, referent and threat narrative are in many respects mutually reinforcing.

Looking Beyond Copenhagen

The Copenhagen School's attempt to create a universal and multilevel framework for empirical analyses of security is of course to be welcomed. However, as discussed in this article, there are still a number of issues that must be explicitly addressed by the School if it is to begin loosening the Westphalian straitjacket. Currently, Euro-American assumptions about concepts such as society, identity and the state, combined with the presumption of Western democracy and primacy of the speech-act, mean that, particularly in a non-Western setting, security dynamics are edited and Westernized through the application of the theoretical framework. These issues must be addressed if the Copenhagen School wishes to change from being a theoretical tourist to a traveller able to cope sensitively with local conditions.

Creating space for the explicit questioning of normative concepts is in this respect the logical next step, and one that the Copenhagen School is already equipped for. In this instance, the issue is simply that the problem has not yet been actively considered in the School's works. Similarly, the incorporation of a less linear conception of the relationship between securitizing actors and referent objects to reflect the possibility of their mutual and simultaneous constitution should not present any significant difficulty. Taking both of these steps would dramatically weaken the hold of the Westphalian straitjacket by focusing more directly on the processes involved in securitization, rather than on the process of securitization *per se,* with its emphasis on overall outcome (Wagnsson, 2000: 17–19).

Most problematical is the constitution of agency proposed by securitization. As the Kyrgyzstani example shows, the relationship between speech and action is more complex than the portrayal offered by securitization. Particularly in the case of domestic politics, action may precede the speech-act that is fundamental to securitization. Yet, the Copenhagen School does not currently possess the theoretical vocabulary to reflect this dynamic whereby 'sufficient action' may replace or supplement the speech-act as the driving logic in the process of securitization. If the Copenhagen School is able to develop the vocabulary to describe the relationship between action and speech, then its framework will be far closer to the ideal of providing the universal 'matrix for area studies' that the School hopes to create.

* Claire Wilkinson is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for Russian & East European Studies, University of Birmingham. This article was initially written during a research visit to the Department of Political Science, Copenhagen University, Denmark, funded by the Economic & Social Research Council of the UK. Many thanks to Lene Hansen for her invaluable comments and advice on previous drafts, and to the three anonymous reviewers for detailed comments. The author can be contacted at cxw@yandex.ru.

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