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‘Enemies of the People’: Populism and the Politics of (In)security

Thorsten Wojczewski

Abstract: Populists are on the rise across the globe and claim to speak on behalf of ‘the people’ that are set against the establishment in the name of popular sovereignty. This article examines how populist discourses represent ‘the people’ as a referent object that is threatened and the form and implications of this populist securitization process. Drawing on securitization theory and poststructuralism, the article understands populist securitization as a discursive practice that propagates a politics of fear, urgency and exceptionality in order to mobilize ‘the people’ against a ‘dangerous’ elite and normalize this antagonistic divide of the social space. While the proposed theoretical framework aims to clarify the relationship between poststructuralist and securitization theory and capture the nexus between populism and security, the case of populism broadens the scope of potential subjects of security and poses important challenges to existing theoretical assumptions about security as something designated by states’ representatives and ‘security experts’. The article develops and illustrates its arguments with a case study on the (de-)securitization moves in the populist discourse of Donald Trump.

Keywords: populism; security; securitization theory; poststructuralism; Trump

Introduction

With the emergence of Critical Security Studies (CSS),¹ the notion of the state as prime referent object of security has become increasingly contested and scholars have drawn attention to the possibility that the state can also be a source of insecurity for (some of) its people. Over the last decade or so, a different challenge to state-centric conceptions of security has emerged in the form of populism. Populists across the world appeal to ‘the people’ and pit them against ‘the elite’ in the name of popular sovereignty.²

While populism is often linked to nationalism, the scholarship on populism has shown that ‘the people’ populists claim to speak for are not (necessarily) identical with nationalist notions of the people, but rather represent the people as the ‘underdogs’, the ‘common folk’ or the ‘silent majority’.³ By accusing the establishment of putting its power privileges or special interests over the interests of the ‘common’ people, populists like Donald Trump de facto represent the political establishment as security threat to ‘the people’ and thus contest the official security discourse: “They've dragged us into foreign wars that have made us less safe. They've left our borders wide open at home. And they've shipped our jobs and wealth to other countries”.⁴

¹ CSS is here understood as an umbrella term for different post-positivist approaches that problematize dominant conceptions of security and seek to take the study of security beyond the strictures of state and military security. This broadening and deepening of the security agenda is driven by the theoretical postulation that security is, at least, partially a socially constructed rather than objective phenomenon. See, David Mutimer, ‘Critical Security Studies: A Schismatic History’, in Alan Collins (ed), *Contemporary Security Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 87-107; Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2014).

² Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), p. 1; Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 5.

³ Benjamin De Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Distinctions and Articulations: A Discourse Theoretical Framework for the Study of Populism and Nationalism’, *Javnost – The Public* 24:4 (2017), pp. 301-19.

⁴ Donald Trump, ‘Remarks at the Central Florida Fairgrounds in Orlando, Florida’ (2016a), available at {<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=123513>} accessed 15 July 2018.

The populist claim to represent and speak for the-people-as-underdogs resembles the claim of some strands of CSS to side with “the voiceless, the unrepresented, and the powerless”⁵. While the CSS literature has examined how non-state actors can both be constructed as referent objects of security (e.g. ethnic communities) and as security threats (e.g. immigrants), it has so far paid hardly any attention to the relationship between populism and security. Roxanne Doty’s study on civilian border patrols on the Mexico-US border comes arguably closest to this research agenda. Though not explicitly referring to populism, Doty addresses a phenomenon that captures, as I will show, an important dimension of the populism/security nexus: “what happens when it is perceived by a significant portion of the populace that the sovereign⁶ does not in fact recognize the enemy”, thus failing to provide security?⁷ Moreover, there are numerous studies that refer to populism in the context of security but typically relegate – what is considered the conceptual core of populism – the elite/people antagonism to the background and associate populism with nationalism, far-right politics or the securitization of migration and borders, whereby the actual role and significance of populism and the populist notion of ‘the people’ remain largely unclear.⁸

Drawing on securitization theory and poststructuralism, this article examines how populist discourses represent ‘the people’ as a referent object that is threatened and the form and implications of this populist securitization process. It conceptualizes populist securitization as a discursively articulated practice that propagates a politics of fear, urgency and exceptionality in

⁵ Richard Wyn Jones, *Security, Strategy, and Critical Theory* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), p. 159.

⁶ Drawing on Carl Schmitt’s theory of politics, Doty understands the sovereign as the actor who decides about the state of emergency.

⁷ Roxanne Lynn Doty, ‘States of Exception on the Mexico–U.S. Border: Security, “Decisions”, and Civilian Border Patrols’, *International Political Sociology* 1:2 (2007), pp. 115-6.

⁸ See, inter alia, Gabriella Lazaridis and Khursheed Wadia (eds), *The Securitisation of Migration in the EU: Debates Since 9/11* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Michael Magcamit, ‘Explaining the Three-Way Linkage between Populism, Securitization, and Realist Foreign Policies: President Donald Trump and the Pursuit of “America First” Doctrine’, *World Affairs* 180:3 (2017), pp. 6-35.

order to mobilize ‘the people’ against a ‘dangerous’ elite and normalize this antagonistic divide of society.

By combining these two theoretical approaches and exploring the nexus between populism and security, the article pursues the following three research objectives: first, it sheds light on populist dynamics, which have so far not been prominent in existing accounts of the construction and politics of security. The rationale for bringing the populism and CSS literature into dialogue is twofold: On the one hand, populists regularly refer to the concept of (in)security and the growing appeal of their discourses in many world regions has made them important actors in the articulation of security issues. The CSS literature, on the other hand, offers analytical concepts that can illuminate how (in)security is constructed by populists and to study the effects of these (in)security constructions. The article shows that securitization theory’s notion of securitization provides important insights into the way in which populists speak about, practice and utilize ‘security’. It argues that key elements of securitization theory such as the definition of security in existential terms, oppositional logic of security and call for emergency politics are in keeping with populist politics and sheds light on how populist discourses can use the logic of securitization to divide society into two seemingly antagonistic and homogenous blocs and stage the populist actor as the ‘true’ representative of ‘the people’. As will be shown, this populist securitization move has three main elements: 1) dramatization and fear-mongering, 2) simplification and scapegoating by designating a particular actor as the single cause of a security problem and ‘the people’ as collective victim, 3) propagation of a state of emergency, requiring a suspension of normal politics and the endorsement of the populist actor as the only one who can secure ‘the people’.

While showing that securitization theory can help us in illuminating the nexus between populism and security, the article also uses the case of populism to highlight certain shortcomings

in the Copenhagen School's securitization theory⁹; namely, the absence of a proper theorization of the construction of the referent object and agent of security, whereby securitization theory can contribute to the reification of populist claims, and the 'elitist' character of securitization theory that marginalizes "the experiences and articulations of the powerless" and at worst represents them "as passive recipients of elite discourses"¹⁰.

Second, by building on and critiquing existing poststructuralist readings of securitization theory,¹¹ the article shows how a poststructuralist perspective can address the theory's weaknesses and contests, in this context, the common conjunction of securitization theory and poststructuralism in the literature. Poststructuralism offers a theorization of collective identity formation that avoids the essentializing and reification of identities and points to the discursive (re-)production of the referent object and agent of security. Thus, in the case of populism, the populist actor, the people and the establishment are no pre-discursive subjects but formed in the moment when different unfulfilled societal demands are placed in a common opposition to the establishment and the populist actor asserts itself as the representative of this popular will.¹² While the existing literature often draws attention to the alleged poststructuralist elements of securitization theory,¹³ this article argues that such readings are ultimately based on a flawed understanding of poststructuralism's discursive ontology. Hence, this article's secondary objective

⁹ Barry Buzan et al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

¹⁰ Matt McDonald, 'Securitization and the Construction of Security', *European Journal of International Relations* 14:4 (2008), p. 13.

¹¹ Cf. Lene Hansen, 'The Politics of Securitization and the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis: A Poststructuralist Perspective', *Security Dialogue* 42:4-5 (2011), pp. 357-69.

¹² Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

¹³ See, Thierry Balzacq, 'The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context', *European Journal of International Relations* 11:2 (2005), pp. 171-201; Thierry Balzacq, 'A Theory of Securitization: Origins, Core Assumptions, and Variants', in Thierry Balzacq (ed), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 1-30; Hansen (2011); Holger Stritzel, 'Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and beyond', *European Journal of International Relations* 13:3 (2007), pp. 357-83.

is not the “(re)discovering [of] securitization theory’s post-structuralist roots”¹⁴ but to show that there is nothing distinctively poststructuralist about securitization theory and to highlight the advantages of conceptualizing securitization as discourse rather than speech act.

Third and finally, the article illustrates its theoretical arguments with a case-study on the Trumpian discourse in the United States and demonstrates how it uses security policy as a site for the discursive (re-)production of ‘the people’ and Trump as its ‘true’ representative. Applying securitization theory’s sectoral approach to security, which distinguishes between military, political, societal, economic and environmental security,¹⁵ the case-study examines the (de-)securitization moves of the Trumpian discourse and demonstrates how populist securitizations can reify monolithic forms of identity. This, in turn, makes the populist leader itself a threat to different referent objects and sectors of security.

Securitization theory and poststructuralism

While security studies traditionally equated the referent object of security with the state, the securitization theory developed by the so-called Copenhagen School in the 1990s broadened and widened the scope of security beyond the state and its military security.¹⁶ This allows us to consider not only the state or the nation but also the populist notion of the people as a potential referent object of security. Since its inception, securitization theory has become a very popular approach that has been taken up, critiqued and further developed by numerous scholars

¹⁴ Hansen (2011), p. 385.

¹⁵ Buzan et al. (1998), p. 27. Strictly speaking, the sectoral approach is not compatible with poststructuralism, since it predetermines what counts as security issue rather than treating security threats as discursive constructions. The article’s rationale for using the sectoral approach is twofold: First, the sectoral approach allows us to capture and illuminate the societal and political sources of the populist antagonism between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’. Second, the analysis of the Trumpian discourse has revealed that the five sectors are the prime sites for the construction of (in)security in the discourse.

¹⁶ Ibid.; Ole Wæver, ‘Securitization and Desecuritization’, in Ronnie Lipschutz (ed), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 46-86.

and applied to a range of issues such as immigration and the environment.¹⁷ Securitization theory breaks with the notion of security as an objective condition and instead conceptualizes security as a speech act through which a target audience is convinced that a specific issue poses an “existential threat to a designated referent object” that has “a legitimate claim to survival” and therefore makes necessary the adoption of extraordinary measures to deal with it.¹⁸

The assertion that security has nothing to do with the ‘reality’ of a threat but is constructed through language (the speech act) as well as the ambiguous understanding of the speech act as both self-referential act and intersubjective process have been widely criticized. Balzacq¹⁹ and Stritzel²⁰ both argue that there is a tension between the Copenhagen School’s internalist conception of security, which ignores the existence “external or brute threats”²¹, and the externalist dimension of securitization processes, that is, the intersubjective or “social sphere” consisting of “sedimented social and political structures” and the “constitutive rules and narratives that surround a single linguistic act” such as the securitizing actor with the authority and power to securitize an issue.²² Importantly, Balzacq and Stritzel attribute these tensions to the poststructuralist impact on Buzan and Wæver’s securitization theory.

The link between securitization theory and poststructuralism is established by Balzacq, Stritzel and others mainly because of the notion of performativity that holds that utterances such as saying the word ‘security’ are equivalent to actions and thus produce a security issue. While poststructuralists argue that language is productive or performative in that it contributes to the

¹⁷ See, inter alia, Balzacq (2005); Thierry Balzacq (ed), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (London: Routledge, 2011); McDonald (2008); Bill McSweeney, ‘Review: Identity and Security: Buzan and the Copenhagen School’, *Review of International Studies* 22:1 (1996), pp. 81-93; Stritzel (2007); Michael C. Williams, ‘Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics’, *International Studies Quarterly* 47:4 (2003), pp. 511-31.

¹⁸ Buzan et al. (1998), pp. 21/36.

¹⁹ Balzacq (2005).

²⁰ Stritzel (2007).

²¹ Balzacq (2005), pp. 181f.

²² Stritzel (2007), p. 369.

constitution of the objects of which it speaks, this is no distinct poststructuralist insight but (to different extents) shared by a range of theoretical approaches with different ontological and epistemological positions such as critical discourse analysis (CDA), discourse psychology or different variants of constructivism that build, for instance, on Bourdieu's concept of habitus and practice or Wittgenstein's language games.

Stritzel, who ultimately conflated poststructuralism with speech act theory in his earlier work²³, offers a more nuanced account in his later works and acknowledges the existence of these diverse approaches to the role of language and discourse.²⁴ While Stritzel makes the case for adopting a discursive reconceptualization of the speech act, he opts for CDA²⁵ and dismisses poststructuralism on the grounds that it grapples with clarifying the relationship between linguistic and other social practices as well as structure and agency. As a result, poststructuralism, as Stritzel claims, fails to take into consideration how "sociopolitical resources and power positions of actors, their political struggles and processes of authorization [...] create, challenge, change or amend existing meaning structures, potentially establishing new discursive hegemonies [...]."²⁶ Curiously, these very issues are at the forefront of most contemporary poststructuralist IR scholarship which does not predominantly follow, as suggested by Stritzel, a "Foucauldian reading of discourse"²⁷ but rather draws, even though to different extents, on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's conceptualization of discourse²⁸ and their discourse theory which

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Holger Stritzel, *Security in Translation: Securitization Theory and the Localization of Threat* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

²⁵ See, Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1992).

²⁶ Stritzel (2014), pp. 39-40.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁸ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985). See, inter alia, David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Thomas Diez, 'Europe as a Discursive Battleground: Discourse Analysis and European Integration Studies', *Cooperation and Conflict* 36:1 (2001), pp. 5-38; Roxanne Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Eva Herschinger, *Constructing Global Enemies: Hegemony and Identity in International*

is rather superficially dismissed by Stritzel as being characterized by a “high degree of conceptual specificity” that “makes their reflections less transferable”²⁹. Moreover, by relying on CDA, Stritzel faces theoretical problems similar to the Copenhagen School in terms of the relationship between speech act and its external context. CDA argues that discourses (conceived as purely linguistic) are somehow determined by extra-discursive powers like the economy or the state and thereby makes a rather awkward distinction between discourse and context, which raises not only questions about the explanatory power of discourse analysis but also about the demarcation between discursive and social practices.

Given the variety of discourse-analytical approaches and common misperceptions of poststructuralism, it is necessary to highlight the distinct features of poststructuralism which lie in its discursive, i.e. anti-essentialist and post-foundational, ontology. This discursive ontology postulates, first, a “decentering [of] the subject”, that is, the break with the notion of an autonomous, conscious, rational and complete subject that precedes its discursive formation and is the origin of meaning;³⁰ second, a conception of discourse as relational and differential system of signification that relates differences to confer meaning and identity and breaks down the awkward distinction between linguistic and behavioural aspects of social practices;³¹ third, an ultimately undecidable political struggle between different discourses over the (re-)production of meaning and identity.³²

Discourses on Terrorism and Drug Prohibition (London: Routledge, 2010); Dirk Nabers, ‘Filling the Void of Meaning: Identity Construction in U.S. Foreign Policy after September 11, 2001’, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5:2 (2009), pp. 191-214; Dirk Nabers, ‘Power, Leadership, and Hegemony in International Politics: The Case of East Asia’, *Review of International Studies* 36:4 (2010), pp. 931-49.

²⁹ Stritzel (2014), p. 43.

³⁰ Jenny Edkins, *Poststructuralism and International Relations: Bringing the Political Back in* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), pp. 21ff.

³¹ Laclau and Mouffe (1985), pp. 105ff.

³² *Ibid.*

The notion of discourse as speech act within securitization theory, by contrast, rests on an actor-centred understanding of discourse that was developed in discourse psychology and applied linguistics and confines itself to the analysis of spoken and written language.³³ While post-structuralism's discursive ontology is derived from linguistic theory – namely, Saussure's structuralist theory of language that locates the meaning of words in their difference from other words, and Derrida's deconstructive reading of Saussure's theory that conceptualizes language as structured but inherently instable – it does not reduce discourse to language but rather draws an analogy between language and society insofar as the relational and differential nature of language can be applied to all dimensions of social reality.³⁴ Hence, the basic properties of language, as Laclau argues, hold for

any complex in which relations play the constitutive role. [...] something is what it is only through its differential relations to something else. And what is true of language in its strictest sense is also true of any signifying (i.e. objective element): an action is what it is only through its differences from other possible actions and from other signifying elements.³⁵

Such an understanding of discourse draws attention to a wide range of non-linguistic (often routinized rather than exceptionalist) practices through which security can be constructed and performed such as border patrols or immigration policies, an aspect emphasized by the so-called Paris School in CSS in particular.³⁶ In contrast to speech act theory, the construction of

³³ Jacob Torfing, 'Discourse Theory: Achievements, Arguments and Challenges', in David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (eds), *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 6.

³⁴ David Howarth, *Discourse* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), pp. 10/116.

³⁵ Laclau (2005), p. 68.

³⁶ Cf. Didier Bigo and Anastassia Tsoukala (eds), *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes after 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2008); Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006).

a security problem to a particular referent object is, from a poststructuralist perspective, thus not simply the result of certain utterances such as ‘threat’ or ‘emergency’ but of the differential arrangement of particular objects/subjects within a specific discourse and it is also through these differential relations that the referent objects and agents of security are (re-)produced. In his seminal work *Writing Security*, David Campbell argues against the notion of a pre-discursive, fully constituted subject such as the state and shows how the United States has been (re-)produced through the discourse of foreign policy and its underpinning representations of danger. Drawing a political boundary between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, the discursive practice of foreign policy inscribes the boundaries and identity of the Self through modes of differentiation, exclusion and Othering and thus constructs the nation-state as a space of identity, unity and order in opposition to the international as a space of difference, dangers and anarchy.³⁷

While Balzacq and Stritzel see a tension between the allegedly “post-structuralist speech act”³⁸ and the intersubjective context of securitization processes, Lene Hansen has sought to refute this critique by providing a “post-structuralist reading of securitization theory”: Hansen argues that a “post-structuralist understanding of discourse is at the centre of Buzan and Wæver’s theorization of security as a speech act”, “their ‘*definition* and *criteria* of securitization’ as being ‘the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects’” and of “their epistemological and methodological stance that securitization should be studied in discourse as it does not need extra-discursive ‘indicators’”.³⁹

With recourse to Laclau and Mouffe’s conception of discourse, Hansen notes that poststructuralism overrides the classical dichotomies between materialism/idealism or

³⁷ Campbell (1998).

³⁸ Balzacq (2011).

³⁹ Hansen (2011), p. 359, emphasis in original.

discourse/practice and problematizes Balzacq and Stritzel's argument that the speech act is not related to context and neglects extra-discursive phenomena.⁴⁰

While Hansen claims to identify the "post-structuralist gist of securitization theory"⁴¹, there is very little evidence to support this appraisal. Apart from the fact that a poststructuralist understanding of discourse involves both linguistic and non-linguistic elements and would therefore not reduce security to a speech act, Buzan and Wæver do not, as suggested by Hansen, affirm in keeping with poststructuralism "the absence of an extra-discursive criterion upon which security can be grounded"⁴². In fact, they provide such an extra-discursive criterion, when they argue that "[s]ecurity is about *survival*"⁴³ and identify certain "facilitating conditions" of securitizations such as the "features of the alleged threats".⁴⁴ While one could still argue that the identification of a certain logic of security can make sense for analytical purposes (provided that one treats these logics as contingent), what is more problematic, from a poststructuralist perspective, is their actor-centred perspective on discourse that ultimately treats actors' identities as given and as origin of intersubjective meaning-construction.

The Copenhagen School's view of the construction of collective identities has drawn severe criticism. In a pointed critique of the school's societal security concept, McSweeney accused Buzan and Wæver of conceptualizing identity in objectivist terms and treating identity as fixed or "a fact of society", thereby reifying monolithic forms of identity.⁴⁵ Hansen has sought to counter this critique by drawing attention to the alleged "poststructuralist roots" of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 359.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 359.

⁴² Ibid., p. 360.

⁴³ Buzan et al. (1998), p. 21, emphasis added. Thus, security and the mode of dealing with security issues are defined in a rather static realist fashion with a clear emphasis on authority, the confronting of threats/enemies and the adoption of exceptional measures. Cf. McDonald (2008), p. 565; Stritzel (2007), p. 366.

⁴⁴ Buzan et al. (1998), p. 33.

⁴⁵ McSweeney (1996), pp. 83-5.

securitization theory's notion of performativity that constitutes the subjects of which it speaks.⁴⁶ In other words, the subjects and objects of security are constructed or performed through the speech act.

In their own reply to McSweeney's critique, Buzan and Wæver have tellingly not followed Hansen's line of argument but noted that, despite their idea of identities as socially constructed, it is possible to treat identities, once constructed and sedimented, as (temporarily) fixed and thus as potential independent variables in securitization processes.⁴⁷ In other words, Buzan and Wæver made the *deliberate* analytical choice to limit their conceptualization of security as speech act to the performative constitution of security issues rather than collective identities/subjectivities such as the state. This also becomes evident in their account of the relationship between societal and state security: While Buzan and Wæver define societal security in terms of "collective identities" that are threatened when a society fears that "we will no longer be us", they link state security to military and political threats to its sovereignty and other constituting principles,⁴⁸ thereby decoupling the state from questions of identity.

In this context it is significant that Hansen suggests that her account of performatively constituted identities is not merely the result of her poststructuralist (re)interpretation of securitization theory but inherent in Buzan and Wæver's approach.⁴⁹ This reading of Buzan and Wæver's securitization theory creates three problems: First, by suggesting that subjects are constituted through speech acts, Hansen implicitly endorses a linguistic reductionism that neglects the crucial role of non-linguistic practices in the (re-)production of collective identities. Second, the argument that subjects are constituted in the moment of the securitizing speech act is incompatible with Buzan and Wæver's conceptualization of securitization as a two-stage process

⁴⁶ Hansen (2011), p. 360.

⁴⁷ Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, 'Slippery? Contradictory? Sociologically Untenable? The Copenhagen School Replies', *Review of International Studies* 23:2 (1997), p. 242-3.

⁴⁸ Buzan et al. (1998), pp. 22-3.

⁴⁹ Hansen (2011), p. 360.

through which a specific matter is moved in a spectrum consisting of non-politicized, politicized and securitized issues.⁵⁰ As securitization denotes the process through which a particular issue is removed from the standard political process to the security agenda, the subject (e.g. government, state or society) necessarily pre-exists the securitization speech act and cannot be constituted in it.

Third, the linking of identity formation and securitization would imply that the construction of collective identities depends on the presence and designation of existential dangers and would therefore affirm the Schmittian dictum⁵¹ that the friend/enemy antagonism is the eternal and unescapable logic of politics. The same problem, as critics argued, also applies to Campbell's poststructuralist approach to security which can indeed be read as if the identity of the nation-state can only be (re-)produced through reference to external threats and dangerous Others, thus making the securitization of identity a matter of survival for every state. Against this backdrop, other scholars, including Lene Hansen herself, have shown that identities can also be constituted and re-produced through less radical and confrontational modes of differentiation and are thus not premised upon threatening Otherness.⁵² By establishing a link between identity constitution and securitization, Hansen's reading of securitization theory however appears to re-affirm this very logic of radical and threatening Otherness.

Against this backdrop, this article contends that there are no distinctively poststructuralist elements in Buzan and Wæver's theory and that Hansen's poststructuralist appropriation of securitization theory creates elements of confusion into both securitization theory and

⁵⁰ Buzan et al. (1998), p. 23.

⁵¹ See for the impact of Carl Schmitt's political thought on securitization theory, Williams (2003).

⁵² Thomas Diez, 'Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering "Normative Power Europe"', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 33:3 (2005), pp. 613-36; Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006); Bahar Rumelili, 'Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding the EU's Mode of Differentiation', *Review of International Studies* 30:1 (2004), pp. 27-47.

poststructuralism. Instead of promoting a poststructuralist (re-)interpretation of securitization theory, this article argues that the Copenhagen School offers no theorization of the constitution of collective identities/subjectivities and its relationship to threats and security. Therefore, the article uses poststructuralism as overarching theoretical framework in which we can understand and analyse populist securitization processes discussed in the next section. It conceptualizes collective actors such as states, people or society as discursive entities that are (re-)produced against the difference of an Other and thus lack an extra-discursive foundation on which their identities could be grounded or permanently stabilized. In other words, subjects can only constitute themselves and practice their identity through identification with the subject positions provided by a discourse⁵³ which, as a system of significant differences, “delineates the terms of intelligibility whereby a particular reality can be known and acted upon”⁵⁴.

While subjects shape and re-produce through their representational practices discursive structures, their active agency is limited to moments of dislocation,⁵⁵ when “the subject’s mode of being is disrupted by an experience that cannot be symbolized within and by the pre-existing means of discursive representation”⁵⁶. By disrupting existing Self/Other relationships, dislocatory events expose the lack of social objectivity and identities that can be grounded on an extra-discursive foundation and prompt subjects to act in order to overcome this state of crisis. This act involves shaping and identifying with a new discourse that seeks to re-establish social order and identity by re-drawing the relationship between Self and Other.⁵⁷ While *all* meaning and identity is constituted in relation to difference, it depends on the respective discourse whether

⁵³ Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolutions of our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 44.

⁵⁴ Doty (1996), p. 5.

⁵⁵ Laclau (1990), pp. 39ff.

⁵⁶ Jason Glynos and David Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 14.

⁵⁷ Thorsten Wojczewski, *India’s Foreign Policy Discourse and its Conceptions of World Order: The Quest for Power and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 26f.

it turns difference into an antagonistic relationship between Self and Other and represents the Other as an enemy and existential threat. A populist discourse, as we will see in the next section, typically follows such an antagonistic form of Othering and employs a logic of securitization. Securitization is in this context understood as a discursive practice that makes someone or something into a normalized and existential security threat and thereby creates not only a politics of fear, urgency and exceptionality but also marks the boundaries of a particular collectivity in an attempt to naturalize and homogenize its identity and mask over its contingency. This also implies that securitization discourses construct and reify a *particular* understanding and interpretation of security rather than providing the only way in which security can be represented and practiced.

Populism and security

Populism generally involves “some kind of appeal to ‘the people’ and a denunciation of ‘the elite’”⁵⁸. The construction of this antagonistic divide between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ is at the heart of a poststructuralist, discursive conception of populism that draws on the work of Laclau and highlights that populist discourses (re-)produce the socio-political categories they claim to represent.⁵⁹

Employing the Copenhagen School’s sectoral approach to security, we can locate the populist category of the people as referent object of security first and foremost in the societal and political sector. According to the Copenhagen School, societal security is about a societal group’s concern about its survival as a community based on a shared sense of identity that can be grounded on a shared language, ethnicity, culture or religion.⁶⁰ While the Copenhagen School’s concept of societal security contests the equation of state and society/nation and calls attention

⁵⁸ Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), p. 5.

⁵⁹ Laclau (2005); cf. also De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017).

⁶⁰ Buzan et al. (1998), pp. 119/124.

to “ethno-national and religious entities” as “politically significant” units of analysis,⁶¹ it can also be extended to the populist category of the people. In populist discourses, societal security does not primarily revolve around ethno-cultural or religious identities but the identity of the ‘ordinary’ people and threats to this identity emanating from a ‘corrupt’ elite detached from the concerns of the ‘common’ folk. The people/elite antagonism in the societal security sector is thus defined in moral terms⁶² and conjures up a threat to – what Paul Taggart⁶³ called – an imagined “heartland” in which the ‘pure’, ‘ordinary’ and ‘virtuous’ people reside. This populist ‘heartland’ is under siege from ‘inauthentic’, ‘alienated’ and ‘bad’ elites who are accused of depriving the ‘common’ people of their identity and way of life.

The political security sector, which revolves around non-military threats to sovereignty, points to the political dimension of this antagonism that exposes the tension between democracy’s promise of popular sovereignty and the reality of elite’s rule. Given their purely discursive constitution, social orders and practices necessarily privilege certain actors, interests and demands, while excluding, marginalizing or threatening others.⁶⁴ As a result, ‘the will of the people’ can never be fully represented or satisfied and popular sovereignty thus remains illusive. Populist discourses assert and thrive on a divide between ‘the people’ and official power by placing multiple unaddressed social demands into a common opposition to the power elite and making it the antagonistic Other that is blamed for frustrating the satisfaction of these demands.⁶⁵ The bearers of these demands become ‘the people’ that populists claim to represent. The formation of this collective popular identity thus requires the establishment of equivalential linkages among different social actors through the construction of a common negation or

⁶¹ Ole Wæver, ‘Societal Security: The Concept’, in Ole Wæver et al. (eds), *Identity, Migration, and the New Security Agenda in Europe* (London: Pinter, 1993), p. 23.

⁶² Cf. Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶³ Paul A. Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), p. 95.

⁶⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁶⁵ Laclau (2005).

Other that can, at least temporarily, cancel out the differences among the members of this political coalition. This allows populist discourses to represent society as being divided into two antagonistic blocs: the people versus the elite, and to place the populist actor alongside ‘the people’ who gives voice to this popular will and thereby assumes the role of the representative of ‘the people’.

Populism’s mode of antagonistic Othering indicates that the people populists claim to speak for is not identical with nationalist conceptions of the people: While nationalist discourses constitute ‘the people’ through an “in/out” antagonism against the difference of its out-groups such as other national communities, as De Cleen and Stavrakakis pointed out, populist discourses represent ‘the people’ along the lines of “a down/up antagonism” as underdogs, powerless and voiceless in opposition to an illegitimately powerful elite that is accused of failing to represent ‘the people’ and undermining popular sovereignty.⁶⁶ Right-wing populist discourses typically combine these two modes of Othering and represent the people as both underdogs and nation.⁶⁷ Instead of conflating populism and nationalism – a common tendency in parts of the literature⁶⁸ – a discursive approach allows us to distinguish and study the relationship between populism and nationalism by drawing attention to their distinct modes of antagonistic Othering.

Populist discourses render ‘the people’ insecure by constructing the establishment and thus the very entity that is, at least in a democracy, supposed to represent and protect the people as enemy of the people. This threat and enmity results from an alleged disconnect and alienation between ‘the people’ and the power elite – an antagonism that is typically defined in both moral

⁶⁶ De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017), pp. 309-10.

⁶⁷ Thorsten Wojczewski, ‘Populism, Hindu Nationalism and Foreign Policy in India: The Politics of Representing “the People”’, *International Studies Review* (2019 [online first]).

⁶⁸ Cf. Walter Russell Mead, ‘The Jacksonian Revolt: American Populism and the Liberal Order’, *Foreign Affairs* 96:2 (2017), pp. 2-7; Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

and political terms. For example, a populist actor (e.g. leader, party or movement) can accuse the power elite of undermining the constitutive principles of the state by using their public office and power position for self-enrichment, clientelism and nepotism. Additionally, the establishment can be accused of selling out state sovereignty by joining or delegating decision-making powers to a supranational or international institution which cannot be held accountable by the people.

When a populist discourse employs a logic of securitization, a populist actor draws on a politics of fear, urgency and exceptionality in order to mobilize ‘the people’ and unite them in a common front against the establishment. Crucially, ‘the people’ populists claim to speak for is, what Laclau calls, an empty signifier that can be inscribed with various (potentially conflicting) meanings and is thus characterized by radical contingency in terms of who or what ‘the people’ are.⁶⁹ As a result, ‘the people’ mobilized by populists never represent a society as a whole, rather a particular political force is taking up the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it and thereby draws a boundary around a particular segment of society which becomes the referent object of security.

With its understanding of security in existential terms, its oppositional juxtaposition of referent object of security and security threat and its reference to emergency politics, securitization theory provides an important framework for conceptualizing how populists speak about and practice security and use it as effective mobilization strategy. By bringing together the key logics of populism and securitization, we can conceptualize populist securitizations and identify its main features:

(1) dramatization and fear-mongering: conjuring up and maintaining the sense of existential threats to ‘the people’;

⁶⁹ Laclau (2005), pp. 69f.

(2)simplification and scapegoating: identifying and blaming the establishment⁷⁰ as the single cause of this state of danger and ‘the people’ as collective victim;

(3)propagation of a state of emergency: shifting and keeping particular issues into the realm of emergency politics as justification for populist politics.

In a populist securitization move, the politics of exception is linked to the demand of disempowering the political establishment and is embodied by the populist actor itself who deliberately employs a transgressive political style⁷¹ and proclaims with a sense of urgency that an existential crisis exists that can only be averted through the populist actor. While the acts of transgression should signal to ‘the people’ that the populist actor is no ‘normal politician’ and will defend ‘the people’ at all costs, the conjuring up of an existential crisis shall reinforce the need to rally behind the populist actor. By making the establishment an existential and normalized threat to ‘the people’ and justifying the use of exceptional political measures (e.g. bypassing intermediary institutions such as the media or the parliament), the populist discourse homogenizes and naturalizes ‘the people’ on behalf of which populists claim to speak and thereby seeks to create and maintain a populist electoral coalition.

Though the societal and political security sectors are the prime sectors for populist securitizations, the populist notion of the people can also be a referent object in the military, economic and environmental sectors of security. In all these sectors, populist securitizations typically follow two basic patterns: either the establishment is accused of failing to securitize a particular issue that is perceived as a threat by a significant portion of society or it is accused of launching securitizations that pose a threat to ‘the people’ and have thus made ‘the people’ insecure.

Populist securitization processes partially contest the typical modality of securitization, which is conceptualized as an elitist, top-down process by the Copenhagen School: “security is

⁷⁰ When populism is combined with nationalism, this scapegoating can also be extended to immigrants, refugees or other nation-states.

⁷¹ Moffitt (2016), p. 44.

articulated only from a specific place, in an institutional voice, by elites”.⁷² Though the importance of the endorsement of the securitization move through the audience is highlighted, it is ultimately the authority and institutional power position of elites, and state-representatives in particular, that initiates and shapes the securitization process. This also becomes evident in the facilitating role attributed to ‘experts’ such as bureaucrats, policy-advisers or scientists: “‘security experts’ are assumed to have the capacity to speak authoritatively on what constitutes a security issue due to their background and qualifications, whereas non-experts are not usually assumed to have the same capacity to ‘speak security’”.⁷³

Populists, by contrast, derive their capacity to ‘speak security’ exactly from their status as (alleged) political underdog who is not part of the ‘corrupt’ and ‘powerful’ establishment and does not ‘play by the rules’ but speaks from ‘below’ in the language of the ‘common’ people. Accordingly, populist securitizations seek to appeal to ‘the people’ directly by bypassing intermediary institutions and experts and by using a rhetoric that is often deliberately vulgar, blunt and politically incorrect and relies on common-sense arguments. This partial deviation from the typical securitization script serves populists to claim a status as political outsider and, simultaneously, to delegitimize the establishment by denying and contesting the elites’ authority to speak on behalf of ‘the people’ and securitize issues. The populist attempt of delegitimizing the establishment, in turn, is likely to trigger counter-securitization moves by the establishment which frame the populist actor as existential threat to different sectors of security. In the following section, this article turns to the Trumpian discourse and investigates its populist securitization moves in different security sectors.

⁷² Wæver (1995), p. 57.

⁷³ Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2014), p. 79.

The Trumpian discourse and populist securitizations

Portraying himself as political underdog, Trump rose to the American presidency on a right-wing populist platform that combined anti-establishment with nationalist, xenophobic and chauvinistic sentiments. Like other right-wing populists,⁷⁴ Trump shaped a discourse that constructs ‘the people’ by placing them into a common opposition to ‘corrupt’ elites and dangerous ‘Others’ that are accused of depriving the sovereign people of their identity, jobs, values, rights and safety.

According to Laclau⁷⁵, the emergence of populism is typically linked to a dislocation of previously dominant discourses and embodies a more general social crisis that renders visible the inherent contradictions, hierarchies and exclusions of a particular social order and triggers a discursive struggle for hegemony. The Trumpian discourse, alongside with other right-wing populist discourses, can be viewed as both a reaction to and manifestation of the crisis of – what Nancy Fraser called – the “Hegemony of Progressive Neoliberalism” that combined neoliberal economic policies aiming at the liberalization and globalization of capitalist economy with a “progressive politics of recognition” centred around “ideals of ‘diversity’, women’s ‘empowerment’, and LGBTQ rights; post-racialism, multiculturalism, and environmentalism”.⁷⁶ The hegemonic discourse deepened the social dislocations of globalization that ruptured, through the notion of an increasing de-territorialisation of social relations⁷⁷, established modes of being and belonging such as the nation-state and encouraged a de-nationalization of

⁷⁴ Danielle Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, ‘Introduction: A new Spectre for Western Europe’, in Danielle Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (eds), *Twenty-first Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1-14.

⁷⁵ Laclau (2005), p. 85.

⁷⁶ Nancy Fraser, ‘From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump—and beyond’, *American Affairs Journal* 1:4 (2017), available at {<https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/11/progressive-neoliberalism-trump-beyond/>} accessed 11 November 2018.

⁷⁷ Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

economic production and investment patterns⁷⁸ as well as political rule and governance.⁷⁹ This, in turn, weakened accountable, democratic representative rule and created new forms of socioeconomic marginalization and precarious existence.⁸⁰

At the same time, the progressive neoliberal discourse propagates identity politics that aims at “‘empowering’ ‘talented’ women, people of color, and sexual minorities to rise to the top”⁸¹ but deliberately marginalizes other forms of identity such as class and Whiteness. “Many white Americans”, as Mead noted, “thus find themselves in a society that talks constantly about the importance of identity, that values ethnic authenticity, that offers economic benefits and social advantages based on identity for everybody but them”.⁸² This perception exists, in particular, among White working-class Americans who saw their employment opportunities and incomes degraded in the course of trade liberalization and outsourcing and created feelings of political, economic and cultural disfranchisement.⁸³

As we will see in the following, the Trumpian discourse (re-)produces the American people it claims to represent by (1)conjuring up a range of existential threats, (2)accusing the establishment of depriving the American people of their societal, political, military and economic security through a lack of or misguided and corrupted securitization moves, and (3)claiming the need for a politics of urgency and exceptionality that links the survival of the American people to the election of Donald Trump: “We have to help our country. It is under siege in so many

⁷⁸ Bertjan Verbeek and Andrej Zaslove, ‘Populism and Foreign Policy’, in Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 391.

⁷⁹ Michael Zürn, ‘Global Governance and Legitimacy Problems’, *Government and Opposition* 39:2 (2004), pp. 260-87.

⁸⁰ Vedi R. Hadiz and Angelos Chrysogelos, ‘Populism in World Politics: A Comparative Cross-regional Perspective’, *International Political Science Review* 38:4 (2017), pp. 400f.

⁸¹ Fraser (2017).

⁸² Mead (2017), p. 5.

⁸³ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in their own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: New Press, 2016).

ways. [...] Either we win this election, or we lose our country”.⁸⁴ Through this populist securitization, the Trumpian discourse could create and hold together a heterogeneous electoral coalition, consisting of Christian evangelicals, free marketers, blue-collar workers from the Rust Belt states and the Alt-right among others,⁸⁵ by appealing to shared anti-establishment sentiments and thus marking the Washington establishment as common enemy which becomes the negative projection screen for a series of different social grievances, anxieties or fears.

The prime sectors for the populist securitization moves of the Trumpian discourse are societal and political security. In the societal security sector, the discourse represents ‘the people’ and the ‘American way of life’ as being under threat from “morally corrupt” elites⁸⁶ and “mass illegal immigration”⁸⁷. This process of antagonistic Othering indicates that this securitization designates two overlapping referent objects: the ‘common’ people and the people-as-nation. The construction of the elite as threat to the identity of the American people is grounded in morality insofar as the elite is allegedly detached from the concerns of the ‘common’ people and places its ‘postmodern’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ morals and interests over the ‘pure’ and ‘authentic’ values of ‘the people’ in the American heartland. When Hillary Clinton called “Trump’s supporters” a “basket of deplorables” who “are not America”⁸⁸ during the presidential election campaign, Trump could not only claim that her comments are a manifestation of

⁸⁴ Donald Trump, ‘Remarks at the Norris-Penrose Event Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado’ (2016b), available at {<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=123516>} accessed 17 July 2018.

⁸⁵ Eric Oliver and W.M. Rahn, ‘Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election’, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667:1 (2016), pp. 189-206.

⁸⁶ Donald Trump, ‘Remarks announcing candidacy for president in New York City’ (2015a), available at {<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=110306>} accessed 17 July 2018.

⁸⁷ Donald Trump, ‘Speech: Donald Trump holds a political rally in Houston, Texas’ (2018a), available at {<https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-maga-rally-houston-tx-october-22-2018>} accessed 24 October 2018.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Time, ‘Hillary Clinton: Basket of deplorables transcript’ (2016), available at {<http://time.com/4486502/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables-transcript/>} accessed 28 October 2018.

the elite's snobbism, decadence and self-righteousness, but also that he is "the voice of the forgotten men and women" and thus the only one who represents 'ordinary' Americans⁸⁹: "While my opponent slanders you as deplorable and irredeemable, I call you hardworking American patriots who love your country and want a better future for all of our people".⁹⁰ Accordingly, it is the alienation from the 'pure' people that has corrupted the establishment: "Her comments displayed the same sense of arrogance and entitlement that led her to violate federal law as Secretary of State, hide and delete her emails, put classified information in the reach of our enemies, lie to Congress, and sell government favors and access through the Clinton Foundation".⁹¹

By accusing the establishment in general, and Clinton and the Democrats in particular, of promoting an "open border" immigration and refugee policy⁹² that "bring[s] people here—in vast numbers—who reject our values", the Trumpian discourse claims that "our politicians put their personal agendas before the national good"⁹³ and collude with the very forces that are "threatening not only our security but our way of life"⁹⁴: "A country that doesn't control its borders can't survive. [...] The flow of illegal immigrants into this country is one of the most serious problems we face. It's killing us".⁹⁵ When Trump stated that he only wants "to admit

⁸⁹ Donald Trump, 'Remarks at a rally at Berglund Center in Roanoke, Virginia' (2016c), available at {<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=119203>} accessed 16 July 2018.

⁹⁰ Donald Trump, 'Remarks at Seven Flags Event Center in Des Moines, Iowa' (2016d), available at {<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-seven-flags-event-center-des-moines-iowa>} accessed 16 July 2018.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Trump (2016a).

⁹³ Donald Trump, 'Address accepting the presidential nomination at the Republican national convention in Cleveland, Ohio' (2016e), available at {<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=117935>} accessed 17 July 2018.

⁹⁴ Donald Trump, 'Remarks at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire' (2016f), available at {<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=117775>} accessed 17 July 2018.

⁹⁵ Donald Trump, *Great Again: How to Fix Our Crippled America* (New York: Threshold, 2015b), pp. 19-20.

individuals into our country who will support our values and love our people”⁹⁶, he appealed to nativist sentiments among White Americans and associated America’s national identity and culture closely with the notion of the United States as an ethno-religious community of white Christians of European descent.⁹⁷ In other words, societal insecurity is linked by the Trumpian discourse primarily to the marginalization of this particular community in the US. Hence, when the National Security Strategy adopted by the Trump administration in March 2018 pledges that one of its key strategic objectives is to “protect the homeland, the American people, and the American way of life”⁹⁸, this also implies the protection of a particular representation of US identity and thus of the threatened American heartland. By conjuring up existential threats to this imagined heartland, the Trumpian discourse not only seeks to naturalize and homogenize a particular conception of American identity but also claims the right to use extraordinary measures to radically restrict immigration to the US and thereby protect the people that occupy or symbolize the romanticized American heartland. These exceptional measures included, inter alia, the promised construction of a “border wall to stop illegal immigration”⁹⁹, the imposition of a temporary travel ban on certain Muslim-majority countries and the threat to use force against illegal immigrants.¹⁰⁰

While Trump has throughout his campaign and presidency described the situation at the southern border as existential threat and “national emergency”¹⁰¹, he formally declared a national emergency in February 2019, enabling him to bypass Congress and divert federal funds to build

⁹⁶ Trump (2016e).

⁹⁷ Mead (2017), pp. 5-6.

⁹⁸ White House, ‘President Donald Trump is rebuilding American strength and confronting threats’ (2018a), available at {<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-trump-rebuilding-american-strength-confronting-threats/>} accessed 2 October 2018.

⁹⁹ Trump (2016e).

¹⁰⁰ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 1 November’ (2018b), available at {<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1057614564639019009>} accessed 2 November 2018.

¹⁰¹ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 25 October’ (2018g), available at {<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1055414972635926528>} accessed 2 November 2018.

a border wall.¹⁰² The declaration of a national emergency allows the Trumpian discourse to further normalize the state of exception and the antagonistic divide between the people and the ‘dangerous’ establishment: “Congress must get together and immediately eliminate the loopholes at the Border! If no action, Border, or large sections of Border, will close. This is a National Emergency!”¹⁰³ As we will see in the military security section, the Trumpian discourse has further reinforced the need for the securitization of migration and adoption of extraordinary measures by representing immigrants and refugees also as a physical security threat to the American people.

While the populist construction of societal insecurity is primarily grounded in a moral divide between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, populist discourses link political insecurity to a people/elite antagonism that is rooted in the political and more explicitly addresses the question of sovereignty. The Trumpian discourse represents the US establishment as an existential threat to the sovereignty of the United States and the American people. By asserting that the “political system” and the “whole economy” are “rigged against the American people”, the discourse pits ‘the people’ against power itself and calls for exceptional and urgent measures to counter the threats to the constitutive principles of the United States: “The insiders wrote the rules of the game to keep themselves in power and in the money. [...] this election is a choice between taking our government back from the special interests, or surrendering our last scrap of independence to their total and complete control”.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² White House, ‘Remarks by President Trump on the National Security and Humanitarian Crisis on our Southern Border’ (2019a), available at {<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-national-security-humanitarian-crisis-southern-border/>} accessed 11 April 2019.

¹⁰³ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 3 April’ (2019b), available at {<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1113437257493561344>} accessed 11 April 2019.

¹⁰⁴ Donald Trump, ‘Remarks at Trump SoHo in New York City’ (2016g), available at {<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=117790>} accessed 16 July 2018.

Hence, the Trumpian discourse represents the establishment as a small, illegitimately powerful group that exploits its position of power for its “exclusive benefit”, fails “to enforce our laws” and serves “powerful special interests” rather than ‘the people’¹⁰⁵. Informing the discourse’s securitization moves in all security sectors is the assertion that “the American people” are not sovereign (anymore) but have been disenfranchised by “politicians that have sacrificed their security, betrayed their prosperity, and sold out their country”¹⁰⁶. Following the logic of a populist securitization, the discourse not only conjures up an existential crisis and threats from all sides, but also provides a radically simplified representation of security which marks the establishment as the root cause of all security problems. Claiming that Hillary Clinton and the American establishment are guided by a “corrupt globalism”¹⁰⁷, which promotes “a borderless world where working people have no power, no jobs, no safety”¹⁰⁸, Trump asserts that he is the only one who can prevent the complete loss of sovereignty and stop the ‘corrupt’ establishment from entering into new trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership which will “give up Congressional power to an international foreign commission”¹⁰⁹.

For constructing the image of Trump as the ‘true’ representative of the people, Trump presented himself as political “outsider” and “successful businessman” who, unlike all the “career politicians”, cannot be corrupted and speaks truth to power¹¹⁰: “I’m using my own money. I’m not using the lobbyists. I’m not using donors. I don’t care. I’m really rich”.¹¹¹ While Trump is thus in many ways part of the elite, he used his status as business mogul and billionaire as one of his main selling points by claiming that he stands aloof from the ‘corrupt’ political

¹⁰⁵ Trump (2016e).

¹⁰⁶ Trump (2016g).

¹⁰⁷ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 22 June’ (2016h), available at {<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/745693029089034240?lang=en>} accessed 16 July 2018.

¹⁰⁸ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 28 July’ (2016i), available at {<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/758873275044798464?lang=en-gb>} accessed 16 July 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Trump (2016g).

¹¹⁰ Trump (2015b), pp. 8/89.

¹¹¹ Trump (2015a).

establishment. This, in turn, would allow Trump to fulfil his main election promise: to restore the sovereignty of the American people through an “America first” policy that will “always put the interests of the American people, and American security, above all else” and steer the United States away from “international unions that tie us up and bring America down”¹¹².

By constructing an antagonistic divide between ‘the people’ and “the entire corrupt Washington establishment”¹¹³, the Trumpian discourse radically simplifies the social space and asserts that there is a single, homogenous popular will which Trump represents. Put differently, the securitization of the establishment makes it possible to appeal to heterogenous social groups and unite them in a common political project by presenting their demands as equivalent insofar as they share a common enemy that can be blamed for a range of social grievances.¹¹⁴ As this antagonistic juxtaposition automatically makes everyone who does not support Trump such as the political opposition or the media an “enemy of the people”¹¹⁵, the rise and election of Donald Trump have triggered counter-securitization moves by members of the establishment that represent Trump as an existential security threat and call for exceptional measures to prevent or constrain Trump, respectively. During the election campaign, a group of “National Security Leaders” in the Republican Party pledged, for example, “to working energetically to prevent the election of someone” who “would use the authority of his office to act in ways that make America less safe” and “poses a distinct threat to civil liberty in the United States”¹¹⁶.

¹¹² Donald Trump, ‘Remarks on foreign policy at the National Press Club in Washington, DC.’ (2016j), available at {<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=117775>} accessed 16 July 2018.

¹¹³ Trump (2016b).

¹¹⁴ This populist assertion does not imply that there is no political polarization in US society – in fact, populism typically enhances political polarisation – but that the bearers of particular unaddressed social demands are represented as the ‘real’ people.

¹¹⁵ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 29 October’ (2018c), available at {<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1057063101189836801>} accessed 2 November 2018.

¹¹⁶ National Security Leaders, ‘Open letter on Donald Trump from GOP national security leaders’ (2016), available at {<https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/open-letter-on-donald-trump-from-gop-national-security-leaders/>} accessed 12 September 2018.

While a typical presidential candidate would, in keeping with conventional conceptualizations of securitizations, generally seek to gain the endorsement of the party establishment and experts and rely on their credentials, institutional power or expertise to underscore her or his suitability for the presidency and authority to securitize issues, Trump could use such counter-securitization moves for staging himself as political underdog who stands up to the ‘corrupt’ establishment: “I speak for the people. So the establishment attacks me. They can’t own me, they can’t dictate to me [...]”.¹¹⁷ While Trump is as wealthy businessman and even more so as president part of the establishment and thus speaks from a privileged subject position, he contested the elitist character of securitizations by dismissing the authority of typical securitizing actors and the idea that foreign and security policy-making “requires years of experience and an understanding of all the nuances that have to be carefully considered before reaching a conclusion”; instead of these “so-called ‘experts’”, “pinstriped bureaucrats” and “‘all-talk, no-action’ politicians”, as Trump claimed, it requires the “common sense” of people who are not part of “the Washington ruling class”.¹¹⁸

In short, what are typically regarded as facilitating factors in the securitization process – institutional political power, expertise and the endorsement of ‘security experts’ – runs counter to populist securitizations and undermines its construction of the threatening elite, the people as collective victim and the populist actor as its protector. As a result, assuming office can pose a challenge to populists and make populist securitizations more difficult, since the populist actor runs the risk of losing its status as political underdog. For preserving the people/elite antagonism, Trump, like other populists in power, blamed the establishment such as the “enemy of

¹¹⁷ Trump (2015b), p. 98.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4/31.

the people Fake News”¹¹⁹ or the “Criminal Deep State”¹²⁰ for subverting his presidency and, by extension, ‘the will of the people’.

The (re-)production of the antagonistic divide between ‘the people’ and ‘the establishment’ also characterizes Trump’s (de-)securitization moves in the other security sectors. In the military security sector, the Trumpian discourse represents the-people-as-underdog by accusing the US establishment of putting the military security of other countries and foreigners over the security of the American people: “Many Americans must wonder why our politicians seem more interested in defending the borders of foreign countries than their own”.¹²¹ While “military power” is the precondition for “national security”¹²², as Trump claims, the US establishment has “badly depleted [our] military”¹²³ and “failed to insist that our often very wealthy allies pay their fair share for defense, putting a massive and unfair burden on the U.S. taxpayer and our great U.S. military”¹²⁴: “we spend so much on the military, but the military isn’t for us. The military is to be policeman for other countries”.¹²⁵ Calling for extraordinary measures, Trump announced “historical increases in defense funding” amounting to a military budget of

¹¹⁹ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 17 June’ (2018h), available at {<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1008506045373845504?lang=de>} accessed 16 July 2018.

¹²⁰ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 23 May’ (2018h), available at {<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/999242039723163648?lang=de>} accessed 16 July 2018.

¹²¹ Trump (2016j).

¹²² Trump (2015b), p. 33.

¹²³ Donald Trump, ‘Remarks at a rally at the Pensacola Bay Center in Pensacola, Florida’ (2016k), available at {<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=119204>} accessed 16 July 2018.

¹²⁴ Donald Trump, ‘Remarks by President Trump on the administration’s national security strategy’ (2017a), available at {<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-administrations-national-security-strategy/>} accessed 17 July 2018.

¹²⁵ Donald Trump, ‘Transcript: Donald Trump expounds on his foreign policy views’, New York Times (2016l), available at {<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html>} accessed 18 May 2018.

\$700 billion in 2018¹²⁶ and threatened to pull out of NATO and refrained from explicitly endorsing NATO's collective defence principle.¹²⁷

While the US establishment prioritized the protection of other countries and “dragged us into foreign wars that have made us less safe”¹²⁸, as Trump claims, it has failed to “secure and defend the borders of the United States”¹²⁹ and allowed a “massive inflow of refugees” and “illegal immigration”¹³⁰: “Every day our border remains open, innocent Americans are needlessly victimized”.¹³¹ By constructing illegal immigrants and refugees as a threat to the physical safety of the American people and linking them to crime, (gang) violence, drugs and terrorism¹³², the Trumpian discourse generates a politics of fear and scapegoating and conjures up an “onslaught of illegal aliens” on the US¹³³. As we have seen, this securitization move has also resulted in the adoption of exceptional political measures.

The populist dimension of this securitization move, which further reinforces this politics of insecurity and exceptionality, lies in the construction of a direct link between the ‘dangerous’ foreign Other and the American establishment. The Trumpian discourse represents the US immigration system, like the US defence policy, as corrupted by an establishment that has

¹²⁶ White House, ‘President Donald Trump’s 500 days of winning on the world stage’ (2018b), available at {<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-500-days-winning-world-stage/>} accessed 2 October 2018.

¹²⁷ Hal Brands, ‘The Unexceptional Superpower: American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump’, *Survival* 59:6 (2017), p. 17.

¹²⁸ Trump (2016a).

¹²⁹ Trump (2016j).

¹³⁰ Donald Trump, ‘Remarks at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center in Reno, Nevada’ (2016m), available at {<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-reno-sparks-convention-center-reno-nevada>} accessed 16 July 2018.

¹³¹ Donald Trump, ‘Remarks at the remembrance project luncheon at the Omni Houston Hotel at Westside in Houston, Texas’ (2016n), available at {<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-remembrance-project-luncheon-the-omni-houston-hotel-westside-houston-texas>} accessed 18 July 2018.

¹³² Trump (2015a).

¹³³ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 21 October’ (2018d), available at {<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1054087893034172418>} accessed 2 November 2018.

“surrender[ed]” the American people “to the false song of globalism”¹³⁴ and places the “politically-correct special interests”¹³⁵ of “wealthy donors, political activists and powerful, powerful politicians” over “the well being of the American people”¹³⁶. Accordingly, the establishment is not only blamed for its “continuing reluctance to ever name the enemy”¹³⁷ and thus for failing to securitize the issue of illegal immigration, but also for colluding with the ‘enemy’: “They don’t care about crime and want illegal immigrants, no matter how bad they may be, to pour into and infest our Country, like MS-13. They can’t win on their terrible policies, so they view them as potential voters!”.¹³⁸

In the economic security sector, the Trumpian discourse implies a similar collusion and constructs the US establishment as enemy of the people by accusing it of entering into “trade deals that strip us of our jobs, and strip us of our wealth as a country”¹³⁹. While regularly scapegoating other countries such as China, Mexico or the European Union for stealing American jobs and wealth through unfair trade practices, Trump shifts the blame to the ‘corrupt’ American power elite: “America’s politicians – beholden to global corporate interests who profit from offshoring – have enabled jobs theft in every imaginable way. They have tolerated foreign trade cheating while enacting trade deals that encourage companies to shift production overseas”.¹⁴⁰ By claiming that establishment politicians such as Hillary Clinton have “sold out our workers, and our country” for self-enrichment and special interests, the Trumpian discourse

¹³⁴ Trump (2016j).

¹³⁵ Trump (2016f).

¹³⁶ Donald Trump, ‘Remarks on immigration at the Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, Arizona’ (2016o), available at {<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=119805>} accessed 16 July 2018.

¹³⁷ Trump (2016f).

¹³⁸ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 19 June’ (2018g), available at {<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1009071403918864385>} accessed 7 July 2018.

¹³⁹ Trump (2016e).

¹⁴⁰ Donald Trump, ‘Disappearing middle class needs better deal on trade’, *USA Today* (2016p), available at {<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2016/03/14/donald-trump-tpp-trade-american-manufacturing-jobs-workers-column/81728584/>} accessed 17 May 2018.

makes the ‘common’ people and the national economy referent objects of economic security that can only be protected against the ‘corrupt’ elite through Donald Trump: “Our country lost its way when we stopped putting the American people first. [...] I am running for President to end the unfairness and to put you, the American worker, first”.¹⁴¹

In keeping with Trump’s election campaign slogan, the Trump administration has shifted economic issues into the realm of securitization: “economic security is national security”¹⁴² and adopted exceptional measures by imposing a 25% global tariff on imports of steel which “weaken our internal economy and thereby threaten to impair the national security”¹⁴³. In addition, the administration started a trade war with China by placing tariffs on \$250 billion of imports from China “to counter China’s unfair [trade] practices” and “to protect the interests of working men and women, farmers, ranchers, businesses, and our country itself”¹⁴⁴. With this securitization, the Trump administration has adopted an economic nationalist position that is not directed against neoliberal capitalism per se but rather combines deregulation and liberalization at home, with protectionist and mercantilist practices abroad. This securitization also helps Trump in keeping together his heterogenous electoral coalition insofar as the negative implications of neoliberal capitalism are externalized and projected onto the foreign Other.

While it has been the failure of securitizing a particular issue that underpinned the Trumpian discourse’s populist securitizations in the security sectors discussed so far, the environmental sector displays a different pattern. Here, the discourse calls for de-securitizing climate change

¹⁴¹ Trump (2016g).

¹⁴² White House, ‘President Donald Trump’s foreign policy puts America first’ (2018c), available at {<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-foreign-policy-puts-america-first/>} accessed 2 October 2018.

¹⁴³ Donald Trump, ‘Presidential proclamation on adjusting imports of steel into the United States’ (2018e), available at {<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-adjusting-imports-steel-united-states/>} accessed 29 August 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Donald Trump, ‘Statement from the President, 17 September’ (2018f), available at {<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-from-the-president-4/>} accessed 2 October 2018.

and represents the establishment's securitization of climate change itself as a threat to the military, economic and political security of the United States and the American people:

Our military is depleted, and we're asking our generals and military leaders to worry about global warming. [...] We have millions of Americans who have mortgages greater than the value of their property, while middle-class incomes are stagnant and more than 40 million citizens are living at poverty levels. And our president is most concerned about climate change.¹⁴⁵

Following a populist logic, Trump blames the 'corrupt' elites for mispresenting climate change and claims that the idea of climate change is a hoax made up by experts, environmentalists and foreigners to harm the American people: "so-called 'experts' told us we were responsible for global warming, but then, when temperatures started dropping, scientists began referring to these variations as 'climate change'".¹⁴⁶ The questioning of scientific evidences through seemingly common-sense arguments and the simplification and personalization of complex phenomena points to the links between populism and 'post-truth' politics and conspiracy theories. According to Trump, the myth that climate change is "man-made" has resulted in "crazy over-regulation" and is "causing us to waste billions of dollars to develop technologies we don't need to fulfil our energy needs" and is thus "really just an expensive way of making the tree-huggers feel good about themselves"¹⁴⁷. Consequently, the Trump administration has withdrawn from the Paris Accord citing threats to the US economy and popular sovereignty as main reasons: "My obligation", as Trump stated, "is to the American People. The Paris Accord

¹⁴⁵ Trump (2015b), p. 62; Trump (2016j).

¹⁴⁶ Trump (2015b), p. 61.

¹⁴⁷ Trump (2015b), pp. 62/65/82.

would undermine our economy, hamstring our workers, weaken our sovereignty, impose unacceptable legal risks, & put us at a permanent economic disadvantage to the other countries of the world”.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

This article conceptualized the populist notion of ‘the people’ as potential referent object of security and examined the patterns and implications of populist securitization processes. Drawing on securitization theory and poststructuralism, it provided an analytical framework that allows us to understand how ‘the people’ populists claim to represent are constructed through a particular mode of Othering and how populist discourses can employ the logic of securitization as political mobilization strategy in order to normalize and homogenize the antagonistic divide between ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’ and justify exceptional political measures.

As shown in the theoretical discussion and empirical case study, securitization theory with its conceptualization of security in terms of existentiality, oppositionality (of threat and referent object of security) and emergency bears a remarkable resemblance with populist politics and can offer important insights into the nexus between populism and security. The article argued that security policy can serve as a site for the (re-)production of populist core categories such as ‘the people’ and identified the main features of populist securitizations to capture this process: 1) dramatization and fear-mongering that conjures up existential and persistent dangers, 2) simplification and scapegoating by designating a particular actor as the single cause of a security problem and ‘the people’ as collective victim, 3) propagation of a state of emergency, requiring a suspension of normal politics and the endorsement of the populist actor as the only one who can protect ‘the people’.

¹⁴⁸ Donald Trump, ‘Tweet 2 June’ (2017b), available at {<https://twitter.com/i/moments/870659074815393795?lang=en>} accessed 17 July 2018.

Securitization theory's sectoral approach to security enables us, moreover, to capture the two dimensions of the populist people/elite antagonism. This antagonism can be located in the societal and political sectors of security and revolves around threats to the identity of the 'common' people and popular sovereignty. The case of populism also serves as a critical reminder of the elitist character of the Copenhagen School's securitization theory and the resulting normative dilemma of marginalizing or excluding the experiences and perceptions of those potential referent objects of security who have no, or limited, possibilities of articulating a security problem. Populism, in this sense, can be seen as a response to an 'elitist' security agenda and accuses the elite of either failing to recognize a security threat or of making 'the people' insecure through misguided and corrupted securitization moves. While populist discourses contest the role of elites in securitization processes by designating the establishment as security threat and appealing to the common-sense of 'ordinary' people rather than the institutional power, expertise and authority of typical securitizing actors, their challenge to the elitist nature of securitization is often insofar limited as many populists are themselves part of the elite and hold privileged subject positions.

As populists typically claim to speak for the disenfranchised, powerless and voiceless, they articulate a referent object of security that is remarkably similar to the subjects of security that parts of CSS scholarship often foreground in its analyses. However, the populist notion of the 'common' people is arguably not the marginalized subject of security that those CSS scholars have in mind, not the least because populism has typically a pejorative connotation and is associated with nationalism, xenophobia, anti-intellectualism or authoritarianism. This points not only to the 'elitist' tendencies within CSS scholarship and its complicity in propagating a security agenda that is detached from the concerns of certain sections of society, but also shows that siding with the 'marginalized' is, from a normative perspective, neither necessarily desirable nor emancipatory.

Following Laclau's discursive approach to populism, this article understands populism as an ambiguous phenomenon that can be both regressive and emancipatory. While populism brings 'the people' back into the political equation by linking together a range of frustrated social demands and pointing to a disconnect between 'the people' and the power elite, its transgressive political style and juxtaposition of society into two antagonistic blocs can undermine democratic principles and, when combined with nativist sentiments, generate a politics of insecurity that is directed against (im)migrants and other minorities.

This ambiguity is also evident in the securitization moves of the Trumpian discourse. While the discourse articulates a legitimate critique of the negative implications of neoliberal globalization and the establishment's failure to adequately address these security problems, its (de-)securitization processes expose the reactionary and exclusionary sides of right-wing populism by creating the illusion of a homogenous popular will and offering a notion of the American people with clear nativist underpinning. Put differently, the Trumpian discourse designates a particular segment of US society as the 'real' people and asserts that Trump represents this popular will. In order to create and hold together Trump's heterogenous electoral coalition, the discourse names with 'the establishment' and 'foreign threats' two powerful Others against which different demands and interests can be represented as equivalent and offers with the empty signifier of 'the people' an appealing source of inscription for a range of frustrated social demands. The bearers of these demands are the people Trump claims to represent; and their commonality depends on the presence of these two Others as common enemy which can cancel out the differences within the *Trumpenvolk*. This also explains why Othering and fear-mongering are permanent features of the Trumpian discourse.

By representing a particular segment of society as 'the people' and making it the referent object of security, populist securitizations are thus characterized by practices of exclusion and marginalization. This serves to highlight the problem that the Copenhagen School's securitization

theory has failed to theorize collective identity formation and thus runs the risk of reifying the socio-political categories it seeks to analyse. For this reason, this article situated securitizations within a poststructuralist framework which highlights the purely discursive constitution of ‘the people’ populists claim to represent and understands securitization as a particular way of representing and practicing security.

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