Securitization and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe

Theoretical Considerations

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Abstract

A regional interpretation of religious phenomena and the social functions of religion in East-Central Europe seems to be most appropriate based on securitization theory. If the region is interpreted in terms of a wounded collective identity, the characteristics of the religious dimensions of the region are revealed in an original way along the lines of securitization theory. In this study, first, securitization theory is introduced and then related to other theories of collective identity. In a second step, the theoretical framework of the capacity of securitization theory is outlined to interpret religion. Finally, a few examples that demonstrate the interpretative potential of regional functions of religion in terms of securitization theory are listed.

Keywords

Central and Eastern Europe; interpretation of cultural region; wounded collective identity; functions of religion; theoretical framework

1   Securitization

Securitization[1] is the linguistic and performative act of declaring and averting danger. In other words, it is a discursive framing, a specific interpretation of certain phenomena and processes to achieve a community interest or a political goal by making the relations of threat and defense the axis of the narrative.[2] The ideal of securitization in the Max Weberian sense was developed by

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[1] The theory of securitization was formulated in connection with the analysis of the processes in the banking and insurance sectors, and was applied to the interpretation of the security policies of the US and other Western European states after the 1990 Iraq war. In this paper, it is treated as a social science framework theory.

[2] Campbell, *Writing security*; Wæver, *Securitization and desecuritization*; Buzan/Wæver/ de Wilde: *Security: A new framework for analysis*; Bourbeau/Vuori, *Security, resilience*

Balzacq.[3] Threats are social facts whose status depends on the intersubjective relationship between the audience and the agent providing security. The security responses to a threat and the social context are interdependent. The drivers of encryption actions are the knowledge claims about the existential threat to the referential object. The power relations between stakeholders structure the process and outcomes of security policy actions. Security actions are embedded in social mechanisms (persuasion, propaganda, learning, socialization, practices, etc.). Securitization confers responsibility.

Buchner contrasts the notions of neorealism and institutionalism, in which a real military potential is available to avert (supposed) threats, with the logic of securitization, which focuses on the agents of social discourse and gives the impression that the real threat is purely political in nature and can be averted by various political means. This strategy is more likely to achieve that, in view of the threat interpreted as a crisis, extraordinary measures can be taken. The securitization process legitimizes the policy makers and increases their acceptance. Ultimately, this political process does not need a real threat, but merely a successful and effective demonstration that the threat exists.[4]

Related to the theoretical approach of securitization is the social theory of postmodernism, especially as interpreted by Zygmund Baumann, who identifies the breakdown of stable orientations and the necessity of flexible orientation as one of the most important features of postmodernism.[5] More widely, we can refer to Anthony Giddens' theory of ontological security,[6] in an inverse sense, as in the last decade the original term has been inversely applied as *ontological insecurity.*[7]

The subject of securitization can be a community interaction or a government agency. While the former is not independent of the personal or institutional agents influencing social discourse, it is primarily horizontal in nature, based on the conscious or random and capricious acquisition of information by the individual. The main sources of information are online networks, social media, popular TV shows, blogs and vlogs, youtube and other channels. The governmental (more broadly, political) branch is also not independent of the processes of community interaction but is primarily based on vertical,

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and desecuritization; Bosco, *Securing the sacred*; Lægaard, *Religious toleration*; Balzacq, *Securitization theory*.

3   Balzacq, *The 'Essence' of securitization*, p. 106.
4   Buchner, *Wie Sicherheit die Schadensabwehr lenkt*, p. 180.
5   Bauman, *Liquid modernity*; Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents.*
6   Giddens, *The Constitution of Society.*
7   Cf., for instance, Rumelili, *Breaking with Europe's pasts*; Cash, *Psychoanalysis*; Kinnvall/ Mitzen, *Anxiety, fear, and ontological security;* Ejdus/Rečević, *Ontological Insecurity.*

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top-down, centrally controlled interventions using typically governmental instruments. Its primary branches are the prominent public actors, the media under government direction and control, and the individuals and institutions representing central objectives at regional and local levels.

The object of securitization can be any real or imaginary phenomenon. What becomes a threat to be defended against in the process of securitization depends primarily not on the intrinsic characteristics of the phenomenon, but on the extent to which it is capable of being made into a threat. On the one hand, it must have self-evident characteristics, and, on the other hand, it must be capable of being contrasted with values that are of fundamental importance to public thinking, such as health, peace, prosperity, family, etc.

The primary stated purpose of securitization is to avert danger, to restore or create the lost or desired security. Underlying these objectives are communal and political interests, which are the primary motives for initiating and maintaining the securitization sub-processes.

José Casanova, a sociologist of religion who has become well-known for his theory of *public religion*, distinguishes between the secular (a sphere independent of religion) and secularization (a theory analyzing the changing role of religion in the private and public spheres), and secularism (a political program to remove religion from public life) in his clarification of the concept of secularization.[8] Applying Casanova's distinction to securitization, we can distinguish between security (a state independent of or not reflecting the threat), securitization as a discursive process that designates threats, and "securitism", which interprets the whole of social and cultural reality exclusively in relation to the threat. The theoretical significance of this distinction lies in the fact that it breaks down the concept of securitization and offers the possibility of a more structured discussion of it. In practical terms, it is of particular importance in that it provides an opportunity to develop more nuanced analytical questions and procedures.

In his classic study 'Secularization: A multi-dimensional concept', Karl Dobbelaere separates levels of secularization, distinguishing between micro (individual), meso (institutional) and macro (societal) levels of it. The micro level is concerned with personal attitudes towards religiosity, the meso level with civil society and social institutions, and the macro level with the societal, universal or continental level.[9] Borrowing Dobbelaere's distinction, it is theoretically and practically useful to discuss and analyze the three levels separately in the context of securitization. Accordingly, the micro level is the

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8   Cf. Máté-Tóth, *Vallásnézet.*

9   Dobbelaere, *Trend Report*; Dobbelaere, *Secularization: an analysis at three levels.*

individual's sense of threat and its thematization and management, the meso level is the securitization by and of the various civil society actors, and finally, the macro level is the policy domain of countries and groups of countries.[10]

In view of the above, securitization can be considered as an instrument or feature of policy, but it can also be identified with certain types of policy. Political systems or regional policies that have a legacy of threat are particularly prone to base their entire policies on securitization. In the case of Hungary, the literature shows that 'the political communication of securitization has had the greatest impact on public discourse'.[11]

2   Securitization in CEE

Collective threat and the growing need for security in response to it is a world-wide phenomenon, typically most noticeable in situations where there is intergroup conflict between majority and minority, or very often where there is some kind of collective grievance/trauma.[12]

As several studies have reported, the mere mention or discursive emergence of historical grievances can reinforce the potential for intergroup conflict, and the identification with a marked victimhood role can result in a hostile attitude towards external (not only perpetrator) groups, a lack of trust, reduced empathy, and a state of intransigence.[13]

This is especially true of exclusive victimhood, where the group is able to see only its own narratives and perspectives, and, as a consequence, a glorification of its own group (national and ethnic) is created. And since only its own grievances are focused on, the suffering of external groups is questioned and relativized, and all external groups become potential sources of danger.[14]

Victimhood as such, of course, is not of regional significance, but such (exclusive) forms of victimhood in Central and Eastern Europe create specific patterns due to the historical background and collective memory. Fear of

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10   The distinction between levels of securitization is particularly reflected in the study by Ejdus/Rečević, which examines the psychological dimensions of the feeling of threat based on interviews in Serbia (Ejdus/Rečević, *Ontological Insecurity*).

11   Feischmidt, *Szolidaritás és társadalmi reflexió*, p. 76.

12   C.f. Wohl/Branscombe, *Remembering historical victimization*; Čehajić/Brown, *Silencing the past*; Andrighetto/ Mari/Volpato/Behluli, *Reducing competitive victimhood*, p. x.; Siman Tov-Nachlieli/Shnabel, *Feeling both victim and perpetrator*; Cohrs/McNeill/Vollhardt, *The two-sided role*.

13   Bar-Tal/Antebi: *Siege mentality in Israel*; Noor/Brown/Prentice, *Precursors and Mediators*; Schori-Eyal/Halperin/Bar-Tal, *Three layers of collective victimhood*.

14   Vollhardt/Bilali, *The role of inclusive and exclusive victim consciousness*.

foreign empires, minority existence, states of entrenchment, and transience are patterns of victimization which, on the one hand, clearly influence the identity of group members and, on the other hand, continue to threaten the collective identity of societies in the region through transgenerational transmission.[15] Literature on collective (and exclusive) victimization illustrates well the properties of this experience of threat.[16]

All this means that, regardless of the political and/or ideological orientation of the individual, a heightened and deep-seated social sensitivity is generated, which has an impact on collective identification. As a result, the security needs of the region are particularly acute trigger points, which can be instrumentalized by political power. In other words, the threat sensitivities of collective identity make the region particularly well suited to being a focus of securitization, both from the host side and from the discourses that are enforced from above.

3   Securitization: The Interpretation of Religion in CEE

The systematic developer of securitization theory, Barry Buzan, professor of the London School of Economics Institute of International Studies and a leading figure in the Copenhagen School, only touches on religious aspects in his seminal work. The most noteworthy and relevant statement for the application of the theory to the religious dimension is that while religion per se can serve as a reference point for military intervention, it must be taken into account that religion is closely intertwined with the state (Israel, Iran) or the nation (Serbia, Croatia), i.e. it cannot be clearly distinguished whether the object of reference is the state or religion. Furthermore, the Islamophobia of the 'West' and the fear of Hindu nationalism, which are also present in the discourse and decisions on security policy, must be taken into account.[17]

To justify Buzan's claim, the first decades of the 21st century have provided serious military and other violent arguments, including security policy responses to terrorist acts invoking Islam as a religion, with its criminalization of the entire Islamic religion, not to mention policies to deal with the refugee crisis. In this context, history has disproved Buzan's claim that religion "has not yet transcended the state as a referent object for military security", since the

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15   László, *Történelemtörténetek;* Fülöp/Kővágó, *A kollektív áldozatiszerep szociálpszichológiája.*

16   Bar-Tal/Cehajic-Clancy, *From collective victimhood*; Bilali/Vollhardt, *Victim and perpetrator groups' divergent perspectives.*

17   Buzan/Wæver/de Wilde, *Security: A new framework for analysis,* p. 53.

multifaceted defense and fight against terrorism on the basis of religion has become an independent target, and the defense against other religion-related facts has also taken on an international, regional character. (See the areas of CEE presented below.)

The relationship between securitization and religion is discussed in international studies mostly focusing on the areas identified by Buzan. In our study, we approach the validity of securitization in relation to religion, and religion itself as securitization, from a broader perspective. We intend to show not only what religious facts and aspects have become threatening in the process of securitization, but also that the function of religion in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region[18] studied by us can be described and understood primarily as securitization. In the former discussion, religion is the object of securitization, and in the latter, religion is the subject of securitization. The regional specificity of the social functions of religion is described in terms of the securitization of religious facts, which is linked to the main identity marker of the region, the wounded collective identity. We propose that, in parallel to the way in which the theory of modernization concerning religion is secularization, the social science framework theory of the CEE region is wounded collective identity, whose theory of religion is securitization.

If it can be argued that the main feature of the social identity of the CEE region is its woundedness,[19] which is a consequence of its geocultural and geopolitical location, then the religious[20] dimension of the wounded collective identity is closely, and perhaps primarily, linked to the sense of ongoing threat. In both the private religious and the public religious spheres, securitization is not only one of the region's most distinctive features, but its most prominent one – with emphases and colorations appropriate to the region's history and cultural endowments.

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18   In this paper, we present the CEE dimension through the literature, but our examples are Hungarian and only serve the purpose of better understanding the relationship between securitization and religion. We plan to elaborate and present further examples and analyses from the region in the future.

19   Máté-Tóth, *Sebzett identitás Kelet-Közép-Európában*.

20   Specific definitions of religion in both essential and functional terms are numerous and are a constant topic of debate in the study of religion. In the context of the theme of our study, we consider religion as a social and cultural phenomenon based on the self-definition of religion by its adherents and representatives. Based on the philosophical discussion of religion, Laustsen and Waever (Laustsen/Wæver, *In Defence of Religion*) criticize the Copenhagen School's conception of religion on this point, which we will not discuss in detail here.

3.1   *Public Religion from the Perspective of Securitization*

In general, there are three approaches to religiosity: the direction of the universal forms and manifestations of personal religiosity (the phenomenology of religion), that of the characteristics of religiosity with regional connotations (the anthropology of religion, and the psychology of religion), and finally that of the many layers of the social phenomenon of religion. Beyond the dimension of personal religiosity, religious securitization takes place primarily in the public sphere (public religion), which, while not entirely separable from the personal sphere, can be separated from it in a systematic way. In other words, since religion is of existential importance for its followers, the threat to religion and to sacred objects affects them existentially.[21] In the theory of securitization, as typified by the Copenhagen school in the field of international studies, this existential dimension is left out of the reflection. Public religion[22] is the totality of knowledge, teachings, regulated community actions and institutions that declare themselves to be religious. Every age and every culture has its own pattern of public religion. Public religion is a universal phenomenon, but it is culture-specific. All religions have doctrines, rites and institutions. An analysis of the characteristics and processes of public religion from the point of view of securitization answers the question what the basis is on which threats are identified by public religious actors and the strategies they adopt to counter them.

3.2   *Religiosity from the Perspective of Securitization*

Securitization is the totality of processes and acts of threat identification and threat prevention. In the context of personal religiosity, at a theoretical, ideal-typical level, the approach is capable of accounting for the dangers that appear in the acts of personal religiosity and the vision behind them. It is also a means of identifying the resources and solutions that can be used to counter the dangers identified. Both threat-identification and threat-avoidance can be personally lived experiences and (linguistic) acts, but the individual is also embedded in the social and religious milieu in which the securitization takes place, in terms of his or her religiosity. What is seen as a threat and how it is averted is determined by pre-given and acquired knowledge and its changes. The private domain of religious securitization is prayer, and the communal domain is ritual, directed either towards the isolated religious sphere or outwardly towards the profane sphere.

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21   Cf. Laustsen/Wæver, *In Defence of Religion.*

22   The term public religion corresponds to José Casanova's *public religion* and, more distantly, to Rousseau and Bellah's *civil religion.* (Cf. Máté-Tóth, *Vallásnézet*).

3.3   *The Danger of Sectarianism*

In the CEE region, a kind of free market in religion emerged after the fall of the anti-religious and anti-clerical communist regime. On the one hand, this meant that religious communities, freed from the control of the anti-religious authorities, were able to engage in a new dynamic of activity, in which they had to reposition themselves in a religiously free social and cultural space. On the other hand, the disappearance of the instances of 'capitalist' influence led to the arrival in the region of powerful missions from Western Europe, and even more so from the USA.[23]

In connection with this phenomenon, a kind of anti-sectarian campaign was observed in many countries in the region. In Hungary, 4 religious communities were stigmatized by the freely elected first parliament, on the basis of reports from the National Security Service: the Church of Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology, and the Krishna Conscious Church.[24] In several waves, mainly right-wing oriented politics has created a fault line between religious communities, with the "historical churches" on one side, and the "(destructive) sects" on the other. In this criminalization effort, the term "business church" was used by Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén, which was part of the process of renewing and replacing the Law 4 of 1990 on Freedom of Conscience and Churches, which was finally concluded in 2011 with the ratification of the new law. Although several points of the law have been declared unconstitutional by the Hungarian Constitutional Court, not to mention the relevant Brussels court, the law continues to provide a basis and a tool[25] for a policy of securitization of religion, despite its continuous amendment process.[26]

3.4   *Islam*

It was especially the refugee crisis, which in 2015 was the primary determinant of world politics, including the politics of the CEE states, that provided an opportunity for the securitization of the Islamic religion. The main tools used included the elimination of the distinction between Islam and religiously motivated terrorism, the identification of Islam with terrorism, and the emphasizing of its incompatibility with the European political and cultural order and traditions. In addition to government propaganda, many research institutes, academics and public intellectuals have supported and continue to support the view of the threat posed by Islam. The government-controlled

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23   Ramet, *Nihil obstat religion.*

24   Horváth, *Szektaveszély a tények mérlegén. Egyházfórum.*

25   Cf. Máté-Tóth/Juhász, *Vallási közösségek az írott sajtóban.*

26   Kovács/Rajki, *Kísérlet a 'szektakérdés' fogalmának.*

media continue to broadcast programs that support the idea of the threat of Islam and use the facts of the persecution of Christians in the Middle East to justify the securitization of Islam.[27]

3.5   *Imported Holidays*

The internet and online networks are suitable means of making the blending of cultures commonplace for the perception of the ordinary person. This is how some holidays that originated in America are spreading in Europe. In particular, the ancient Celtic pagan holiday of Halloween and Valentine's Day have become the targets of securitization, on the grounds that the former coincides with the Christian All Saints' Vigil (eve).[28] The latter has become the target of securitization in some more radical Muslim countries, since the population regards it as a holiday of free love, which is contrary to their interpretation of shari'a. Halloween has been opposed not primarily by political groups but by church groups who say that American business culture is an attack on traditional Christian culture.[29,30]

3.6   *LGBTQ+*

Churches in the CEE countries, their adherents and church officials alike see feminism, homosexuality, gender theory and the activism of LGBTQ+ organizations as a major threat. Although these contemporary discourses do not overlap, they are fused in acts of securitization and are seen as a common source of threat.[31] The attitudes and actions thus stigmatized are opposed to family, nature, tradition and Christianity in their respective understandings of securitization. The supreme church government itself is actively involved in this Christian or Catholic apologia, providing a backstop for the episcopal bodies of the local churches.

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27   The literature on the subject is extremely rich, but we will mention only a few examples of studies on the Hungarian discourse (András, *A migráns-narratíva mint ön- és ellenségépítés*; Demeter, *Propaganda against the West in the Heart of Europe*; Goździak/Marton, *Where the Wild Things Are*; Mihályi/Szelényi, *A morális pánik természete*).

28   Szemerkényi, *Kell-e nekünk Valentin nap?*

29   For example, Lőrincz, *Halottak napja vagy halloween?*, p. 3.

30   "I think that for a Christian family, this Halloween hullabaloo, this pretension, this masked parade, they do not fit into their everyday life, because it would promote the cult of Satan" – statement by the head of a Catholic kindergarten.

31   Janky/Kmetty/Naszályi/Tamássy, *Médiakeretezés és LMBTQ+ emberek iránti attitűdök*; Nuñez-Mietz, *Resisting human rights through securitization*; Vida, *New Waves.*

4   Link to the Wounded Collective Identity

Although religious securitization is a universal phenomenon, it has regional characteristics. These can be captured in the system of values and interests that emerge in the process of securitization, depending on the issues, events, and processes against which the securitization process presents values to be defended. In the CEE region, religion-related securitization operations and processes have emphasized the threat of sectarianism, liberalism, Islam, US holidays and LGBTQ+, and have contrasted this with the conglomerate of values to be defended, namely, Christianity, family and Europe, articulated as traditional and particular (national). The process of securitization is closely related to the discursive operations of populism, one of whose most essential capacities is the stark opposition between the (threatening) 'others' and 'us' (who need to be defended). In conclusion, in our study we have sought to support the claim that securitization theory, developed by the representatives of the Copenhagen school, has a special potential for interpreting the religious processes of the CEE region. This approach has not yet been exploited in the Hungarian literature in international studies, sociology, and religious studies, and from this point of view our claim can be considered original. Furthermore, it is an opportunity for the representatives of these disciplines to engage in transdisciplinary cooperation on the subject. A review of the international literature has led us to the conclusion that the securitization-based approach to the religious dimension of the CEE region has so far been used by only very few authors. And those authors who have analyzed the contemporary discourses of securitization relevant to religion in some countries of the region have not linked contemporary phenomena to the trauma-centered self-understanding as a primary marker of the region. With our study we intend to initiate further international reflection in this direction.

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