

The Dynamics of Securitization in the Weak State: Competing Discourses in Mexico's Hot Land

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Abstract

In the Tierra Caliente region of Mexican state of Michoacan a bloody war between vigilante groups, drug cartels and government forces has gone on unabated for years. This conflict springs from a fundamental issue within the state, its weakness. The inability of the state to establish rule of law over all of its domain has led to a variety of actors rising and attempting to establish order in their own way. In order to understand the dynamics of this case study and others like it, can the Copenhagen School approach and the theory of securitization be used? Often criticized for being Eurocentric and state centric, application of their framework to a weak state context has implications for the theory itself. While many of its components such as the discursive establishment of security and the extraordinary measures can accommodate a new context, underlying assumptions in the theory threaten to limit its use. Therefore, new variables that question assumptions of legitimacy must be incorporated. The product, is a reworked and new understanding of weak state security dynamics and bottom up securitization.

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Introduction

The Copenhagen School of security studies has established itself as one of the preeminent points of view within the wider field of Critical Security Studies. Having moved away from the traditional or neorealist approaches that dominated the field in the post-World War II literature, they opened up the field to new perspectives. In particular, they moved to incorporate non-military threats to referents objects other than the state, which was a major departure from the traditional view. Authors Barry Buzan and Ole Waever put forward multiple frameworks and concepts intent on broadening the scope of security. The theories of sectoral security, securitization and regional security complex theory were all products of the pair. The two have had success in moving away from the state and the traditional with their approach. However, critics are present and often question whether the Copenhagen School has gone far enough.

Critics often cite the Copenhagen School's propensity for the state and euro-centric in their approach. While it is true that in many ways they have moved away from the state such as in looking at non-state threats, referent objects and sub-state entities such as national ethnic groups, they often do not account for dynamics that the framework can't accommodate. Due to the oversights and assumptions of Copenhagen School logic, the theory of securitization in its purest form has trouble acclimating to contexts outside of the state and Eurocentric. One of the base assumptions within the securitization framework is the issue of who can speak security. Generally, from the state-centric perspective, the one who can speak security is the state, as they are the legitimate source of order. They do open this concept up to other large entities such as national ethnic groups but even then a certain amount of legitimacy is assumed.

In the context of the weak state, these assumptions are challenged, the issue of legitimacy within an institutionally weak state is often a source of conflict. In states where sovereignty is not fully held, other groups can often hold power. It is within this context I hope to understand security dynamics in the weak state. Specifically I inquire and attempt to answer, how does securitization operate when the state is weak? Or more specifically, how does securitization occur when there is no single source of authority? In order to answer this question I will look at a single instrumental case study. By bringing the theories of the Copenhagen School together with the critiques under the umbrella of the case study, I hope to bridge the gaps that exist between the two. This could identify key variables that are not considered in securitization and show how these processes do work in a different context.

I hypothesize, that, the process may be different once the assumed legitimacy of the state is not present. This simple research question potentially has many cascading repercussions for the Copenhagen School. First, when the state is not the assumed authority, who securitizes and on behalf of whose security? In the weak state context, securitization takes on different forms and new concepts must be introduced. Differing processes such as “Bottom up” and “Horizontal” securitization may come to the forefront. In addition, I believe processes by which actors attempt to gain legitimacy will define this process. Lastly, “competing discourses” will also be seen to be crucial to the process in the non-western and weak state context.

The case study of Tierra Caliente in Michoacan, Mexico is of particular interest due to the complexity of the security dynamics in this space. A bloody conflict has been ongoing in the state as multiple drug cartels, vigilante paramilitary groups and government entities have all been fighting for differing goals. The drug war in Mexico has killed an estimated 100,000 people

since 2006 and it continues to rage, especially in the south western part of the country.¹ This particular conflict has a number of attributes which are of interest to this paper. Mexico is considered by most a 'weak state', how I define this concept will be illustrated later in the paper. The state of Michoacan is of particular interest as it has also been amongst the most volatile in the region. In addition, the conflict is also complex with a multitude of actors and groups all playing their part in the conflict. This case is ideal as it poses challenges to the assumptions and framework put forward by the Copenhagen School.

To see how securitization operates in the weak state context, the paper will go through multiple steps. First, I will survey the Copenhagen School literature to show the moves they have made since their inception and where they currently stand in the Critical Security debate. Then I will survey notable critics and competing ideas that contrast that of the Copenhagen School. As this paper is focused on the weak state context, I will follow the literature review by defining the concept of the weak state as argued by Barry Buzan and theorists from the Third World Security School. This will lead into the theoretical framework, which will shape how I will view the case study in question. I will give an overview of securitization and put forward new elements and ideas about how this process operates in the weak state context. The last chapter will focus purely on the case study itself. First I will give a historical background of the case study that outlines the events and actions that occurred in Michoacán during a defined period of time which will start from slightly before the emergence of the Knights Templar drug Cartel (March 8, 2011)

¹ Tuckmann, Jo. "Mexican Officials: 43 Killed in Major Offensive against Drug Cartel." *The Guardian*. May 23, 2015. Accessed May 25, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/22/mexico-firefight-drug-cartel-region>.

² until the time post Mexican government intervention ³ up until April, 30 2015. Finally, I will analyze the discourse within Michoacán's amongst the notable actors affiliated with relevant groups in the conflict. This paper will analyze statements made in videos, speeches and in print to see if distinct securitizing moves are being made. In addition, I will explore the place that non-speech forms of communication may have within the wider narrative. Lastly, the differing securitizing elements that may be at work within the weak state context are of particular interest and will be tracked in the discourse if present.

² Noel, Andrea. "Where Mexico's Drug War Was Born: A Timeline of the Security Crisis in Michoacan." VICE.com. March 12, 2015. Accessed May 22, 2015. <https://news.vice.com/article/where-mexicos-drug-war-was-born-a-timeline-of-the-security-crisis-in-michoacan>.

³ Fausset, Richard. "Mexico Troops Clash with Vigilante Groups; 12 Reported Killed." *Los Angeles Times*. January 14, 2014. Accessed May 31, 2015. <http://www.latimes.com/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-mexico-violence-20140114-story.html>.

Chapter 1 - Literature Review

1.1 - The Copenhagen School: Securitization and Sectoral Security

Since its inception, critical security studies has sought to “widen and deepen” our understanding of the concept of ‘security’.⁴ Previously, the focus of security studies had been the traditional neorealist approach which was state-centric with its primary focus on states as the referent object⁵ and an assorted array of military threats stemming mostly from the external which was embodied in opposing states. Authors such as Kenneth Waltz⁶ and John Mearsheimer⁷ discussed the anarchical international landscape, security dilemmas, nuclear deterrence and conflicts amongst states as this was perceived to be the ‘only way’ to discuss security. With the introduction of the critical approach to security, the field expanded to include a variety of different areas where security had not previously been considered. This expansion included different types of threats and expanded the potential referents. While traditional neorealist perceptions of security remain relevant, the critical approach has carved out its own place in the security studies discourse. A place by which observers can discuss a multitude of referent objects and threats such as disease, the environment and identity. The critical approach has sought to change the way we think ‘security’ as it forces us to rethink what the concept actually means, what can constitute a threat and who can seek security.

⁴ Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

⁵ In this paper, the term ‘referent’ or ‘referent object’ refers to entities which are existentially threatened.

⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: a Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001)

⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*, Updated ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014),

One of the primary points of reference within the field of critical security studies is that the Copenhagen School approach. At its core, authors Barry Buzan and Ole Waever comprise the Copenhagen School. They have both individually and jointly published major contributions to the field. In what can be considered the first move in what would eventually be a long term project to reorient the security field and to expand the scope of security beyond the state was Buzan's 1983 book *People, States and Fear*. In the book, he introduces a framework that includes multi-leveled referents and the introduction of the concept of sectoral security which he would develop further in later works.⁸ He focuses on the concept of national security by taking a three level approach. These levels which included the individual, the state and the international system were analyzed in terms of a broader inquiry into the concept of 'national security'. The sectoral security model looked at the nature of threats which still included the traditional military threats but expanded to also include political, economic and ecological.⁹ At the time this was a very new way of thinking security, however it still privileged the state over other referents as national security was still paramount. In retrospect, it was the first step in a multiple decade long process of looking at security from a new critical perspective.

In 1993, the concept of societal security was expanded upon with the book *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*.¹⁰ In it, Copenhagen school outlines the concept and threats to society through the lens of the other sectors.¹¹ They differentiate between state and societal by stating the focus of each. Whereas the state is concerned with sovereignty,

⁸ Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: the National Security Problem in International Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 75

⁹ Ibid., 75

¹⁰ Waever, Ole, Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup, and Pierre Lemaitre. *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 17

¹¹ Ibid., 41

the society (which comes in many forms) is concerned with identity.¹² Meaning societal threats are “whatever puts the ‘we’ identity in jeopardy”¹³ This again was perceived to be another move in moving away from the traditional/ state-centric approach.

In 1995, Ole Waever in an article for *On Security* entitled “Securitization and Desecuritization” put forward his first attempt to bring the framework of securitization into the security debate.¹⁴ This was the first mention in the Copenhagen School literature of ‘security’ as a speech act, where the utterance of a threat or issue as a matter of security is the act of security.¹⁵ While Waever imagined security in a purely discursive sense, the discourse was still very much driven by the state or from the ‘top down’. The process outlined in the article as being elite driven or as a general rule the speech act is done on behalf of the state. At this point in the Copenhagen School approach, the state was still overwhelmingly at the forefront, even going as far as stating “as concepts, *neither individual security nor international security exist.*”¹⁶ He goes on to argue that the concept of national security is the security of the state and that the formalized referent of the state is inherent to this idea.¹⁷

The Copenhagen School’s most recent collaborative work is the 1998 book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, is still one of the most important pieces of critical security literature to date. It brings together many of the pieces and ideas they had put forward in their previous works. Mainly, this work is oriented toward further movement away from the state-centric approach. They argue the purpose of this piece is “to set out a comprehensive new

¹² Ibid., 27

¹³ Ibid., 42

¹⁴ Waever, Ole, and Ronnie D. Lipschutz. "Securitization and Desecuritization." In *On Security*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. 46-86.

¹⁵ Ibid., 55

¹⁶ Ibid., 48

¹⁷ Ibid., 48

framework for security studies. Our approach is based on the work of those who for well over a decade have sought to question the primacy of the military element and the state in the conceptualization of security.”¹⁸ Two very important concepts come out of the Copenhagen school approach. The first is the evolved version of the process of ‘securitization’ which is outlined as follows “when a securitizing actor actor uses a rhetoric of existential threat and thereby takes an issue out of what under those conditions is “normal politics,” we have a case of securitization. Thus, the exact *definition* and *criteria* of securitization is constituted by the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects.”¹⁹ Under Copenhagen school logic securitization is a process by which a securitizing actor makes a ‘speech act’ to an audience which states that a threat exists to a referent object. The audience then accepts or denies the threat, if accepted than securitization is complete. Furthermore, if the ‘audience’ accepts the threat they are granting permission to the securitizing actor to implement extreme measures to counter the threat. This was a very different way to envision security, as it made security a discursive act, where the intersubjective agreement between the securitizing actor and the audience is the act of security. Differing from Wæver’s 1995 contribution, 1998 book opened securitization up to other referents outside the state.

The second main contribution is the framework they put forward for ‘widening and deepening’ of both the potential referents and the potential threats. Their framework directs their security analysis by organizing areas of focus that include levels of analysis, sectors and regions. The levels of analysis approach divides entities into subgroups such as the *international system*

¹⁸ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: a New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Pub, 1998), 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24

which would encompass everyone, to *units* which would represent states and nations to *individuals*.²⁰ In addition, Buzan expands on his sectoral focus in this new framework with sectors comprising much of the organization and focus of the book. They lay out five sectors (military, environmental, economic, societal and political). The sectoral approach to security allows the proverbial ‘widening’ of the security agenda.²¹ It opens the discourse to a much wider range of security foci as opposed to the traditionalist approach of military and state. Furthermore, they outline *regional* dimensions within the different sectors which in turn accounts for variables that may be unique to specific regions which can change the types of sectoral threats and/or perceptions of those threats. The Copenhagen School framework allows the analyst to theorize about a multitude of referents and potential threats that can be conceived within the levels of analysis, security sectors and regions.

All of the previously mentioned elements of the Copenhagen School approach equate to a thorough and expansive way to view security. It allows for the traditionalist security issues such as military threats, but opens the conversation to many other types of referents and societal aspects of security. In addition, the process of securitization and the imagining of security as a speech act gives a starting point by which we can look at situations, and how they move from the realm of the ordinary to the realm of security. However, while they have certainly ‘widened and deepened’ the conversation, critics are still present. Since the emergence of the Copenhagen School, a litany of scholars and academics with critiques of the approach have emerged. The criticisms come in many forms, however much stems from the inherent favoritism shown to the

²⁰ Buzan et al. *Security: a New Framework*, 6

²¹ Ibid.

state both in the securitization framework and in general focus. While some of this state centrism is avoidable, other times it is built into the nature of the framework itself.

1.2 – The Copenhagen School’s Critics

While Copenhagen School provides a potential jumping off point for an expanded concept of security, the framework that includes securitization and sectoral security has flaws. This is especially evident when looking at how Copenhagen School approach’s often bipolar relationship with the concept of the ‘state’. Their stated purpose was to move beyond the state-centric approach and in some ways this has been accomplished. They have moved away from the state as a referent by opening up to others such as the environment and identity. However, the state-centrism of the traditionalist model is not completely gone from Copenhagen School. Ken Booth argues “Buzan’s key text, *People, States and Fear*, was not therefore a call for a radical rethink of security theory as much as a call to mainstream analysts to broaden the security agenda of states away from their overwhelming concern with military power”.²² While the referent objects have changed, the securitizing actors (the state) have mostly stayed the same. Copenhagen school seems resigned to this fact as they state “Security is an area of competing actors, but it is a biased one in which the state is still generally privileged as the actor historically endowed with security tasks and most adequately structured for the purpose”.²³ In the sectoral security model, this ‘top down’ approach is still alive and well. While Copenhagen has successfully broken from the traditionalist model, they are still overtly eurocentric and state

²² Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security (Cambridge Studies in International Relations)* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 162

²³ Buzan et al. *Security: a New Framework*, 37

focused in their approach. This focus where state's are inherently the most privileged to speak security and provide security has a multitude of connotations and issues.

The process of securitization while respected as a useful tool in understanding security, it has its faults by being a state privileged process. Author Claire Wilkinson discusses the concept of the "Westphalian Straightjacket" which critiques the Copenhagen School's overly Euro-centric conception of identity.²⁴ From this distinctly western viewpoint, the securitizing actors they outline generally follow suit. Wilkinson claims "Empirically, securitization is further restricted to the realm of high politics at the level of the state, with little potential for including substate actors that do not interact with official politics, leaving security sectors to merely describe various aspects of the state's security as non-state actors and groups are left in the analytical shadows".²⁵ While the results of Copenhagen School's approach is fairly state-centric, the elements of securitization are still fitting to look at a wider assortment of securitizing actors although also fall prey to a variation of critiques.

The 'security as a speech act' concept has often come under scrutiny and is often considered to be restrained by the 'Westphalian Straightjacket'. Matt McDonald critiques the Copenhagen concept of the speech act as exclusionary to other forms of securitizing expression "an exclusive focus on language is problematic in the sense it can exclude forms of bureaucratic practices or physical action that do not merely follow from securitizing 'speech acts' but are part of the process through which meanings of security are communicated and security itself

²⁴ Wilkinson, Claire. "The Copenhagen School On Tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is Securitization Theory Useable Outside Europe?" *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 5 (March 12, 2007): 1, Accessed April 29, 2015. <http://sdi.sagepub.com/content/38/1/5.full.pdf+html>

²⁵ Ibid., 15

constructed".²⁶ He also goes on to point out the potential for other mediums such as the role of images as another form of securitizing language. He cites the part played by images of the World Trade Center on September 11th in securitizing terrorism in the United States as an example. While McDonald's critique does not seem at first glance to be calling out Copenhagen for an overt focus on the state, his words lend themselves to this interpretation. Non-state actors often lack the platform, coherence and top down leadership to securitize issues in the speech act form. Often other forms of expression are sometimes more suitable to securitize on the substate level. Mediums such as action, images or what can be considered 'peer securitization' are sometimes the most available for non-state actors.

As the Copenhagen School claims "We have constructed a wider conceptual net within which the state-centric position is a possible but not predetermined outcome".²⁷ The securitization framework is general enough that it can accommodate a 'bottom up' approach in which the state is not the securitizing actor. The broadness of the securitization framework allows for a different direction than the one taken by Buzan and Waever. While Copenhagen School does not cover the 'bottom up' approach, they do leave an opening to do so. In relation to social power and facilitating conditions they claim "This relationship among subjects is not equal or symmetrical, the possibility for successful securitization will vary dramatically with the position held by the actor. Security is thus very much a structured field in which some actors are placed in positions of power by virtue of being generally accepted voices of security. This power, however, is never absolute: No one is guaranteed the ability to make people accept a claim for necessary security action, nor is anyone excluded from attempts to articulate alternative

²⁶ McDonald, Matt. "Securitization and the Construction of Security." *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 4 (2008): 568, Accessed May 7, 2015. <http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/14/4/563.full.pdf.html>.

²⁷ Buzan et al. *Security: a New Framework*, 37

interpretations of security. The field is structured or biased, but no one conclusively “holds” the power of securitization”.²⁸ This quote points to a fundamental issue within the securitization literature. While securitization is seemingly not confined to state entities, who outside the state can speak security? Furthermore, this raises another question in what constitutes legitimacy? In the context of the weak state and a bottom up approach, what would generally be considered a ‘legitimate’ actor is not applicable. A wide range of potential actors can attempt to securitize a particular issue, however, their success is in question.

New interpretations of the securitization process that include ‘bottom up’ and ‘horizontal’ securitization are still underdiscussed. However, these concepts are starting to permeate the popular security discourse. Constantinos Adamides discusses to concepts in *Institutionalized, Horizontal and Bottom-Up Securitization in Ethnic Conflict Environments: The Case of Cyprus*, he states “Horizontal securitization, as the name suggests, takes place on a horizontal level making the process essentially ‘peer securitization’. Bottom-up securitization refers to cases where the audiences either become securitizing actors themselves or they apply so much pressure to ‘mainstream’ actors (for example political elite and media) that the latter are ‘forced’ to engage in securitizing acts.”²⁹ In his paper, he mostly discusses the concept of institutionalized securitization from the bottom up and horizontal perspective. The routines of protracted ethnic conflict situations lend themselves to the institutionalized form of securitization as Adamides suggests. But again, this does not account for other forms that bottom up securitization may take. For instance, more *ad hoc* forms of securitization and intra-state threats such as the state itself.

²⁸ Ibid., 31

²⁹Adamides, Constantinos. “Institutionalized, Horizontal and Bottom-Up Securitization in Ethnic Conflict Environments: The Case of Cyprus.” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2012) 10, Accessed May 5, 2015. <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/3791/>.

Ken Booth states “To countless millions of people in the world it is their own state, and not ‘The Enemy’ that is the primary security threat. In addition, the security threat to the regimes running states is often internal rather than external. It is almost certainly true that more governments around the world at this moment are more likely to be toppled by their own armed forces than by those of their neighbors”.³⁰ As stated by Booth, the state-society relationship is often adversarial. While the state is meant to be the sole provider of security or the best placed entity to provide security to the people they often do not do so due to insufficient capacity to do so or due to conflicts of interest. Often the survival of the state is at cross purposes with the ‘security’ needs or requirements of the people or society as a whole. Buzan covers the issue of this conflictual relationship throughout his first chapter in *People, States and Fear*. He cites the ‘social contract’ that exists between the individual and the state in which the individual trades some elements of personal freedom for security.³¹ However, this contract can often turn sour as the state can start to become more of a threat than a benefit to the individuals who reside in the state.³² The security needs of the state and that of the individual or society will then compete in certain contexts. Therefore, if the state’s security needs conflict with the security needs of society or the state’s security needs are an existential threat to ‘society’ then other securitizing actors must be considered. This points to a significant blind spot within the securitization literature, bottom up securitization.

As demonstrated by the variety of critiques of the Copenhagen School approach, the move away from the traditionalist and state-centric was partially accomplished but not fully so. While

³⁰ Booth, Ken. “Security and Emancipation.” *Review of International Studies* 17, no. 4 (October 1991): 318, Accessed February 17, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20097269>.

³¹ Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*, 21

³² *Ibid.*, 24

many scholars see the value and applicability of securitization and sectoral security, it is often criticized for not going far enough away from western and state-centric perspectives. This approach has been radically different than the approaches taken by their neorealist predecessors, However, the security discourse continues to evolve and expand. Copenhagen School has opened the conversation to possible referents outside the state, but the framework of securitization has multiple designations outside the referent such as the securitizing actor and audience. The range of security dynamics and actors active on the domestic and international levels is vast. The state can often be involved in such dynamics but other times it may not be. In its current form the Copenhagen School and its western concepts of International Relations have isolated the security debate. Even considering all of this, securitization and sectoral security still provide a good starting point for further exploration of nontraditional security dynamics although adaption is required.

Chapter 2 – Defining Concepts and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Defining the Weak State

The sovereign state is still the dominant unit in International Relations when looking at domestic and international dynamics. On the international level, it is the entity which exercises its will and preferences on the world stage. On the domestic level, the sovereign state holds the monopoly on force and is the provider of order and security in its domain. However, state often do not fulfill these expectations for a multitude of reasons such as insufficient state capacity or corruption. It is under these very broad conditions that the weak state emerges. In order to lay out the concepts and trademarks that characterize the weak state and the threats that stem from it, I will draw from the Third World Security School. Barry Buzan does offer some insight into the ‘weak state’ concept and the often tumultuous dynamics of the relationship between the state and the individual which I will discuss. In addition, I will specifically look at authors such as Mohammed Ayoob, Caroline Thomas and Brian L. Job who discuss the security needs in the third world context, which specifically details the ‘weak state’ and the ‘state as a threat’.

Buzan argues “The principal distinguishing feature of weak states is their high level of concern with domestically generated threats to the security of the government, in other words, weak states either do not have, or have failed to create a domestic political and social consensus of sufficient strength to eliminate the large scale use of force as a major and continuing element in the domestic political life of the nation”.³³ In this context weak states are highly focused on the domestic threats that stem from their lack of established order. When this occurs they often

³³ Buzan, *People, States, and Fear.*, 67

use large scale shows of force to establish order. However, across the spectrum of states, variety exists.

In *People, States and Fear* Barry Buzan makes note of and discusses the diversity of states that exist in the world. He again departs from the neorealist notion that states are ‘like units’ and instead recognizes the categorical distinctions of the multitude of states that populate the system.³⁴ Brian L. Job is of the same mind when taking into account the wide diversity in states. He addresses the issues with both defining the weak state and the 3rd world insecurity dilemma. Job argues that “In empirical terms, the Third World is composed of an array of states, exhibiting enormous variation in their economic, social, and political conditions. In theoretical terms, there is no single understanding of the “weak state” concept”.³⁵ Job points to the diversity that exists in the system of states and that diversity still exists amongst weak states. While there is no consensus on a definition of a weak state due to this diversity, we can garner some overarching concepts of what characterize the weak state.

Buzan claims that one of the defining characteristics of the weak state is the weakness of their institutions, he states “When the idea and institutions of a state are both weak, then that state is in a very real sense less of a state than one in which the idea and institutions are strong”.

³⁶ As shown in the quote, Buzan defines strong and weak states relative to their institutional stability and strength. This concept is reiterated by a number of notable scholars. In the Brian Job article, he cites Caroline Thomas who “associates state strength/weakness with the institutional capacities of the state”.³⁷ She goes on to describe the exact meaning of the institutional

³⁴ Ibid., 66

³⁵ Job, Brian, ed. *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States*. (Boulder, Colorado: L. Rienner Publishers) 1992, 19

³⁶ Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*, 66

³⁷ Job, ed. *The Insecurity Dilemma*, 20

weakness, in her words she describes it in relation to a state's infrastructural power. She states "Infrastructural power refers to the level of sophistication, effectiveness, and reach within the state's territorial domain of the state institutions (i.e., bureaucracies) that provide or exact resources from citizens.³⁸ Therefore, infrastructural weakness or institutional weakness is manifested in the lack of reach or control within one's own territorial domain. A weak state is ineffective at exercising power and control within its own sovereign territory.

While the 3rd world security school also tends to be state-centric in approach, it does bring the discussion away from the Euro or Western Centric ideas of security. Furthermore, this school can outline the security issues that are recurrent within the Third World setting which gives a platform for the exploration of the human security needs in the third world. It is within this context where the state is weak and insecure that a host of different security dynamics are at work, with state sovereignty not fully attained and sub-state actors securitizing and providing security within what amounts to a semi-anarchical system. Competing interests often set this stage between groups of sub-state actors amongst themselves and often run against the state which creates complicated security dynamics. Buzan asserts a similar claim "it is probably more appropriate to view security in weak states in terms of the contending groups, organizations and individuals, as the prime objects of security".³⁹

As stated, western concepts of the state and normative ideals of how it operates are often not sufficient to explain security dynamics in weak states. Author Mohammed Ayoob discusses the concept of the ineffectual nature of western concepts of security when applied to the third world. Ayoob states:

³⁸ Ibid., 20

³⁹ Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*, 67

The fundamental attribute of the Western concept of security (in that it is a corollary of the doctrine of state sovereignty in its pure and pristine form) is external directedness. But it is clear that in the Third World, despite the rhetoric of many of its leaders, the sense of insecurity from which states suffer emanates to a substantial degree from within their boundaries rather than from outside. This is borne out by, among other studies, the findings of a recent project on the security perceptions of leaders of Southeast Asian states. That study presents the conclusion that "most Southeast Asian leaderships, like their counterparts in the rest of the Third World, are preoccupied primarily with internal threats to the security of their state structures and to the regimes themselves." While this does not mean that external threats are nonexistent, it does imply that where external threats do exist they often attain saliency primarily because of the insecurities and conflicts that abound within Third World states.⁴⁰

The focus of third world states is often on the internal due to the lack of grip on many of the domestic concerns that are taken care of in the 'first world'. However, Ayoob's focus is again state-centric. It is essentially discussing the state as the referent in the 3rd world context, however, this statement can be applied in other ways. Many of the domestic issues discussed by Ayoob can be understood as a piece of a greater security dynamic in which societal and sub-state actors are a part of this overall structure. The "insecurities and conflicts" are often a symptom of the weakness of the state.⁴¹ Weak states do not inhibit risk or threat to an acceptable level to the population due to inability or lack of political will. With this inability to enforce rule of law and/or lack of political will, many of the same issues that are threats to the state are also threats to the individual. With the state absent, competing securitizers emerge to fill the vacuum challenging the states right to the monopoly on use of force.

The weak state can be characterized in a number of ways which demonstrate its identity as a weak state. While there is no consensus of definition, there are some recurrent characterizations. Overall the weak state can be said to be characterized by institutional weakness and a higher level of concern with the domestic issues rather than the international. As

⁴⁰ Ayoob, Mohammed. "The Security Problematic of the Third World." *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (1991): 263, Accessed May 13, 2015. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2010473?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 263

a result of this institutional weakness domestic issues become paramount. The weakness of the state institutions to keep what can best be referred to as their domestic sovereignty which results in high levels of insecurity. It is under these conditions that we can understand a state to be weak. The reasons, frequency and diversity of these threats to the population are directly related to the strength that the state possesses. In opposition, a strong state can mitigate much of the domestic threats to itself and society. In an institutionally strong state the rule of law becomes the law of the land. The states security apparatus such as the legal system and security officials enforce the law or if they fail in this duty, then they become subject to it. In the weak state corruption and institutional weakness create spaces within the state's domain that are in essence lawless. In this state, threats to population and state are prevalent.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Securitization in the Weak State

Copenhagen employs a levels of analysis scheme for unit construction “the levels-of-analysis scheme has been criticized for reinforcing the state centrism and inside-outside assumptions typical of international relations. In this view, the scheme is not just an innocent, abstract typology but presents a specific ontology that obscures and discriminates against those transnational units that do not fit clearly into the scheme”.⁴² As the mounting critiques of Copenhagen School point to overt state-centrism and nonapplicability outside of the western societal concepts, different contexts must be accommodated. This approach has trouble incorporating those units that do not fit neatly into the packages put forward. While theory construction is generally meant to fit as much context in as narrow a space as possible we must often step back and broaden our outlook. In the case of securitization, the strength is in the identifiable components of the security process such as the actions (the speech act, acceptance and extreme measures) and the actors involved (the securitizing actor, the audience, the referent object and the threat).

It is these components which provide potential for understanding the process of security. However, many of the Copenhagen School’s attempts at identifying or narrowing units, referents, audience, and securitizing actors limits the scope of who can do security or who we can fit into the framework. In addition, the order of securitizing moves is often not as neat as Copenhagen would show in their process of securitization. Sometimes there is no particular order to the steps outlined by the Copenhagen school, sometimes all of the steps occur simultaneously. While Copenhagen School does acknowledge that referents often overlap, which helps in

⁴² Buzan et al. *Security: a New Framework*, 6

understanding the complexity of real life security dynamics, they are still narrow in understanding the often complicated nature of competing interests.⁴³ This concept is especially apparent when looking at the competing interests between society or individuals seeking emancipation, or some other form of security, and the state seeking to gain a complete hold on their sovereignty. However, even this outline of the potential actors within society at large does not fully encapsulate the complicated security dynamics often at work in certain '3rd world' contexts.

I will look at multiple concepts that are at work within securitization theory that become problematic outside of the western concepts of society, identity and the state-centric. By engaging with securitization within a new context I hope to illuminate the workings of the non-traditional security dynamics. In the 3rd world context often sub-state actors are the dominant form of order, and who is or isn't a part of the different entities that populate this system are fluid. It is in this context that 'bottom up' securitization occurs due to the political opportunity. The well defined scope or parameters of securitizing actors, audience, referent object and threat are often blurred. While the discursive construction of security is still a concept worth holding on to, the process and actors involved must be reworked to allow for different contexts. As the contexts change so do many of the rules that govern the dynamics of security.

2.2.1 - Copenhagen School: Securitization

Traditionally, in securitization an actor securitizes an issue as an existential threat to a referent object.⁴⁴ This is done through a speech act aimed at a particular audience who will then accept or deny the threat. Audience acceptance of the threat completes the process of

⁴³ Ibid., 27

⁴⁴ Ibid., 25

securitization.⁴⁵ Within this process it is assumed that the securitizing actor is looking for permission from the audience so that it can enact emergency action.⁴⁶ This assumes that the securitizing actor is also the one who is providing security or the one who will implement the emergency action. When the state is strong, this process that is put forward by Copenhagen works well and is applicable along a wide range of contexts due to the hierarchical structure.⁴⁷ But when the state is weak, the *privileged* position of the state to securitize issues is not assumed. Whereby the states weakness creates a situation of turmoil, a multitude of actors emerge to claim a variety of security concerns. The state can be one actor amongst many, with no clear privilege given to the state by an audience due to lack of trust or perceived lack of legitimacy. Multiple actors securitizing issues within the turmoil with varying amounts of success creates a dynamic and fluid situation. Therefore with the contextual change to the weak state, the traditional securitization framework is not as fitting. While some of the same elements are still at work, others bend and break.

2.2.2 - Sectoral Issues

The Copenhagen School differentiates between the concepts of “international security” and “social security”.⁴⁸ The important designation refers to the difference between threats to individuals (social security) versus issues of collective survival (international security).

Copenhagen School discusses the transitional point where social security becomes international

⁴⁵ Ibid., 25

⁴⁶ Buzan et al. *Security: a New Framework*, 24

⁴⁷ The Strong state is used with the meaning that it has a firm grasp on its sovereignty and has strong institutions which can provide order and stability domestically.

⁴⁸ Hansen, Lene. "The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School." *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 29 (2000): 289, Accessed April 3, 2015. <http://mil.sagepub.com/content/29/2/285.citation>.

“As with unemployment and crime, these are threats primarily to individuals (threats in society); only if they threaten the breakdown of society do they become societal security issues” (1998, 121). The international level of social security is the societal security sector, and this is when these type of security issues become relevant to the Copenhagen school.

Lene Hansen further summarizes this dichotomy stating “The differentiation between the two modes of reasoning found within ‘international security’ and ‘social security’, and the restriction of security studies to the concern of the former, leads the Copenhagen School to argue that the concept of security can be expanded to areas other than the military, as long as the mode of reasoning resembles the one of ‘international security’”.⁴⁹ One of the issues that arises from this designation under Copenhagen logic is that issues such as crime affect the individual, however when the threat level rises to the point of an ‘existential threat’ then the referent shifts from individuals to the nation, the state or other large group. Social security issues can also manifest themselves into large scale political sector issues, when the state is dealing with a largescale existential threat to its sovereignty. However, the people who live within this state also are threatened and securitized as such. But under Copenhagen logic they are seemingly unaccounted for as the international security issues refocus to the large entities. In reality, the individual level has the potential to transform in a group dynamic, as in the case of ‘peer securitization’. In the addition, these groups often do not fit within the levels of analysis approach. Due to Copenhagen’s inability to successfully move away from the state, a host of potential non-traditional security dynamics are left unaccounted for in the framework.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 289

2.2.3 - Scope of Securitizing Actors, Audience and Referents

While Copenhagen has moved away from the state as the only referent, it is overwhelmingly the focus of analysis when looking at securitizing actors and the providers of security in the securitization framework. However, when the state is weak it becomes a threat both from its weakness and from issues stemming from its weakness. This leaves a security gap that needs to be filled. Others fill the vacuum, securitizing issues and providing security on behalf of the referent. Often, the referent, the audience, the security speaker and provider are one in the same and the borders of these actors is ill defined especially when looking at the audience and referent. The need for security must be met, and when the state cannot do so then someone else must. This is not to say the state is absent from this process, they are very much present. However, they are just another actor attempting to assert their discourse amongst the others who are competing for the same.

In discussing securitizing actors Copenhagen School states “These actors are not usually the referent objects for security, because only rarely can they speak security through the reference to the need to defend their own survival”.⁵⁰ In ‘peer securitization’ this is not the case as the issues are securitized within and amongst the group.⁵¹ So in these circumstances the securitizing actor is justifying and advocating for its own survival as the securitizing actor in this context is simply ‘we’ and not a definitive actor. The audience is an undefined entity with no definitive parameters. Often the audience is split amongst their acceptance of the different security narratives which leads to the conclusion that if the audience is the referent, then its scope is only defined post speech act. This is to say that since security is subjective, then only by

⁵⁰ Buzan et al. *Security: a New Framework*, 40

⁵¹ Adamides, “Institutionalized,” 10

agreeing that you are threatened do you define yourself as the referent. This viewpoint reveals a gap that has not been fully explored by the Copenhagen School.

2.2.4 – Legitimacy

Copenhagen argues that speaking security is based on the “social capital of the enunciator, the securitizing actor, who must be in a position of authority, although this should not be defined as official authority.”⁵² Copenhagen assumes legitimacy on the part of the securitizing actor. While they do account for non-official authority, they do not account for how authority or legitimacy is gained. When the presupposed legitimate actor (the state) is absent or weak, then legitimacy must come from somewhere else and is often not presupposed. Sometimes authority comes after the acceptance of a speech act.

Where as a small group behind a minor authority figure lends some legitimacy, a larger following would expand that legitimacy. The gaining of the larger following is dependent on both the intersubjective establishment of the threat and the potential changes that can be provided by the securitizing actor. Therefore it is based both on the ability or credibility of the securitizing actor to provide an alternative to the status quo and the agreement of the audience that the argument presented is one that is agreeable. Actors speak security and upon the acceptance of the threat by some segment of the target audience, the actor has both gained legitimacy for his or herself and successfully securitized.

Therefore, legitimacy is gained post speech act. Acceptance comes in trial form. The individual seeks security by accepting plans put forward by others. This operates in a similar fashion to democratic elections with definitive term limits. A candidate is elected based on a

⁵² Buzan et al. *Security: a New Framework*, 33

specific platform which is agreeable to a population. If the candidate is elected and fulfills the promises made then he may be re-elected after his term limit has ended. If he does not live up to the promises made, he is in danger of losing a re-election campaign, in which case someone new will emerge. As in the third world context, the situation is dynamic and fluid. Actors are essentially interchangeable, only the audience remains.

In the context of the weak state, smaller groups struggle for market share. Without the ready made structures of power and legitimacy of large entities, the process of gaining legitimacy is key to the securitization process. Multiple ways in which legitimacy is sought can include providing the most resonant argument coupled with ability and/or plan to counter the threat or legitimacy through identity. Copehagen argues that “existential threat, point of no return, and a possible way out” are important to the speech act.⁵³ I am in agreement with this notion, however I am arguing it is key to the legitimizing process as well. This legitimacy argument could be presented through what can be referred to as ‘legitimizing speech acts’. These speech acts can take both discursive and non-discursive forms as in use of symbols or narratives.

2.2.5 - Theoretical Framework Summary

The components of securitization are still paramount in looking at real world security contexts. To reiterate, the actions (the speech act, acceptance and extreme measures) and the actors involved (the securitizing actor, the audience, the referent object and the threat) will be used to understand the security dynamics when the state is weak. When the state is weak and therefore absent or impotent to provide order, the process of securitization changes. The vacuum that exists in this space, opens the door for competing forms of authority and order. Futhermore,

⁵³ Buzan et al. *Security: a New Framework*, 33

the issue of legitimacy moves to the forefront in this context. With no single actor at liberty to speak or provide security, legitimizing actions and speech become integral to the securitization process.

In the weak state context, the political opportunity for bottom up securitization is a distinct possibility as the state does not hold sovereign control over a particular space. Villages, cities and regions can often be either selectively outside the grasp of the state or outside their grasp due to lack of state capacity to incorporate them. The lack of state sanctioned order provides a grounds by which innumerable security concerns arise both to the state itself and society at large. Neither the 'social security' perspective nor the societal or political security which fall under the umbrella of 'international security' can fully encapsulate the dynamics at work within this context. As the referent and audience is undefined while dealing with subjective existential threats, it can not fit neatly into the sectoral identity concerns or securitization model. This context provides a grounds by which multiple actors securitize and provide security under a specified threat.

Therefore, securitization in the 3rd world context or when the state is weak can take on the form of what can be described as 'competing securitizations'. The state lacks the capacity or will to deal with the domestic issues it is confronted with so other forms of authority rise. Since the state does not have a firm grasp of its own sovereignty, threats can arise that affect both the state and society alike. It is under these conditions that a multitude of actors can rise and offer a substitute for providing security other than the state. The audience that exists in this context receives speech acts from multiple actors in multiple mediums. However, the process by which they are spoken to often does not fit in to classical securitization framework. Multiple actors attempt to securitize simultaneously to a single overarching audience (example: Actor A

securitizes the state as a threat to the audience while simultaneously Actor B securitizes actor A to the same audience) This audience has the option to choose based on their subjective assessment of the potential threats presented. With multiple competing security discourses it is dependent on the individual to align with one over another although abstention is a possibility. Once acceptance has occurred, the parameters of both the referent and audience are defined. By agreeing to one security discourse over another, one is essentially defining the referent. If the audience and the referent object are one in the same then only when the intersubjective establishment of the threat is agreed do we know what the referent is. If other individuals within the audience do not agree that they are being threatened, then they are not the referent and will agree to a competing discourse or abstain.

Chapter 3 – Case Study of Michoacan, Mexico

3.1 - Case Study Background

The Mexican state of Michoacan has been the scene of highly publicized conflict and the site of ongoing violence. Much of the violence in the state has often been attributed to narco wars and battles between competing drug cartels over control of Michoacan, home to the strategically important Lazaro Cardenas port. The violence associated with the illicit producing and trafficking of narcotics has led to fairly regular power transfers as the ‘winner’ of these wars takes control of the region. In 2006, *La Familia Michoacán* announced its arrival as the dominant player in the state by tossing five severed heads onto the dance floor of a popular disco.⁵⁴ This was a violent announcement of its newly acquired position and a message to all potential competitors and the local population alike. *La Familia Michoacán* ruled over the Michoacan state with virtual impunity by buying politicians and controlling through terror from 2006 until late 2010.⁵⁵ *La Familia*’s reign ended with the ‘death’ of their leader Nazario Moreno Gonzalez.⁵⁶ The death of the Moreno Gonzalez also referred to as “El Chayo” and “El Mas Loco” (The craziest one) opened Michoacan to competing interests. Upon his ‘death’ El Chayo’s, two of his highest ranking lieutenants split from *La Familia* and formed a new organization called *Los Caballeros Templarios* or the Knights Templar.⁵⁷ The two lieutenants

⁵⁴ Shoichet, Catherine. "Mexican Cartel Leader Nazario "El Chayo" Moreno Reported Dead -- Again - CNN.com." CNN. March 11, 2014. Accessed May 20, 2015. <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/09/world/americas/mexico-drug-lord-nazario-moreno-killed/>.

⁵⁵ Noel. "Where Mexico's Drug War Was Born"

⁵⁶ Nazario Moreno Gonzalez was reported as killed in a shootout with Mexican authorities in 2010, but no body was recovered. The report was later proved to be inaccurate when he was killed in March of 2014 and his identity was confirmed through DNA and fingerprint testing (Shoichet)

⁵⁷ Noel. "Where Mexico's Drug War Was Born"

(“La Tuta” and Enrique “El Kiki” Plancarte) and the Knights Templar would be the dominant player in Michoacan over the next three years.⁵⁸

3.1.1 - Los Caballeros Templarios (The Knights Templar)

The Knights Templar is an organization which is as strange as it is violent. Often referred to as a pseudo-religious order, the organization is a confluence of the random.⁵⁹ The organization is characterized by its attributes and actions such as its ancient religious ethics, drug trafficking, cult like beliefs, state like attributes, extreme violence, torture and even farming.⁶⁰ They even sanctified the ‘late’ leader of *La Familia Michoacan*, Nazario Moreno Gonzalez as “Saint Nazario” and erected shrines to him all over the state of Michoacan. Even their name is an obvious nod to the ancient Christian military order of the Knights Templar who protected pilgrims on their path to the holy land. Much like the ancient order, the Knights Templar of Michoacan are a secretive and (at least in public) are dedicated to a strict set of principles. These principles are laid out in detail within the *Codigo De Los Caballeros Templarios De Michoacan* (the Code of the Knights Templar of Michoacan).⁶¹ The codebook outlines obligations and principles that are meant to be internalized by its membership and the code is “obligatory” for all of its members.⁶² While the Knights Templar are generally considered a cartel by most, they see themselves as similar to a fraternal order whose purpose is to be a righteous force in the world.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Grillo, Ioan. "Saint, Knights and Crystal Meth; Mexico's Bizarre Cartel." Reuters. July 18, 2012. Accessed May 20, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/18/us-mexico-drugs-knights-idUSBRE86H0WB20120718>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ English translation of *Codigo De Los Caballeros Templarios De Michoacan* in "Mexico's Knight Templar and Code of Conduct Implications" TribalAnalysisCenter.com. November, 2013. Accessed May 18, 2015. [http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF-TAC/Codigo De Los Caballeros Templarios De Michoacan v1.pdf](http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF-TAC/Codigo%20De%20Los%20Caballeros%20Templarios%20De%20Michoacan%20v1.pdf).

⁶² Ibid.

The code states “We Knights Templar will wage the ideological battle that confronts us in order to defend the values that sustain society based on ethics that have been developed over the centuries”.⁶³ The issues of honor and social justice are at the heart of the Knights Templar ideology.

While the so-called Knights Templar subscribe to a code, their actions often depart greatly from the concepts of social justice and honor. The Knights instill fear into many in Michoacan through the tactics which they employ. Engaging in the murder of civilians and rivals, torturing, dismembering and raping captives has enabled them to become an organization to be feared. The cartel’s position as the absolute authority in the state created a perception of invincibility. They controlled politicians and police from the state to the national level, which meant the average person had almost no recourse against them. In addition to the fear they instilled and political power they wielded, they had substantial economic power which is what enabled the rest. The group had a diverse array of business interests in the region. While they are still first and foremost a drug trafficking organization and the largest exporter of methamphetamine to the United States, they also garner a significant amount of their income from other sources.⁶⁴ They are active in wide spread extortion across the state that takes protection money from both large and small businesses alike. In addition they often used kidnapping to rape local woman and for coercion which supported their purpose of instilling fear

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Grillo. "Saint, Knights and Crystal Meth"

in local populations.⁶⁵ One of the largest portions of their business operations came from the farming of regional crops such as the lime and avocado.⁶⁶

Where they had previously only taxed or took protection money from the lime producers in the Tierra Caliente region of Michoacan, they eventually changed their approach. Quoted in the Washington Post “[The *Templarios*] started taking over lime farms, many times illegally, without papers, or buying them with drug-trafficking money, and in many occasions at the price they would set: ‘I will give you this much for your land, and if you don’t accept it, I will pass the money to your widow’. Then they started regulating the lime picking season: you couldn’t pick limes certain days of the week [and] packing companies would only receive limes from farms owned [or controlled] by the *Templarios*”⁶⁷ This evolved business strategy was to directly control the output of lime producing in the area. Sometimes they flooded the market with limes driving the prices down and other times they restricted production causing price spikes. Many point to this development as one of the potential ‘straws that broke the camel’s back’ that would lead to the rise of organized self-defense groups whose intent it was to retake control over their lands and eliminate the Knights Templar.⁶⁸

3.1.2 - The *Autodefensas* (The Self-Defense Groups)

The *autodefensas* or the self-defense groups, started to emerge in 2013 in multiple Mexican states including Guerrero and Michoacan.⁶⁹ Their emergence is considered to be in

⁶⁵ Wilkinson, Tracy. "In the Hot Land, Mexicans Just Say No to Drug Cartels." Los Angeles Times. June 11, 2013. Accessed May 26, 2015. <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/jun/11/world/la-fg-mexico-hotland-20130611>.

⁶⁶ Garcia-Ponce, Omar, and Andres Lajous. "How Does a Drug Cartel Become a Lime Cartel?" Washington Post. May 20, 2014. Accessed May 21, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/20/how-does-a-drug-cartel-become-a-lime-cartel/>.

⁶⁷ Qtd. In Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Noel. "Where Mexico's Drug War Was Born"

direct response to offenses committed by different organized crime organizations against the local populations across Mexico along with wide spread political corruption that enabled it.⁷⁰

The *autodefensas* in Michoacan were born on February 24, 2013, specifically as a product of the offenses committed by Knights Templar cartel as they were the most powerful and damaging presence in the state.⁷¹ Leaders of a self-defense group in Michoacan spoke of the reasons for the movement “The first one, given by the leader of the rural town of Tepalcatepec, is that the Templarios crossed a line when they started to kidnap their woman and children in groups in order to rape them. The second explanation, given by the leader of Buenavista – the town where the vigilante movement began – is that the Templarios moved from illegally taxing agricultural output to actually exerting direct control over production”⁷² It was the taking of direct control over the regions lime production coupled with years of cruelty at the hands of the Templars which spurred the emergence of the *autodefensas*. In conjunction with the inability or lack of will on the part of government authorities to control the area and protect its people, the need for a legitimate protection force was evident.

The *autodefensas* were born from the need for protection from the Knights Templar and the threat they posed to the interests and people of Michoacan. The first of these self-defense militias rose up in the city of Tepalcatepec, but the movement quickly spread to the neighboring cities of La Ruana and Buenavista soon after.⁷³ In the months after the rise of the self-defense militias, they were able to wrestle control of those cities from the Knights Templar. Within this time, three men emerged as leaders amongst the *autodefensas*; a farmer named Hipolito Mora, a

⁷⁰ Loyola, Bernardo, and Laura Woldenberg. "The Warrior State." VICE. April 15, 2013. Accessed May 22, 2015. <http://www.vice.com/read/the-warrior-state>.

⁷¹ Noel. "Where Mexico's Drug War Was Born"

⁷² Garcia-Ponce and Lajous. "How Does a Drug Cartel"

⁷³ Fighting Mexico's Knights Templar Cartel. Mexico: Vice News, 2014. Film. <https://news.vice.com/video/fighting-mexico-39-s-knights-templar-cartel>

doctor named Jose Manuel Mireles and another farmer named Estanislao Beltran, who often goes by “Papa Pitufó” or “Papa Smurf”.⁷⁴ These men would become the unofficial spokesman and public faces of the *autodefensas* movement in Michoacan.

The *autodefensas* more closely resembled a paramilitary organization than a police force. The cartels were powerful, rich and well-armed and comprised of assassins and well paid fighters. The militias were comprised of farmers, businessmen, lawyers, laborers, priests and any other occupation one could think of. They armed themselves with AR-15s and AK-47 assault rifles while the cartel was armed with grenade launchers and bazookas.⁷⁵ Regardless of the asymmetric nature of their weaponry, the *autodefensas* had successes in the first year of their emergence. They took back control of farms, homes and cities themselves mostly through the use of force. The reason for their success early on was due to the coordinated efforts of the different self-defense groups and the diversity of their strategy. The self-defense groups went after cartel workers and employees at all levels of the command structure. Road blocks and checkpoints were placed all over the cities and at all entrance and exit points in order to monitor all that pass. They rooted out informers for the cartel of which there were many. These informers and other low level cartel men were given a second chance. They were generally jailed for a period of time then forced into community service and a sort of rehabilitation program to reincorporate them into the community.⁷⁶ The cartel assassins and people higher in the command structure were executed or turned over to state authorities.⁷⁷ The properties owned by the *Templarios* men were

⁷⁴ Noel. "Where Mexico's Drug War Was Born"

⁷⁵ Fighting Mexico's Knights Templar Cartel.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

either given back to the original owners as they were often forced to sell at below market price or sold off, with the money being redistributed to the poor.⁷⁸

The *autodefensas* had success in their armed uprising against the Knights Templar cartel, however the result was a mounting death toll on both sides of the conflict. With the conflict mounting, the Mexican government stepped in a year after it start to attempt to quell the unrest. In January of 2014 the government sent 9,000 soldiers and security officers to Michoacan to bring order and to disarm the *autodefensas*.⁷⁹ The self-defense groups protested and refused the government's attempt to disarm. In a calculated risk, the government instead offered to bring the groups under the umbrella of the state. They gave an ultimatum, disarm by May 10, 2014 or register their weapons and join a state sanctioned group called the 'Rural Defense Forces'.⁸⁰ This initially seemed like a positive step for both sides as the government could save face by showing that they were in control and the self-defense forces could keep their weapons to continue the fight against the *Templarios*. After the agreement, both the Mexican troops and the *autodefensas* marched into the Templar stronghold, the city of Apatzingan.⁸¹ While the Templars have not been eliminated, the *autodefensas* made significant strides in reducing cartel strength.

3.1.3 - The Mexican Government Intervention, the *Autodefensas* & "Los Viagras"

However, as tends to be the case in Michoacan, any step forward is accompanied by two steps back. Soon after the government intervention, conflicts started to emerge between the different factions of the *autodefensas*. A council of the *autodefensas* that had included the three

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Iacanangelo, David. "Michoacán Militias Still Patrolling In 8 Towns after Deadline to Dissolve." *Latin Times*. May 12, 2014. Accessed May 23, 2015. <http://www.latintimes.com/michoacan-news-militias-still-patrolling-8-towns-after-deadline-dissolve-172722>.

⁸¹ Fighting Mexico's Knights Templar Cartel.

previously named leaders, voted one of them out, Dr. Jose Manuel Mireles. While some groups decided to take the government offer, joining the Rural Defense Forces, others refused and continued to patrol the streets as they had done before. This was one point of contention between the groups. Another conflict emerged after a dispute between the Hipolito Mora the leader of the La Ruana group and the group leader of Buenavista called Luis Antonio Torres, or "El Americano". The disagreements soon turned violent with both sides engaging in what turned out to be a bloody battle that left 11 dead, including the son of Mora.⁸²

At around the same time another vigilante group emerged, however this one did not have the same grass roots beginnings of the others.⁸³ With the opening left by a severely weakened Knights Templar due to the *autodefensas* and government intervention which included the killing of "El Chayo" and the capture of "la Tuta" coupled with the infighting between the *autodefensas*, "Los Viagras" have risen up to fill the void. The group run by Nicholas "El Gordo" Sierra and his seven brothers has been accused of drug trafficking but at the same time were also a part of the self-defense movement. They had even signed on to be a part of the state sanctioned Rural Defense Forces.⁸⁴ But in what can often be a confusing quagmire of violence, this group ran into a large scale conflict with the government of Mexico and its military. A protest by "Los Viagras" over back pay from their time in the Rural Defense Forces turned into a massacre. On April 27, 2015 a conflict erupted between the group and government forces which ended with 16 people

⁸² Agren, David. "Michoacan, Mexico, Breaks Bad - Again - After Shootout Between Rival Militias Kills 11." VICE.com. December 18, 2014. Accessed May 23, 2015. <https://news.vice.com/article/michoacan-mexico-breaks-bad-again-after-shootout-between-rival-militias-kills-11>.

⁸³ How "The Viagras" Got Their Name: Mexico's Hot Land (Dispatch 3). Mexico: Vice News, 2015. Film. <https://news.vice.com/video/how-the-viagras-got-their-name-mexicos-hot-land-dispatch-3>

⁸⁴ Castellanos, Laura. "'It Was the Feds': How Mexico's Federal Police Slaughtered At Least 16 Civilians in Michoacan." Vice News. April 27, 2015. Accessed May 8, 2015. <https://news.vice.com/article/it-was-the-feds-how-mexicos-federal-police-slaughtered-at-least-16-civilians-in-michoacan>

dead, all of them from “Los Viagras”.⁸⁵ While reports differ, one article originally published in Spanish by Univision, but translated by Vice News cites eyewitness reports of government forces executing civilians who were unarmed or armed with sticks.⁸⁶ The article states that many of the killings were done while people were kneeling having already surrendered.⁸⁷ The situation in Michoacan is violent, extremely fluid and sometimes hard to decipher as so many groups are vying for legitimacy and/or their version of security. In addition, the lines between vigilantes, cartels and government are severely blurred to the point it is difficult to truly know who is working for who.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

3.2 - Discourse Analysis

For the purposes of ascertaining meaning and understanding of how securitization occurs inside the weak state, I will look at the discourse of the relevant actors within the case study of Michoacan. While the state is one actor relevant in the conflict, it is simply one of many who are involved in the larger picture. Securitization occurs on multiple levels, with different referent objects and different actors securitizing different threats, all within the same overall conflict space. As Copenhagen states that security is about the inter-subjective establishment of a threat, I believe the case study will bear this concept out. In addition, the question of “Whose security” is particularly relevant to this concept.

For organizational purposes the discourse will be analyzed within 3 distinct time frames within the overall scope of time laid out in this paper (March 8, 2011 – April 30, 2015). The time frames looked at will start with the emergence of The Knights Templar, the emergence of the *autodefensas* and the post government intervention. I will be looking for indications of securitizing moves within the discourse to see if the Copenhagen version of securitization is best suited or whether the adapted version explains the conflict better. In addition, I will explore the non-discursive statements made by various actors in the conflict to see there is relevance within the overall security dynamic.

Specifically, I will be looking for the specific concepts outlined in the securitizing framework. The actions (the speech act, acceptance and extreme measures) and the actors involved (the securitizing actor, the audience, the referent object and the threat). In the weak state, the structures that lend legitimacy are not in place as in the strong state, so within this context I will also be looking for both legitimizing statements and acts. The issue of legitimacy is key to understanding the security dynamics of the weak state.

3.2.1 - The Myth of 'Jesus Malverde'

In Mexico, there is a well-known story of a man called Jesus Malverde. While venerated in the Mexican state of Sinaloa, his story is one that resonates with many in the country. While details vary, he was said to have been a carpenter in his youth. At an unconfirmed age, both of his parents died of either a curable disease or of hunger depending on the version of the story. Regardless this tragedy was a result of the extreme poverty felt by many in Mexico. It was at this point that Jesus turned to a life of banditry.⁸⁸

His reputation grew quickly, and was soon known to many as *el bandido generoso* or the generous bandit. Stories of him stealing from the wealthy to give to the needy spread throughout Sinaloa. Soon, word of Jesus' exploits reached the governor of Sinaloa. In a provoking statement to Jesus, the governor put forward a challenge. If Malverde could break into the governor's home and steal his sword, he would grant him an official pardon.⁸⁹

Malverde accepted the challenge, skillfully broke into the home of the governor and stole the sword undetected, only leaving a note behind that stated "Jesus M. was here." The governor after being publicly humiliated ordered his capture and execution. When authorities finally caught Malverde, he was tied up and hanged. To send a message to all who would defy the authority, he was left hanging (as opposed to burial which is custom) until his bones fell to the ground. As a show of respect the local people threw stones at the pile of bones in order to bury them.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Chesnut, Andrew R. "Jesus Malverde: Not Just a Narcosaint." The Huffington Post. January 9, 2014. Accessed May 29, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/r-andrew-chesnut/jesus-malverde_b_4567114.html.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

This ‘Robin Hood’ story is one that is well received by a population who is used to living in economically stratified society in which the masses occupy the bottom strata. In Mexico, Jesus Malverde has become the Patron Saint of Banditry and the unofficial Narcosaint or Patron Saint of Drug Traffickers. Shrines to Malverde can be found all over Sinaloa, stacked with offerings from local populations and criminals alike. He represents the wishes of many, a man who takes on the authority and helps the people in need. A righteous criminal that would challenge the system in order to combat the ills of society.

Building off of the Malverde narrative, The Knights Templar and its leader Nazario “El Mas Loco” Moreno Gonzalez attempt to establish their own following. During the time prior to the emergence of The Knights Templar, La Familia Michoacan was the undisputed power. Nazario Moreno, (a devout Evangelical Christian) gained a following amongst the local population. He stated that he had a “divine calling” – “curing society in the same fashion he had been cured himself. Even if this meant he had to “kill to do good”.⁹¹ He would often give self-empowerment lectures to the people and was referred by locals as ‘lord’ or “El Messiah”.⁹²

Within the weak state context, the question of who is the legitimate and who is not is not a foregone conclusion. Therefore, within the weak state, legitimization is key to the process of securitization. Also building off Matt McDonald’s critiques of Copenhagen school, non-discursive forms of communication will be looked at, along with the discursive.

⁹¹ qtd. in Ernst, Falko A. "Seeking a Place in History – Nazario Moreno's Narco Messiah." Insightcrime.org. March 12, 2014. Accessed May 30, 2015. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/seeking-a-place-in-history-narazio-moreno-narco-messiah>.

⁹² Ibid.

3.2.2 - Time Frame: The emergence of the Knights Templar (March 8, 2011-?)

In the first statement by the Knights Templar upon their emergence, banners were placed around the state of Michoacan stating that they would be taking over all of the "altruistic activities that were previously done by the Familia Michoacán." ⁹³ The Familia Michoacán were the previous authority in the region but were dismantled. The Knights Templar were making a very clear statement that they were there to replace the previous power. However, in what is essentially their first public declaration, they are stating that they are replacing the previous "altruistic" authority, implying that this was their purpose.

Soon after the arrival of the Knights Templar, shrines started to appear all over the state of Michoacan. In what can be referred to as a non-discursive legitimizing speech act, shrines were erected in the name of 'Saint Nazario'. While Nazario Moreno was thought to be dead by the state, a cult accumulated around the concept of 'Saint Nazario' in the villages. The Knights Templar which he was secretly running was the spiritual successor of Nazario, this association lent legitimacy to the group. As stated, the Knights were taking over the 'altruistic' activities previously done by *La Familia Michoacan* and Nazario Moreno who was worshipped by many.

With Nazario Moreno thought to be dead publicly, he was sheltered in small mountain villages. He was often said to walk amongst the people in robes and offering wine in what can be understood as a mimicking of the Christian ritual of the Eucharist. ⁹⁴ "La Tuta" became the public face of the Knights Templar. In order to legitimize himself and the Knights as the new righteous order he would emulate the narrative of Jesus Malverde as Nazario Moreno had. He

⁹³ Noel. "Where Mexico's Drug War Was Born"

⁹⁴ "Mexico Cartel Leader Thrived by Playing Dead." The New York Times. March 9, 2014. Accessed May 30, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/03/10/world/americas/ap-lt-mexico-drug-war.html?_r=0.

said in 2014 “I was always altruistic. My mother told me 35 years ago that I would never have any money because I was always giving it away.”⁹⁵ This makes the connection between himself and the altruistic criminal narrative.

In a 2013 video release “La Tuta” states “We are an organization, a brotherhood. We govern ourselves, and we constitute ourselves, based on certain laws and codes of conduct [Holds up the Knights Templar codebook]. We are a necessary evil, but here in Mexico, we can figure things out.”⁹⁶ This early statement is thematically followed by other statements that reiterate their legitimacy by claiming that they are ‘necessary’ and that they can ‘figure things out’. In understanding what exactly they would figure out, in another statement La Tuta says “the least bad solution for social order.”⁹⁷ Within the securitization framework the lack of social order is the threat to ‘civilians’ who are the referent object. The existence of the Knights Templar is the extraordinary measure as they will do the job of keeping the social order as opposed to the state who is weak. The Knights Templar are what stand between society and anarchy (the existential threat).

The justification of their own existence, by pointing to the societal issues that are prevalent within Michoacan is recurring. They justify themselves through the existence of the threat [lack of social order], and speak of the potential negative repercussions if they were to be forced out. In a speech given to a crowd of ‘civilians’ in 2014, “La Tuta” claims “As we told you: we are a ‘necessary evil’. Unfortunately – or fortunately – we are here. If we weren’t, another group would come.”⁹⁸ The term ‘necessary’ is repeated again in reference to the Knights

⁹⁵ "Finding La Tuta: On the Trail of a Mexican Drug Lord | Channel 4 News." YouTube. January 28, 2014. Accessed May 27, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jX7dbLW-47M>.

⁹⁶ Fighting Mexico's Knights Templar Cartel.

⁹⁷ Ernst. "Seeking a Place in History"

⁹⁸ "Finding La Tuta"

Templar. He states in an interview in 2014 “if they say that the problem is me and the Knights Templar and we are responsible for everything happening in Michoacan. We’ll, let the federal and state institutions take action against us and establish rule of law. We completely agree with that.” The implication of this statement is simply that they are doing what the government does not. However, if the government were to do their job, then they would welcome it. This further lends them legitimacy as an honest and righteous group who cares for the people as their existence comes secondary to the public good. They exist to bring order in society because they are needed, if they were not needed then they would go away.

With the public face of the Knights Templar painting a picture that suggested a group that lives by a code and wants to bring stability to society, some of their actions would counteract that image. As they became the single authority in the state, they alienated many through extortion of local businesses, murders, rapes, torturing and the takeover of the local farming economy. In response other entities attempted to legitimize and securitize on behalf of those victims of the Knights Templar. In a choreographed statement from 2012, the competing Jalisco cartel released a video. In front of a couple dozen masked men holding assault rifles, a man in the center reads a prepared statement, he says:

Attention citizens of Guerrero and Michoacan, we are in your states now to clean up the garbage. We are the warriors of the Jalisco Cartel. To all government agencies and federal police entities we tell you now that the problem is not with you. Let us do our jobs. Our problem is with the ‘Knights Templar’ Cartel. Because people are fed up with their injustices being committed every day. These so-called ‘Knights Templars’ are not drug traffickers anymore but a bunch of bandits. They abuse people and kill innocent people to steal the little they earn. They dedicate themselves to kidnapping, extortion, collecting taxes. Steal land from farmers and the worst of all, rape defenseless women...and you Knights Templar...you are a pack of filthy bandits. We are drug traffickers...not thieves and kidnappers like you filthy Knights Templar. We assure you we will wipe you out, and all your leaders, here are the names...Enrique Plankarte alias “El Kike”, Cervando Gomez alias “La Tuta”, Nazario Moreno alias “El Chayo”, “El Doctor” and “El Messiah”. These two last one’s heads will be a trophy we will give to the country. The government has not captured them because they do not know the territory, but we do, like the palm of our hands.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ "Drug Cartel Promises To Kill All Members of the Mexican "Knight Templars" Crime Family." LiveLeak.com. Film. March 24, 2012. Accessed May 10, 2015. http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=80f_1332628131.

This particular speech act has multiple elements of securitization. They are addressing their audience which they identify as the people of the states of Guerrero and Michoacan. In this case the referent is clearly the same as the audience. They identify the threat, which is the Knights Templar Cartel. They are a threat because they are involved with kidnapping, extortion, stealing land and raping the defenseless. These securitization components are clearly shown in the statement, however the legitimizing and differentiating between Jalisco and the Knights is also present. They identify themselves as ‘warriors’ and ‘drug traffickers’ which they are insinuating is a higher order of criminal, unlike the lower status criminal of ‘thieves and kidnappers’ or ‘bandits’. They advocate to ‘let them do their jobs’ which is to clean up the garbage [the Knights] and to wipe them out along with their leaders whom they singled out in the statement. Whether this particular ‘securitization’ was completed is up for debate, and will be addressed later in the case study.

3.2.3 - Time Frame: Emergence of the Autodefensas (February 24, 2013-?)

The *autodefensas* were founded in early 2013 as a response to the threats posed by the Knights Templar. The early establishment of these groups is not as well documented as some of the later periods after the conflict started. There may be two potential reasons for this. One is that the groups were not yet hierarchical early on so they had no official leadership. In this context the securitizing dynamics may have taken on a ‘peer securitization’ form, meaning they securitized the issue amongst themselves.¹⁰⁰ This would have been due to necessity, as early on a group of individuals securitizing a threat which they have all fallen victim to would have been the logical solution. Only once they were able to congeal into a small group would a wider

¹⁰⁰ Adamides. “Institutionalized, Horizontal and Bottom-Up Securitization”

audience have been addressed for the need of wider approval. Therefore, the self-defense discourse I will look at starts after their establishment, mid conflict. However, unlike the Knights who have a central command structure, the *autodefensas* is actually made up of multiple groups with their own leadership. Most of the speech comes from the individual leaders.

Estanislao Beltran aka “Papa Smurf” is one of the main leaders in the self-defense movement. He identifies himself as “the General Coordinator for the self-defense movement in the state of Michoacan. I am a farmer and livestock owner, I grow Mexican lime. I have a few heads of livestock.”¹⁰¹ and that “it’s the people who are rising up to fight them [Knights Templar].”¹⁰² This statement as with many like it are crucial to the securitization process in the context of the weak state and the case study. Saying that he is simply a local farmer, and the general coordinator for ‘the movement’ legitimizes their actions. His statement shows that he is a humble working man like most in Michoacan, and that the self-defense movement is also comprised of ‘the people’. This appeals further to the sense of identity of the people in the region which is mostly working people. Later on he states “Our movement started on February 24, 2013. Our towns were fed up with living under oppression, of being hijacked, of being humiliated.”¹⁰³ This was stated in reference to the Knights and the reasoning behind the movement. This statement appeals to people who have potentially suffered from that threat and creates a ‘we’ feeling.

Beltran recalls “The origin of the drug cartels was to produce and to commercialize drugs. To sell them wherever there is a demand. The ‘Knights Templar’ moved directly into extortion. Kidnapping, and plundering of families possessions. But the worst thing they did, was

¹⁰¹ Fighting Mexico's Knights Templar Cartel.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

taking 13 year-old girls to abuse them. If they liked someone's wife, they would take her. How is it fair for us to live in this situation? We don't want any more drug cartels in Michoacan.”¹⁰⁴

While perhaps not as straightforward as a speech act as some others, this statement has some of the elements of securitization. The threat is clearly identified as the Knights, as well as stating the particular actions which are most egregious. The crimes he presents along with the question ‘How is it fair for us to live in this situation?’ leaves anyone listening with no choice but to agree. He then states the measures to be taken, which is to get rid of drug cartels.

Another man, Hipolito Mora is one of the most vocal leaders within the self-defense movement. In a statement in 2014 he says “The main reason that led to this movement, was when they took over the lime crops. Only farm workers involved. The lowest class in Mexico, was the one being beaten up. Not one rich bastard was even involved in this movement. When this began the ‘Knights Templar’ left, and they abandoned many lime ranches. So what we started doing was cutting them. That is how we have been funding ourselves. It doesn't matter if they say that it's the Jalisco Cartel. We are funding ourselves with...from lime”¹⁰⁵ This statement shows a departure from the words of Beltran. Hipolito Mora chooses an exclusively economic sectoral focus as he does in many other public statements as opposed to the social justice issues stated by Beltran.¹⁰⁶ The threat of the Knights Templar is the same, but the perception of how the threat manifests itself is different within the self-defense movement. He does however hit on some of the same themes that Beltran does. Particularly the humble nature of the movement of farmers left with no choice but to defend themselves, this reiterates their legitimacy. One interesting note is Mora addressing a rumor that his self-defense group has been

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Fighting Mexico's Knights Templar Cartel.

¹⁰⁶ From Prison to Politics: Mexico's Hot Land (Dispatch 4). Mexico: Vice News, 2015. Film. <https://news.vice.com/video/1012>

funded by the Jalisco Cartel. While nothing has been proven, this accusation is well known and it is why it is difficult to assess the success of the Jalisco Cartel's securitization of the Knights Templar. Regardless, the efforts of the *autodefensas* are extraordinary and are the result of the security claims of local people. Mora states "I know that were doing something illegal. If in order to defend my family I have to step out of legality, I'm willing to do it every time." This states that the threat is extreme enough that they must defend themselves regardless of the question of legality.

Two other leaders (Dr. Jose Manuel Mireles and Luis Antonio Torres Gonzalez or "El Americano") are also distinctly involved and in positions of power in the *autodefensas*. Dr. Mireles (like Mora) takes a different focus when securitizing the issue "We are fighting against the same criminals, disguised as the government. Or the other way around. The government disguised as criminals, however you choose to look at it. And this has been happening for many years. It happened once and again, and again... Who were we supposed to turn to?"¹⁰⁷ He points specifically to the issue of government corruption and weakness as the reasons for society's ills. The threat is the criminals and the government as they are one in the same. He then poses the question of who can they turn to. The answer is meant to be rhetorical as they have no one to turn to except for themselves, hence the justification of their actions. This poses an issue for the Copenhagen School, as the securitizing actor, the audience and the security provider are all one in the same. The proverbial 'we' is used multiple times, but who 'we' are is undefined. In essence 'we' is only defined upon agreement.

¹⁰⁷ Fighting Mexico's Knights Templar Cartel.

In a speech in Michoacán “We sent thousands of complaints over 12 years, but there was no authority that listened. And in the absence of authority, justice must prevail. There was no justice for the people, so the people sought it for themselves.”¹⁰⁸ This statement further legitimizes and justifies the extreme action of taking up arms to counter the threat posed by government and organized crime. “El Americano” reiterates the same lack of action by the state “It doesn’t help to have the military and the police here. They’ve always been here and have never done anything.”¹⁰⁹ This clearly states that they have no choice but to act.

As the self-defense groups took back farms and towns, The Templars were weakened. In the weak state, many actors securitize and legitimize simultaneously which leads to a competition amongst the discourses. “La Tuta” of the Knights Templar, in reference to the violence and crime in Michoacan states “We want peace and tranquility. We don’t want to be the people who are blamed for causing problems in Michoacan. The problems in Michoacan are caused by self-defense groups and vigilantes. They are creating the situation, they are stealing, blatantly.”¹¹⁰ Where before, the Knights securitized the threat that was ‘lack of societal order’, now he blames the self-defense groups. This statement shows that the Knights were reorienting the threat focus, making it attributable to the *autodefensas*. The conflict between the groups became a bloody and drawn out affair with segments of the population associating with either the Templars or one (or all) of the various *autodefensas*. The audience is not a unitary entity and they agree to differing securitization attempts or none at all.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “Finding La Tuta”

3.2.4 - Time Frame: The Government Intervention (January 2014-?)

In January of 2014, the state of Michoacan is in a state of war between cartels and self-defense groups. The government steps in to demand the *autodefensas* disarm. They send in 9,000 military and security officers to subdue the conflict and disarm the groups.¹¹¹ The Mexican attorney general states the purpose being to “reestablish legal order”.¹¹² While some *autodefensas* give in to government demands, others refuse. By January 15th, clashes between self-defense groups and the military, in addition to the cartel are focused around the city Apatzingan which was the stronghold of the Templars. The government actions in the case can be seen as an extreme measure. Deploying the military to settle unrest and to provide order within the home state is out of the norm. The government, unlike the other actors presented in this conflict do not attempt to gain legitimacy as they perceive themselves already legitimate. In addition, audience approval is not sought as the situation is so out of control that their actions are deemed necessary regardless of perception.

The self-defense group’s refusal to disarm coupled with their statements further reflect both the threat and the need for extreme measures. A self-defense member argues “Why should we give up our weapons when the government doesn’t do its job? If we give up our weapons the Knights Templar will come and kill us. What will the government do? They are paid off by the cartels”.¹¹³ This sentiment is reiterated by Estanislao Beltran “How can the government tell me to leave the trenches and go to work? Because the military and the federal police are not going to

¹¹¹ Fighting Mexico's Knights Templar Cartel.

¹¹² Qtd in. Fausset, Richard. "Mexico Troops Clash with Vigilante Groups"

¹¹³ Qtd. in "Mexican Vigilantes Reject Calls to Disarm in Drugs Cartel War." Euronews.com. January 15, 2014. Accessed May 31, 2015. <http://www.euronews.com/2014/01/15/mexican-vigilantes-reject-calls-to-disarm-in-drugs-cartel-war/>.

stay forever. So they'll come back, and if I'm lucky they will shoot me with a machine gun. And if I'm not, they'll kidnap me and deliver me inside a plastic bag." and he also declares "We will not leave our trenches. If they kill us, it's because we ran out of ammunition. As long as we're alive and we have ammunition, we will defend ourselves." ¹¹⁴ His language is strong and peppered with 'life or death' sentiments. The threat posed by the Knights is existential and warrants a severe response. This also calls to attention the perception of ineptitude about the Mexican government. They will stay for a period of time and then leave, again leaving the people to their own protection which justifies continued action.

The mayor of Nueva Italia, Casi Miro Quezada, states "The people were scared to go out at night maybe it's not a good idea to disarm the self-defense groups. I say again the people here feel comfortable with them around." ¹¹⁵ Support for the groups is shown with the previous statements, during this period of time. As stated in the case study background, the government fell to bargain with the self-defense groups and incorporated them into the state, however many refused and splits amongst the *autodefensas* started to occur.

Hipolito Mora reflects "We started this armed movement with the goal of liberating ourselves from organized crime. From extortion, murder, and all of these things. We still have the same goal." The term 'liberation' used by Mora suggests the existential threat perceived by the citizens of Michoacan and the threat posed by organized crime. Soon after the government incursion into Michoacan, 'Saint Nazario' was killed by Mexican security forces, however 'La Tuta' was still at large. The situation in Michoacan was extremely fluid with threats and allegiances reconfiguring as the dynamics changed. The government intervention and bargain

¹¹⁴ Fighting Mexico's Knights Templar Cartel.

¹¹⁵ Qtd. in "Mexican Vigilantes Reject"

disrupted the bipolar allegiances in the state. This along with the continued weakening of the Knights led to new security dynamics. The previous statement by Mora was taken in this context, however, new enemies were now in the forefront, mainly the opposition *autodefensas* leader “El Americano”. Infighting started between the two, culminating in a battle that left eleven dead and the two group leaders in prison.¹¹⁶ Three months later, both sides were released from prison.¹¹⁷

In an interview Mora was asked:

Vice: “There are people who say that everyone is getting released now, so that you’ll kill each other.”

Mora: “That’s a possibility. The government must say, “Let’s let these assholes free and they’ll take care of each other. That way we don’t have to be responsible.”

Vice: “They let “The American” out free, and he is your sworn enemy.”

Mora: “Yes, that is how I consider him.”

Vice: “What is going to happen?”

Mora: “I don’t know, whatever he wants to happen. I have never provoked anyone. But if he provokes me, I will respond as I always have.”

Vice: How?

Mora: “If we need a shootout, I’ll give him a shootout. I don’t give a fuck.”¹¹⁸

With infighting amongst some of the leaders of the *autodefensas*, government stepped up their efforts to establish order. The highly publicized disappearance of 43 students in the state of Guerrero forced the Mexican government to address the security situation in the more lawless states. President Nieto “Because of the tragedy in Iguala, Mexico is being put to the test once more”...”Mexico cannot continue like this, and I assume the responsibility of the fight to liberate the country from criminality, to end impunity, and to see all of those who are guilty of the

¹¹⁶ "Brief Timeline of the Hipólito Mora-El Americano Shootout." Borderland Beat. January 15, 2015. Accessed May 5, 2015. <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2015/01/brief-timeline-of-hipolito-mora-el.html>.

¹¹⁷ From Prison to Politics

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

tragedy in Iguala punished”¹¹⁹ The government using the word ‘liberate’ in the same vein as did Hipolito Mora, which clearly cites the need for extreme measures to liberate the population from the threat. Much like the Templars and the *autodefensas*, they want the ‘responsibility’ to fight the threat. This statement has many of the indicators of securitization. An existential threat is uttered through the threat to ‘liberty.’ Unlike the other groups, the implementation of extreme measures is not something that is subject to approval by an audience. They implement a strategy which involves disbanding all 1,800 municipal police forces (17,000 officers) and bring them all under the state (32 state police forces).¹²⁰ Michoacan and Guerrero were amongst the first states that the measures were implemented. Soon after, in February of 2015, the Templar leader ‘La Tuta’ was captured. This signaled the end of the reign of the Knights Templar.

In this new environment created by government led violence, self-defense infighting and the collapse of the Knights Templar, “Los Viagras” emerged. Equal parts cartel and self-defense group, they both trafficked drugs and were a part of the self-defense movement. Nicholas “El Gordo” Sierra, the leader of “Los Viagras” states in reference to his men “These guys are part of a movement, and still are. They are the strongest of all.” and “they are always on the front line, giving their lives, and it’s sad that the government never gave them any recognition for that.”¹²¹ In securitization terms, we go back to what I’ve referred to as the legitimizing speech act. Identifying as a part of ‘the movement’, which was recognized previously by the population as legitimate.

¹¹⁹ Ahrens, Jan Martinez. "Mexican President Dissolves Municipal Police Forces in Bid to Stop Drug Gangs." EL PAÍS. November 28, 2014. Accessed May 30, 2015.
http://elpais.com/m/elpais/2014/11/28/inenglish/1417180109_334639.html.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ How “The Viagras” Got Their Name

Sierra speaks in a different tone in discussing the issues of Michoacan. Not a straight forward securitization by any means, he speaks more of what has transpired in the *autodefensas*, and who the new enemy is with the Knights Templar gone. He claims “The government” is the enemy now.¹²² He discusses his views on the government’s strategy to both eliminate the self-defense groups, he argues “The government turned all of us against each other.”¹²³ When asked if he felt betrayed, he responded “Yes, because I did nothing to them [government]. The government’s strategy is to turn the leaders into criminals.” The potential death and infighting within the self-defense movement was perceived by many to be a proactive strategy to open Michoacan once more to a competing source of order. While not securitization in the purest form, his statements serve to illustrate the competing interests and securitizations at work with the weak state.

3.2.5 – Summary of Findings

In looking at the discourse of various relevant actors within the Michoacan case study we can see a multitude of concepts that show securitization at work and along with additional concepts. In many of the speech acts, we can clearly see the claims of existential threats, of calls to act, and the justification for acts. The actors that are relevant for securitization were not as clearly defined as in traditional Copenhagen approach. In this case, securitizing actors, audience and referents were sometimes one entity and on other occasions they were distinctly different. Weak state dynamics create a space in which the general assumptions by which security operates are not a foregone conclusion.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

Additional elements seen within the case study and to weak state securitization, was presence of legitimizing speech acts and competing securitizations. The opening left by the state allowed other actors to emerge and attempt to assert themselves as authority or security provider. This opening manifested itself in competing security discourses in which the actors created their own version of the threat and what extreme measures should be taken. Within these competing securitizations were the presence of legitimizing speech acts. Often, actors securitized a threat and legitimized themselves simultaneously. Audience acceptance was both a legitimizing action for the actor and a permission given to their actions. Overall, securitization is a useful framework for understanding a wide range of security issues. However, in the weak state context some of the assumptions made by the framework must adapt to the new setting. The issue of legitimacy is of particular importance due to the cascading effects due to the contextual change. The lack of a singular legitimate actor change the dynamics of security on many levels.

Conclusion

The Copenhagen School and their concepts of sectoral security and securitization give us a good starting point to look at a wide variety of security dynamics. Sectoral security divides security into threats and referents outside the state.¹²⁴ Securitization gives us the concept that security is discursive and is a process by which securitizing actors inter-subjectively establish a threat with an audience.¹²⁵ It is a speech act which raises an issue above the political and into the realm of security due to its status as an existential threat. In this sense, the Copenhagen school's conception of security is applicable. The framework accounts for the subjective and one only needs to look at speech to see the raising of security issues.

However, once one explores the framework further and examines some of the base assumptions and perspective taken, then questions emerge. Expanding on the many critiques which accuse the Copenhagen School of being state and Eurocentric, I attempted to bring the framework and the critiques together in an empirical case study. The question of how securitization operates in the weak state was seen in the case study. The case of Michoacan presented a complex and diverse security environment where a multitude of actors were present such as drug cartels, vigilante groups and state actors. They all spoke security and competed amongst one another in a broad popular discourse to establish their version of a narrative and enact their security measures. They claimed existential threats to referent objects and proposed solutions which could be seen as extraordinary. Even in such a complex setting, the marks of securitization were present.

¹²⁴ Buzan et al. *Security: a New Framework*, 27

¹²⁵ Ibid., 23

While the acts and actors of securitization were present in the speech acts and discourse, there were other concepts at work as well. The issue of legitimacy when there is no single accepted authority changes the security dynamics significantly. Specifically this was seen as bottom up securitizers seeking legitimacy and attempting to securitize. The case study showed the close relationship between the two concepts. In addition, within a conflict space such as Michoacan where legitimacy is attainable by non-state actors, competing security discourses emerge. While the issue of lack of social order is at the heart of the issue in Michoacan, how this disorder is characterized by different actors is of interest. While the threat is the same, in competing securitizations the framing and how they perceived the manifestation of the threat was different.

It is my hope that this paper bridges some of the gaps between the Copenhagen School and its critiques. By further shedding light on the concepts of bottom up, horizontal and competing securitizations along with illustrating the importance of legitimacy establishment through discursive and non-discursive speech acts, an altered perspective could be put forward. These concepts also open the issue up to further exploration. The concept of non-discursive speech acts and legitimacy through placement in narrative is a concept of interest that can be looked at further within a security context. Alternative case studies can be done to further explore the validity or confirm the statements made in this paper. These could include examples of both bottom up and horizontal securitization. The early stages of ‘peer securitization’ could not be looked into within the scope of this paper, however this is one of the most interesting concepts and it is still underdeveloped.¹²⁶ In summation, the different contexts of strong and weak states along with the differences between established authority and not, create distinct

¹²⁶ Adamides, “Institutionalized,” 10

security environments. These fundamental differences can shape how security issues manifest themselves and the identity of the actors which will both speak and provide security on the behalf of their referent objects.

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