

## ***Securitization and Desecuritization Processes in Protracted Conflicts: The Case of Cyprus***

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This book is a very welcome contribution to first, the literature on the Cyprus conflict, and second, to the security studies literature and specifically, securitization. More broadly, it offers a sophisticated and novel understanding of how in situations of protracted conflict, in this case non-violent, perceived threats can be routinely securitized with the inevitable consequence that negative perceptions of the ‘enemy other’ are habitually reiterated and reinforced and the conflict rather than being resolved, is perpetuated. Conversely, the book also explores how horizontal and bottom-up securitization processes create an environment where conflict fatigue can lead to de-escalation and desecuritization attempts by elites and the multiple audiences involved, even if those very same groups, very often, hinder the realization of such efforts in practice.

The central theoretical claim of the book relates to securitization theory, and specifically the further deepening and development of the concept of institutionalised securitization. To this end, the main assertion in the book is that it goes beyond the notions of routine securitization, persistence of threats and the urgency this brings with it associated with the Copenhagen School, to capture ‘instances where the entire process of securitization, including the referent objects, the source of threat, and the intersubjective process between actors and audiences, evolve into a state of permanency becoming inevitably part of the society’s political and social routines.’ (p. ix). Indeed, such a claim is central to the core argument of the book, that routinized and institutionalised processes of securitization can emerge from top-down, ad hoc elite-driven processes under certain conditions, creating new modes of securitization that are involuntary, horizontal and bottom-up in nature.

To this end, and to articulate the above argument, the author separates the book in to 7 chapters and an Introduction. Chapters one to four seek to set the theoretical (securitization, chapters 1 and 4), conceptual (the characteristics of protracted conflicts, chapter 2) and empirical (historical) context (the Cyprus case, chapter 3),

whilst chapters five and six offer a rich empirical analysis of the modes of securitization (chapter 5) and desecuritization (chapter 6) observable within the protracted Cyprus conflict. Particularly interesting from a conflict resolution perspective is the discussion of ontological security in chapter four; indeed, whilst the research agenda opened up by ontological security in the context of conflict is not the central focus or driving conceptual frame of the book, it is clear how such a research agenda can provide further added value in understanding the psycho-social spoilers and enablers in any given conflict situation where securitization and desecuritization dynamics are observable. The final chapter then offers thoughts on a more contemporary but, nevertheless, critical issue that has impacted on the securitization/desecuritization dynamics in the Cyprus conflict; that of the discovery of energy hydrocarbons.

There are several important implications that stem from the analysis offered in the book with regard to routine securitization and indeed achieving de-escalation and desecuritization in the case of Cyprus. There are also broader implications with regards to extending the research agenda further, in particular in relation to desecuritization processes, conflict transformation and ultimately the creation of ontologically secure, resilient and adaptive citizens in protracted conflicts that can facilitate the movement to sustainable solutions rather than further reinforcing and perpetuating negative identity perceptions and conflict. What the analysis in the book points to predominantly, in the case of Cyprus, is the 'stickiness' of routine and institutionalised securitization. Even, it seems, where top-down and bottom-up de-escalation and desecuritization efforts are observable through a focus on de-politicised and low-cost (political, economic and psychological) low-salience issues such as utilities and cultural heritage, the Cyprus case shows the difficulty of overcoming ingrained and embedded identity perceptions in relation to high-salience issues and thus in moving from an 'us' and 'them' narrative to a 'we' narrative. It also demonstrates how new issues such as energy (Hydrocarbons) can add to the existing stickiness of routinized and institutionalized securitization if not accompanied by the necessary changes in the broader conflict framing and framework.

This structure of the book offers a clear logic for the argument to unfold, but one aspect that would have been welcomed –and this is a minor quibble– is an overall Conclusion (and Concluding sections in the actual chapters). I agree with the author that the Concluding chapter should not simply 'focus on reiterating the main arguments of the book' (p.166) but a separate concluding chapter would have provided a platform through which to pull together the different elements and many valuable

insights of the book. This would have helped to further reinforce the central implications of the analysis offered with regards to the value of the theoretical contribution and the critical lessons and potential way forward with regards to desecuritization and sustainable solutions and peace in relation to the seemingly 'intractable' Cyprus conflict. Indeed, whilst the author does an excellent job of flagging the main implications throughout, this reader would have appreciated a consolidated final chapter offering reflections on the theoretical and empirical claims made and what this all means first, for the relevant literatures discussed in the context of the Cyprus conflict, second, the cooperation and convergence of the multiplicity of stakeholders often involved at different levels in conflict resolution and promoting peace in protracted (securitized) conflict environments, and finally, on the advancement of the research agenda relating to securitization, desecuritization and indeed ontological security in protracted conflicts in and beyond Cyprus.

Overall, this book offers critical insight on the conflict in Cyprus that will be of value to multiple audiences: students and scholars across the (sub) disciplines of (critical) security studies, peacebuilding, and conflict management and resolution that seek a deeper understanding of how conflict dynamics can be perpetuated through processes from above and below; and diplomats and the broader policy, civil society and NGO communities involved in negotiations and peacebuilding initiatives, that wish to further understand how, where and through which processes conflict dynamics are reinforced, and in turn, to think further about how targeted interventions can subsequently be constructed and implemented that enable desecuritization processes created from above and/or below to create sustainable 'we' dynamics and ultimately, more virtuous pathways to reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. This is no easy task in any conflict given their often complex, multi-level, multi-issue and multiple stakeholder nature. This contribution certainly provides an intellectual platform for a deeper understanding of the underlying conflict psychology and social and political dynamics and processes related to the protracted Cyprus conflict, but also of valuable lessons that can be learnt from this for conflict transformation and peacebuilding scholars more broadly in violent and non-violent conflict environments.

**GEORGE CHRISTOU**