



**Apocalyptic Imaged Futures as Securitizing Speech Acts in the Reconceptualization of Outer Space as a Private Domain: Applied to Discourse from the Pro-Privatized Outer Space Epistemic Community**

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THESIS REVIEW

by Ondrej Ditrych, MPhil. Ph.D.

The thesis engages an interesting and relevant topic of security in the outer space. The author undoubtedly demonstrates a solid knowledge of the empirical material. However, the thesis suffers from shortcomings in theorisation, research design, structure and the empirical analysis.

The author's argument is that "creating and diffusing an intersubjective shared idea of an apocalyptic imagined future through securitizing speech acts, where humanity's only chance of survival will be an established permanent privately owned and operated colony in outer space, will be a crucial aspect required to build an epistemic community large enough and with enough influence to reconceptualize outer space from an international regulatory and regime perspective. This in turn will serve as a catalyst for the normalization and legitimization of free-market private enterprise in outer space" (p. 7). In addition to this hypothesised causal mechanism (or what the author terms as "descriptive inference", he later ventures to make a prediction that the private industry interests will be so important as to prevent emergence of an international regime (p. 34).

The author does not make clear how he has arrived at this hypothesised mechanism; nor how the transmission would be effected between securitising acts (not successful securitisation entailing acceptance by an audience, as the author only chose to deal with the acts *themselves*) would translate into a broadening of the epistemic community. The thesis moreover does not demonstrate this mechanism at work while leaving several concepts in the basic argument underdefined: both the 1) transmission between securitising acts and the growth of epistemic communities to the point when they are "large enough", and 2) the role of epistemic communities in "reconceptualisation" of outer space and "normalization" and "legitimization" of the operation of private enterprise.



The thesis is therefore far from being an explanatory theory that purports to “explain the exact focus it takes on the drive for a new privatized outer space paradigm” (p. 6). Instead, it suggests a causal mechanism, then follows it with an extensive review of the debate on outer space and theory, and finally provides a few examples of attempted speech acts that are not convincingly presented as *securitisation* moves.

The literature review is more an extensive paraphrase of two oeuvres (Weeks 2012; Peoples 2011) which does not seem necessary to develop the argument. That said, the author does not lose from sight the public / private dialectic and hence it provides a useful if overly expansive background to the problematique the thesis seeks to engage. The author does not show, in my view and contrary to his claims, that the US. has been a successful international norm entrepreneur, making domestic legislation into (broadly accepted) international norms.

The theory chapter that follows again resembles to a large part semistructured notes on constructivism rather than development of a theoretical framework that could then be mobilised in empirical analysis. In general cogent, it misreads Finnemore and gives the impression of using her (and Mearsheimer, or Zehfuss) as strawmen in an (unnecessary) defence of constructivism and Wendt in particular that has no bearing on developing the argument. Neither does the section dedicated to legitimisation. Together, these sections and the previous chapter take the disproportionate almost 2/3 of the thesis. Theoretical sections that follow, on securitisation (3.4) and epistemic communities (3.5) are then comparatively short and could benefit from more standard literature on the topic (Haas 1992) as well as e.g. interrogations of the politics of catastrophe (Aradau and van Munster 2011).

As noted above, the empirical analysis does little to demonstrate the hypothesised mechanism’s operation, instead providing several examples of speech acts that do indeed evoke the imagery of catastrophic future for the mankind and/or biosphere in advocating promotion of private exploration of outer space, but in addition to not being linked to any (hypothesised) effects on the epistemic community, they are problematically conceived of securitising acts since in their grammar they do not seem to call for measures that could be considered *exceptional*. (Neither do they call for a “permanent privately owned and operated colony in outer space”.)

Therefore, while the author clearly is up to something, i.e. the role of private interests’ advocacy in norm entrepreneurship and the (non)emergence of outer space regime that has certain security implications, the securitisation framework (underdeveloped in the thesis) may not be the one most befitting the issue at hand.



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In conclusion, the thesis meets the basic academic criteria. However, its shortcomings prevent achieving its potential to present a cogent and innovative argument on a relevant topic. Therefore, I recommend it to be defended and graded GOOD.

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