Translation: How Securitization of Islam travels from Right-wing to Left-wing Political Parties

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Abstract

Securitization of Islam cannot be fully comprehended without looking at party ideologies. While it is acknowledged that Muslims in the West have been securitized, little attention has been paid to the language and ideas through which securitization manifests across and inside political parties, especially on the Left. This aspect needs further research. After the jihadist terrorist attacks of the mid-2010s, many European centre-Left politicians have securitized not only Islamism, but also Islam, by using tropes frequently pronounced by right-wing political parties. The literature has already analysed how securitization changes across countries. I ask instead how securitization travels across parties and argue that this process occurs through an intra-linguistic translation, which means to transform words within the same language without losing the original meaning. I investigate the translation of securitization of Islam from right-wing to left-wing language and show that the process is active and nested in 'distal' and 'proximate' contexts. I illustrate my argument through a discourse analysis of speeches released by key figures of the French Socialist Party-led governments (2012-2017) since they translated the securitization of Islam through indirect speech acts and by flagging their own referent objects (such as *laïcité*) to persuade left-leaning audiences.

Introduction

While it is acknowledged that Western governments have securitized Islam in the last two decades (Croft, 2012; Mavelli, 2013; Eroukhmanoff; 2019), little attention has been paid to how securitization manifests across and inside different political parties. When parties are the unit of analysis, the focus is, understandably, on right-wing populism (Kaya, 2019; Wojczewski, 2020), whereas left-wing populist securitization and desecuritization have been explored only recently (Bonansinga, 2022; Gaudino, 2024). Yet, centre-left parties have also treated the question of Islam as a matter of national security, through Islamophobic words commonly associated to right-wing political parties.

This paper aims to examine the language used by centre-left parties to appropriate right-wing discourses on the securitization of Islam, which are predicated on the assumption that Islam is a religion likely to generate violent fundamentalism, and thus that whoever is or looks Muslim is a potential radical Islamist to carefully monitor. This agenda - based on restrictive border policies, access to citizenship and counterterrorism measures - can be partly explained by the recrudescence of jihadist-inspired terrorism across Europe in the mid-2010s. However, it sounds at odds with European centre-left parties, which have often espoused libertarian views on socio-cultural issues. In turn, European Muslims have identified more with progressive than conservative parties (Baysu, Swyngedouw, 2020: 2). That said, Islamophobia is not absent from left-wing ideologies, because of factors including Marxist antagonism against religions, past anticlerical struggle against Christian institutions, and orientalist stigma against Muslims (Moosavi, 2015).

Neither the Copenhagen nor the Paris Schools of securitization analyse the different language that right-wing and left-wing parties deploy to justify the securitization of Islam. This absence might give the misleading impression that security is a domain that stays impermeable to the ideas of governing parties sitting in the executive (Neal, 2012). It is true that there is shared cross-party consensus on securitizing Islam. Yet, the securitizing discourse across the Right and Left is not uniform. Quite the opposite, security travels across the political spectrum and acquires distinct meaning for specific constituencies. Hence, specific manifestations of the securitization of Islam cannot be understood without engaging with political parties and their referent objects - the "things that are existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival" (Balzacq, 2011: 35) - allegedly threatened by Islam.

I want to contribute to research on the securitization of Islam by asking how this process travels from right-wing to left-wing political parties. There are abundant studies on how right-wing parties adjust liberal-progressive themes to claim that Islam is incompatible with the West (Brubaker, 2017), and on the mainstreaming of Islamophobia in Europe and the US (Ansari and Hafez, 2012; Mondon and Winter, 2017). Additionally, recent empirical accounts from anti-racist activists on the British Left reveals some ambivalence in the way they challenge Islamophobia (Harris, 2022). Yet, the securitization of Islam by left-leaning parties has been mostly neglected by political scientists and Critical Security Studies alike.

I argue that the securitization of Islam travels across parties through an intra-linguistic *translation*, which means to change a set of words or a speech, within the same language, from one register into another one (e.g. from conservative to progressive). I use the notion of translation to unpack how political parties appropriate tropes traditionally belonging to the parties on the opposite side of the political spectrum and adjust them into a language coherent with own ideologies. During this process, right-wing and left-wing parties behave simultaneously as actors and audiences of securitization and wield the formal power to approve or neglect the construction of Muslims as security threats. Not only do parties nurture own ideological reasons to discriminate Muslims: also, they borrow intolerant vocabulary from their competitors and translate it through alternative phraseologies that sound familiar to their audiences.

Translation makes the securitizing tropes intelligible for tailored audiences, such as party members, competing parties, and electors, who otherwise would not be persuaded. While translation is a circular process that happens from Right to Left and the other way around, in this paper I explore the left-wing translation of securitization of Islam. In doing so, I explain that the notion of translation - which has already engaged securitization scholars (Stritzel, 2011a, 2011b; Villumsen-Berling et.al., 2022) - crystallizes the active and contextual semantic changes that parties achieve when securitizing an issue. Accordingly, translation helps to illuminate the impact had by nationalist and conservative narratives on progressive parties' discourse on Islam. Also, it reveals that left-leaning parties justified securitization to their audiences by performing 'indirect speech acts' and flagging their own referent objects.

My investigation proceeds as follows. Firstly, I explain that the literature on securitization has not dwelled on how different political parties conceptualize the securitization of Islam, which, I argue, travels across the political spectrum through an intra-linguistic translation. This transfer of meaning rests on both active and contextual dimensions, as the second section clarifies. The third section outlines my research design, methodology and case selection, whereas the fourth one illustrates the paper's argument through my findings about a centre-left party, the French Socialist Party (SP), that has translated the securitization of Islam from the Right.

Political Parties as Securitizing Actors

Securitization generally indicates the process through which issues are socially constructed as security threats. Over the last twenty-five years, many scholars have reflected on securitization and theorized it predominantly either as a 'speech act', that is uttered by state elites and discursively engenders extraordinary security measures (as in the Copenhagen School; Buzan et.al., 1998), or as ordinary administrative procedures assembled by security bureaucrats and experts (as in the Paris School; Bigo, 2002, 2014). Aside from these mostly theoretical contributions, other literature has analysed the securitization of Islam through narratives, policies and practices aimed to control and exclude Muslims from the full enjoyment of their civil rights. Despite its conceptual and empirical advancements, current scholarship has only recently started to examine inter-party variations in articulating the discourse on security - especially by right-wing populists (Wojczewski, 2020). Yet, since securitization studies are mostly concerned with the actions of Governments, Ministries (e.g. Home Office, Defence) and security agencies dependent on the executive (e.g. Intelligence, Police, Military), research on professional politicians usually belongs to political scientists - who, in turn, relegated the study of security to scholars of International Relations, as Neal argues (2012: 110). Hence, security management is framed by securitization scholars as a prerogative of the executive power, independently from the political affiliation of governing parties.

This analytical posture precludes a comprehensive understanding of parties' endorsement or contestation of securitization, and of parties' ideological justification when they appropriate issues that are usually vocalized by their competitors. Although many Western political parties have lost attractiveness and representative capacity, parties are important

players in the securitization process. Parties' elected officials and their political ideologies influence policymaking on contested issues, such as the alleged link between Islam and insecurity. In line with scholars believing that partisan contestations around security should be taken seriously (Hegemann and Schenecker, 2019; Gaudino, 2024), this paper deepens the debates on the securitization of Islam by focusing on parties. Differently, it problematizes how some centre-left parties have translated a securitarian view of Islam under the pretext of a war against jihadist terrorism..

Although the securitization of Islam has been broadly discussed, current studies do not explore how security takes multiple forms and justifications when they travel across the political spectrum. Cesari (2010: 9) defines securitization as the process involving 'actors who propose that Islam is an existential threat to European political and secular norms and thereby justifies extraordinary measures against it', building on the Copenhagen School model. Her analysis rightly illustrates some common tropes used by Western policymakers - framing Islam in relation to terrorism, complaining about multiculturalism, or dividing Muslims into 'good' and 'bad' (Mamdani, 2002). Admittedly, while Cesari acknowledges the continuity between Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher's discourse on Muslims (2010: 13), she does not examine the referent objects advanced by Blair, leader of a centre-left party, to justify the securitization.

This aspect is instead underlined by Croft (2012), who questions the impact of partisan ideologies by comparing how British Cabinets under Blair (1997-2007), Gordon Brown (2007-10) and David Cameron (2010-12) differently flagged the concept of 'Britishness' to securitize Islam after the 9/11 and 7/7 jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks. According to Croft (2012: 86-90), the securitization of Islam is not a strategy to ensure the survival of the state, as per the Copenhagen School. Through a 'post-Copenhagen' approach (2012: 73), Croft argues that the referent objects of securitization are the distinct values that governing parties associate with what they consider as the British way of life, with different narratives advanced by Conservatives and Labour. Hence, Croft lays the ground to interpret the securitization of Islam as a site of conflict between competing partisan narratives about Britishness. Despite this merit, Croft does not explore the language that New Labour chose to appropriate the Islamophobic refrains usually uttered by the Right, which is what this paper seeks to explain by engaging with the concept of translation.

By merging insights from Copenhagen and Paris Schools, other authors have advanced the debates on the securitization of Islam by reflecting on the 'felicity circumstances' (Balzacq, 2005: 172; Eroukhmanoff, 2019: 27) or 'facilitating conditions' (Ciută, 2009: 314) allowing securitization to succeed. By investigating France, Mavelli (2013: 162) argues that such conditions are not only *internally* related to the syntax of the an exceptional speech act but depend also on *external* historical and sociological factors, chiefly the extended genealogy through which the West has constructed its secular subjectivity against religions (2013: 167-172). While securitization can be triggered by unprecedented moments, it has two non-negligible dimensions (Mavelli, 2013: 175): it is grounded in a consolidated discursive realm, namely the centrality of French secularism (*laïcité*) in upholding Republican values, and is shaped by security professionals, represented for instance by the members of the Stasi Commission who advised to prohibit religious signs at school (as then enshrined by the Law 228-2004).

The centrality of discursive norms and contextual legacy emerges also in the work of Eroukhmanoff. The author originally sketches a theory of 'indirect securitization' which accounts for the 'covert ways' in which Islam is securitized by saying exactly the opposite, namely that Muslims are *not* a security threat as the real threat lies in radical versions of Islamism (2019: 1-2,33). In doing so, Eroukhmanoff explains that her selected securitizing actors (Bush Jr., Obama and Trump) used 'indirect speech acts' to 'save face if securitization fails' (2019:2) and dodge allegations of Islamophobia, since their counterterrorism policies were presented as targeting Islamist extremists and illegal immigrants in general (like in Trump's controversial 'Muslim Ban') rather than Muslims as such. Indirect securitizations deepen the distance between elite speakers and securitized subjects, by erasing the outcomes of security policies upon the latter (2019: 4,10), and allow securitizing actors to formally respect the norms of racial equality (central in US political culture), by couching hate speeches in codewords and dog-whistling better fit to persuade their audiences (2019: 67-70).

While I agree with the argument that securitization depends on local contexts, I aim to integrate them by adding another analytical layer: the setting in which party interactions occur, which serves to understand the reasons and modalities that prompted centre-left parties to endorse the securitization of Islam. This endorsement should be understood by taking seriously the growing electoral rise of far-right parties, whose Islamophobic agenda has severe repercussions on all the political spectrum. Through this vantage point, we can track how the

same securitized threat (Islam) is uttered in different ways by political parties of various ideologies, whereas existing securitization theories come at the analytical cost of neglecting that securitizing agents translate securitization of Islam in a distinct language, which can sound 'softer' to persuade distinct audiences. The central place given to the audiences aligns my analytical choice with recent Post-Copenhagen sociological variants of securitization (Eroukhmanoff, 2019; Robinson 2017) arguing that securitization is not a self-centred illocutionary act, but an inter-subjective process running across a network of agents and audiences. To further unpack how securitization is modified by party representatives, I propose to engage with the notion of translation and its intra-linguistic meaning.

Intra-linguistic Translation: an Analytical Framework

Translation helps detecting how the securitization of Islam unfolds across political parties, specifically on the Left. I choose translation because of its 'polyvalence' (Villumsen-Berling 2022:13) that facilitates exploring the creation and transformation of meanings across various semantic fields, including those related to security. As argued by Villumsen-Berling et.al., translation is the central site to observe 'synchronic political battles over conceptual meanings' (2022: 17). Contested concepts such as security cannot be literally translated from one field to another, but only re-interpreted and adapted 'within and across new spaces of professions, disciplines, organisations, cultures, and scales' (2022: 12).

Aside from the interest in translating security across multiple fields of experts, translation has been theorised as the process through which security threats travel across countries. According to Stritzel (2011a: 2494), the localization of a security threat to a new national context implies three mechanisms of translation: 'elusiveness', as some concepts are easily to translate than others; 'compatibility' or 'resonance' of the threat with the receiving context; and 'adaptation' thanks to the agency of the translator. By unpacking the translation of two security threats ('Organized Crime' and 'Rogue States') across two countries (the USA and Germany), Stritzel contends that security turns into a too abstract and a-historical notion if it is deprived of its binding ties with local discourses and national security cultures. These inter-linguistic translations convey an additional flavour to the original security threat because translators never 'replicate the source (…) but also creatively produce, rewrite, rearticulate, re-represent something in new term' (Stritzel, 2011b: 344).

Although these existing contributions praise the analytical value of translation, they downplay the intra-linguistic[1] component of translation across securitizing agents who reword the same security threat (e.g. Islam) by using the same language. Despite acknowledging that translations involve synchronic political battles over concepts, Villumsen-Berling et.al. (2022) exclude professional politicians from the fields analysed in their investigation: a perspective that is rather aligned with traditional approaches in securitization theories. Although Stritzel takes an innovative direction, his analytical model applies only to inter-linguistic translations, as if the crucial variable to understand securitization was country-dependent, and not partisan-dependent. Alternatively, while Mavelli (2013: 165) explains that Bush Jr. intra-linguistically *translated* 'Islam' into 'Terror' to avoid framing the War on Terror as Islamophobic, his interest is raised more by the genealogy of Islamophobia than by the actual linguistic process.

Building on existing scholarship, I argue that intra-linguistic translation across political parties is a key variable to interpret how the securitization of Islam happens on the Left. Intra-linguistic translation helps to better grasp the semantic conflicts about the securitization of Islam across the Right and Left. This aspect is worth examining: the rationale and targets of securitization depend on the ideologies of political parties, who can decide if, how and why Muslims should be securitized. Many right-wing and left-wing parties have concurred that Islam produces threats to national security. Nevertheless, they recur to alternative language, due to referent objects that spring from unique partisan legacy: briefly, Islam is a demographic threat to ethnic white Europeans and an incompatible religion for the Right, while the Left sees it as a threat to libertarian and progressive values like gender and LGBTQ+ equality.

The rest of the section explains that translation has two key dimensions: active and contextual.

Active dimension

In their role as agents of securitization, political parties translate security in *active* ways, which means that the tropes borrowed from their competitors must be adjusted to the expectations and ideals of their audiences. Active translations usually respond to two

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[1] In defining translation, Jakobson (1959: 232-233) distinguishes *intra-lingual* (rewording by verbal signs of the same language) from *inter-lingual* (interpretation through verbal signs of another language) translations. I retain this difference for analytical purposes despite being difficult to retrace in practice (see Villumsen-Berling, 2022: 45).

challenges: first, to align with the partisan ideological legacy and, second, to demonstrate that the translated version is better than the original. In doing so, they show that securitization is not an illocutionary act in forms of a decontextualized speech-act. Instead, the translated securitization is a perlocutionary act, since it relies on the acceptance by internal (e.g. fellow party members) and external (e.g. electors, other parties) audiences.

Political parties actively translate the semantic repertoire of their competitors with the purpose to match their ideological heritage. Translation implies a re-formulation of the original securitizing message that fits parties' ideological legacies so that their version does not appear as a passive imitation. As Balzacq (2015:3) argues, 'security practices that result from securitization remain socially binding so long as they respond to commonly accepted values', including the values flagged by political parties to condone securitization in front of their members and electors. The embeddedness of translation in a specific ideological heritage (e.g. left-wing norms and values) does not obscure the perimeter of action of the translator. Conversely, it strengthens the role of 'translation entrepreneurs' who graft foreign notions into concepts resonating with local sensibilities (Wolf and Fukari, 2007). Hence, when left-wing parties stress the importance of security, border controls and surveillance of radical Muslims they couch this discourse historically born on the Right into narratives that sound attuned with left-compatible preoccupations, including that immigrants are a potential burden for the welfare state and competitors for lower-paid jobs (Raymond, 2009) and that Islam thwarts gender equality and Western secular and liberal principles (Moosavi, 2015).

Translation is achieved by agents who add new layers to the authentic text to persuade their audiences that their version of securitization beats the original. The imprinting given by translators averts a half-baked reproduction of other parties' language, which sounds unpalatable to fellow party affiliates and electors. Thus, translation is laden with risks: when parties securitize by speaking a language that jars with their ideological repertoire, loyal electors and fellow party members might oppose the move. Competitor parties that securitized Islam first might also discredit the translation and claim that 'electors always prefer the original to the copy' as once said by National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen (Le Monde, 2007). Faced by this predicament, centre-left parties can choose to accommodate, dismiss or openly reject right-wing agendas (Bale et.al., 2010). Yet, what is less examined by the literature is that the accommodation of right-wing ideas occurs by translating them into a language familiar to left-leaning electors – as discussed by Buckler and Dolowitz (2009: 17-18) about New Labour's

adaptation of free-market ideas. This line of investigation matters in a historical moment in which centre-left policymakers in Western European countries like France, Italy, Britain, and Denmark have increasingly framed immigration and Muslims as security threats.

These linguistic and ideological modifications show that translation of securitization can be understood only if the role of the audiences is seriously considered. Much has been written about the marginal place of the audiences by Copenhagen School scholars (Balzacq, 2005; Côté, 2016). This gap has persuaded many scholars to 'recognize the undeniable importance of the audiences' in a shift defined as 'audience turn' (Soares, 2022: 2). In this respect, political parties are agents and audiences of their competitors' securitization. The transfer of meaning is not a linear flow directed from actors who first make securitization to passive audiences who take it. The audiences interact industriously with the source of securitization. To produce satisfactory translations, agents must elaborate on the original message by using their ideological repertoire and avoid passive imitation, whereas audiences must accept it as congruent with the party legacy. Audiences can be both *internal* (fellow party members who approve resolutions, programs, and ideological guidelines) and *external* (competing political parties, which can challenge the translation and claim the translated issue as their own; electors, who can also be internal audiences if they hold party membership). They have sway in endorsing translation or rejecting it if party leaders do not convince them that the translated idea fits party standards and outshines the original.

The significance of the audience makes of intra-linguistic translation an analytical framework in line with post-Copenhagen scholars who do not see securitization as a posterior performance that emerges linguistically during the speech act (Eroukhmanoff, 2019: 28-29). Translation has perlocutionary effects because it depends on the audiences' approval, which oblige the securitizing agents to tailor the securitizing vocabulary for selected listeners. Security is uttered and translated following discursive limits imposed by the expectations of the audiences. Still, contextual constraints, examined by the next sub-section, are not rigid enough to prevent the translator from deciding which referent objects to secure against Islam.

Contextual dimensions

Research in linguistics illustrates that translation is a social practice attached to the contextual cultural conditions in which translated concepts are nested, reproduced, and understood (Wolf and Fukari, 2007; Villumsen-Berling et.al., 2022). Translation becomes feasible if entangled to the socio-cultural, historical, and political texture under which it is fabricated and spread. A facilitating context makes party agents more receptive to the opportunity of securitizing an issue. Recent securitization of Islam in Europe should be understood in light of exceptional circumstances, like the multiple terrorist attacks in the name of Islam and the refugee crisis of the mid-2010s. Still, securitization of Islam can be translated by left-leaning parties only if it resonates with the norms that they consider part of their history and that they now see jeopardized by Muslim minorities. This contextual layer should be defined as 'distal context' (Balzacq, 2011: 37), namely the 'socio-cultural embeddedness of the text' and refers to factors like 'social class, the ethnic composition of the participants, the institutions or sites where discourse occurs, ecological, regional, and cultural environments'. However, this paper also stresses that centre-left parties have framed Muslims as source of insecurity because of the parallel rise of far-right parties in the 'proximate context', namely 'the sort of occasion or genre of interaction the participants take an episode to be', like a 'spoken or written conversation' (Balzacq, 2011: 37)[2].

The distal context indicates the socio-cultural fabric where Islamophobic arguments are produced and in which they are intelligible. This socio-cultural milieu changes according to national histories and state-church models of specific countries: differently from other countries like the USA and UK, French *laïcité* prescribes a more rigid separation between state and religions evident in the absence of religious symbols from several public spaces, such as high schools (Mavelli, 2013; Baubérot, 2014). However, Islamophobia is also grounded in the distal context of left-wing political parties, which translate the securitized threat both in their local language and culture (inter-linguistically) and according to their ideological legacy (intra-linguistically). The argument that religious signs and practices should be confined to the private sphere is commonly accepted across Western countries. Yet, it sounds more tied to the anti-religious agendas historically proposed by left-wing ideologies (socialism, communism, republicanism) than by right-wing ones, often more conservative and respectful of the presence of religion in public affairs. Therefore, religion, and specifically Islam, is framed as antithetical

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[2] Balzacq borrows the categorization in distal and proximate contexts from Margaret Wetherell's works.

to some left-wing referent objects such as belief in gender equality, freedom of expression, and rejection of transcendental sources of political legitimacy.

Such historical factors participate in the distal context that frames the active translation. They cast a shadow on the Copenhagen School's hypothesis that securitization belongs to the realm of exceptional circumstances. The latter are insufficient to understand why Islamophobia has travelled from Right to Left. It should be recalled that Muslim immigrants were already considered dangerous by both French centre-right and centre-left parties at least since the 1980s, when there was a shift in the way 'Muslims chose to publicly affirm their identity' (Bowen, 2007: 66) and Islam seemed to threaten left-wing principles, such as the religious neutrality of schools. While France was dealing with the Creil affair, in 1989, the 'Rushdie affair' hit the headlines in Britain. Labour politicians were divided between a faction protecting unfettered freedom of speech and those who instead reckoned that Rushdie's book (*The Satanic Verses*) offended Islam (Carle, 2008). Other examples provide evidence of left-leaning parties and trade unions hardly masking racist and Islamophobic attitudes (Hajjat and Mohammed, 2013; Virdee, 2014), corroborating the argument that the securitization of Islam is not an exceptional reaction to unprecedented events, but the outcome of historically rooted partisan legacies.

Additionally, securitization should also be tied to a distinct proximate context, by which I mean the conversational setting in which right-wing and left-wing parties adapt and translate each other's discourse. If we consider the post-1989 Western political setting, left-wing parties have moved right-ward, accepted centrist neoliberal positions and supported a liberal vision of the international order. Yet, after 9/11, centre-left parties have also increasingly politicized religious and cultural issues, such as immigration and relations with Muslim minorities (Berman and Kundnani, 2021: 27). The politicization and securitization of Islam were firstly triggered by far-right parties, whose impact on the political spectrum has been profound. While the diffusion of racist ideas from far-right to centre-right has been researched (Brown et.al., 2021), less studies scrutinize how the process unfolds in social-democratic parties, accused of unsuccessfully 'copying' the radical right on its own turf (Mudde, 2019). Despite their value, these studies do not adequately capture how centre-left politicians transform the language borrowed from the Right, thereby creating differentiated securitizations of Islam according to their ideological legacy. Interpreting the left-wing securitarian turn as a 'contagion' (van Spanje, 2010) from the far-right absolves centre-left parties by minimizing how they reproduce

xenophobic ideas when they act as audiences of far-right securitization (Kallis 2013: 239). I contend instead that we need to unpack the left-wing adoption of right-wing narratives by scrutinizing distinct Islamophobic arguments advanced by the Left.

Proximate and distal contexts should be studied as intertwined dimensions that allow retracing translations both synchronically and diachronically. Debates on security amongst French right-wing and left-wing parties began in the 1980s, when nationalist politicians blamed the Left for being too laxist on security issues, aiming to lure potential left-wing voters who might feel abandoned by those who should allegedly protect lower classes. In 1984, PM Laurent Fabius (SP) even stated that 'Jean-Marie Le Pen poses good questions, without giving good answers'. This statement sounded surprising for a party that claimed to adhere to anti-racism. Still, it showed that the SP could not ignore the National Front's electoral growth - from 10.45% in 1984 European Parliament elections to 14.38% in 1988 Presidential elections. It partly explained why the Socialist Cabinet pursued tougher restrictions on new entries and inclusive measures towards already settled immigrants (Shields, 2007: 201). A similar pattern emerged after 2015, as I later demonstrate, since some National Rally's ideas have sneaked into the French Left's discourse on Islam.

The next section presents my research design and the reasons to select Islam and the Socialist Party as a case study of translated securitization.

Research Design

To disclose the securitization in translation, I draw upon interpretivism, a research approach that successfully lends itself for critical studies on security (Lynch 2014:44). Interpretivism helps to unpack the constitutive meanings of social phenomena (like the construction of security) rather than to assess a relation of causality. My framework puts on the same level the translators' agency and the structural constraints imposed by distal and proximate contexts. I am interested in how political parties' agencies affect highly contextualized discourses by translating words according to their ideology. Social actors like parties cannot escape the structured context that influences how they give meaning to reality. Nonetheless, lacking autonomy does not equate to lacking 'agency', since 'agents can reason and act in novel ways, although they can do so only against the background of the contexts that influence them' (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006: 4). In this respect, agency means the decisions taken

by individuals to achieve their goals, given multiple opportunities and obstacles. Although the socio-linguistic background is a powerful factor, right-wing and left-wing arguments about Islam are not an automatic consequence of such contexts. The meaning is constantly produced and transformed through interactions across a network of parties who are simultaneously 'agents' and 'audiences' of securitization.

That the context matters as much as party agency is evident in my choice of Islam as a successful case of translated securitization. Securitization literature underlines that not every problem can be securitized: the threat must be bounded to a context that is historically marked by hostility and troubles between the securitizing agents and the threat (Ciută, 2009; Balzacq, 2011). Securitization is co-dependent on the context, which eases the social mechanism of persuasion and propaganda against an enemy. Otherwise, the evocation of threats would fall on deaf ears. Translation works when different parties securitize a threat that is mutually shared because it resonates with their traditional security concerns. Since many Western right-wing and left-wing parties consider Islam as a 'rival system based on religious affiliation' (Kumar, 2012: 9-10), the translation of its securitization is possible. Motivated by two alternative images of the enemy, Islamophobia has grown on both sides of the political spectrum, eased by the fact that left-wing parties have an own legacy of Islamophobic discourses. While the European ruling elites of the past considered Islam as a competitor coming from outside, contemporary Islamophobia in the West targets Muslims who either migrated or were born and raised in Western countries. European Muslim minorities still appear as "others" in a public sphere based on secular norms and on the lingering presence of the Christian heritage (Mavelli, 2013: 167).

The Socialist Party exemplifies the persistence of Islamophobia on the French Left. It also reveals the typical left-wing predicament between firm belief in secular principles, which are essential in the Socialist history (Peace, 2019), and the commitment to fight racism and voice the concerns of immigrants. While anti-racism turned into a key purpose of some young SP members at the beginning of the Eighties, for instance by providing support to the anti-racist group *SOS Racisme*, during the Mitterrand Presidency the SP also showed an ambiguous attitude towards Islam and reluctance to accept any sign of multiculturalism (Chabal, 2015).

An additional reason to focus on the SP is that it guided the executive from 2012 to 2017, when it represented the largest centre-left party in France. In that period, France was dramatically hit by multiple terrorist attacks committed by jihadist-inspired groups. 255

fatalities were registered from 2014 to 2019 (Institute for Economic and Peace, 2020: 57), alongside with the eight victims of the Toulouse and Montauban attacks in 2012. After the attacks in Paris and Saint-Denis of November 13, 2015, in which 130 people perished, Hollande declared a state of emergency (*état d'urgence*), which grants exceptional powers to the Ministry of Interior and the police in anomalous circumstances. New counterterrorism measures included the declaration of war against ISIL, a more assertive foreign counterterrorism agenda, the deployment of the army to protect "sensitive points" of French territory (*Operation Sentinelle*), the deportation of foreign nationals suspected of terrorism, the reform of intelligence (2015), and increased prison sentences for terrorist acts (Massol De Rebetz and Woude, 2020).

To illustrate my argument, I have analysed fifty-seven speeches and interviews released by former President François Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls in the years 2015 and 2016, marked by the three most lethal religious-inspired terrorist attacks (January 2015 in Île de France, 13 November 2015 in Paris, 14 July 2016 in Nice). After searching for the keywords "*Islam*" and "*terrorisme*" on the database of political speeches available on *viepublique.fr*, I have selected twenty-three texts by Hollande and thirty-four by Valls that deal with religious-inspired terrorism justified in the name of Islam and performed a discourse analysis, which I consider as a 'form of critical theorizing' that 'aims primarily to illustrate and describe the relationship between textual and social processes' (Jackson, 2007: 395), and is concerned with the political effect of choosing some words instead of others.

Translating Securitization of Islam from Right to Left in France

Disguised as a war against radical Islamism and jihadist-inspired terrorism, the Socialist Party securitized Islam through indirect speech acts and in the name of referent objects coherent with the its party history. While jihadist groups understandably raised securitarian reactions, the SP ended up portraying all French Muslims as a community preyed by radical preachers who lure countless youngsters to adopt extremist behaviours. Yet, securitization was translated in a softer language more aligned with progressive and libertarian values cherished by SP electors, compared instead to the overtly xenophobic language espoused by the National Rally. Hence, an active translation occurred by linking securitization to the SP's distal context, in which the attachment to *laïcité* explains worries about Muslims. The Right, however, influenced the SP in the proximate context since Hollande and Valls endorsed the argument

that radical Islamism is a security problem, decontextualized from broader considerations about socio-economic grievances and Muslims' resentment against French foreign policies. Moreover, the Project of Constitutional Reform 3381 signed by the SP proposed to strip the citizenship from binationals convicted for serious attempts against the life of the Nation. Denaturalization for foreign criminals, as later explained, is an idea previously voiced by the Right. Therefore, translation provides a better understanding of how the SP concealed a substantial right-ward movement (i.e. accepting the securitization of Muslims) to its audiences to dodge allegations of incoherence.

My findings firstly confirm that the SP securitized the threat coming from jihadist armed groups and their affiliates. Valls declared that 'we are at war against terrorism, jihadism and radical Islamism' (V21) and that France should fight against those who 'attack our values', meaning 'radical Islamists who reside in our suburbs' and 'young people who have radicalized' (V16). While this finding is expected and confirmed by other analyses (Alduy, 2017; Bogain, 2017, 2019; Fragnon, 2019; Peace, 2019), what strikes is the use of indirect speech acts by SP securitizing agents. In line with Eroukhmanoff's findings (2019) on US Presidents' covert securitization of Islam, Hollande and Valls often argued that terrorism has nothing to do with Islam (H7) because the real threat comes from a violent ideology ('radical Islamism', 'jihadism', 'Salafism', 'Wahhabism') that has perverted Islam to make it lethal and fanatic (H7, V3, V25). The statesmen also claimed that Islam has a place in France (H23, V27), since most Muslims live peacefully their religion (V6), and that 'amalgams' about all Muslims being terrorists should be discouraged (H1, H2, H14, H18, V17, V26) because Muslims are 'jihadists' first victims' (V8, V11).

In doing so, Hollande managed to present counterterrorism policies not as a clash of civilizations, which would mean to ape the Right and its overt Islamophobic stances, but as a response to the 'war against all civilizations' mobilized by jihadist groups (H12). Since Hollande aimed to convince progressive audiences of the necessity to securitize Muslims, the construction of the terrorist's otherhood was not predicated on cultural and religious features, that left-wing electors would find unorthodox as referent objects of securitization. Likewise, Valls advocated a firm reaction against 'those who in the name of Islam try to impose their order in the French suburbs' (V22). To justify so, Valls even declared that, after the Charlie Hebdo massacre, one Muslim friend came to talk to him in tears, 'ashamed of being Muslim' (V22). Through a subtle rhetorical shield, Valls' indirect speech act constructs entire suburbs

as potential laboratory of Islamic extremism. Meanwhile, the disclaimer (having a 'Muslim friend' who asks protection from radical Islamism) helps dodging allegations of Islamophobia, in a strategy frequently adopted by white people to appear as non-racist (Rabii, 2022).

SP securitizing agents sugar-coated the indirect securitization of Islam to their audiences by actively translating it in the name of referent objects aligned with the party's agenda. A pillar of Hollande's 2012 electoral program, *laïcité* is often mentioned as part and parcel of French way of life, which jihadists want to jeopardize, and as the framework enabling gender equality and non-conflictual coexistence among citizens of different confessions (H13). Hollande argued that, in selecting Charlie Hebdo, terrorists attacked two fundamental principles of the French nation: freedom of expression and freedom of conscience, both enabled by the religious tolerance ensured by *laïcité* (H9). Through indirect speech acts, Valls portrayed a minority of 'fundamentalist' (V4) as abhorring such principles and persuading fellow Muslims that *laïcité* stigmatizes Islam. Nonetheless, scholars have showed that *laïcité* disproportionately targets Muslims and, additionally, that Islamophobia has an evident gendered dimension (Faury, 2023: 2). The headscarf was associated by Valls to a political sign challenging Republican values (V32; Peace, 2019: 115) and to one of the reasons inspiring anti-French hostility amongst jihadists (V27). Hence, *laïcité* - that Valls describes as necessary to balance between tolerance and firmness (V9) - should be secured to ensure peaceful coexistence across religions. One way to defend *laïcité*, according to Hollande and Valls (H5, V22), is to teach it from schools to immunize French Muslims from the threat of Islamist radicalization.

Another key referent object needed to persuade the Socialist audiences of translation is the respect of democratic freedoms, cherished by centre-left electors. In a significant meeting held by the social-liberal think-tank *Terra Nova*, Hollande highlighted that the responses to jihadism, including the state of emergency, would not clash with the rule of law and the civil freedoms at the core of French way of life (H4). In the same speech, France was described as the birthplace of human rights, which is another a value that holds significant sway in the SP's social-liberal agenda (Bogain, 2017: 478,481). Hollande advanced similar arguments in a speech given in his historic electoral constituency (Corrèze), where he argued that terrorism needs to be countered by respecting the rule of law (H2). In his words, the state of emergency becomes the instrument to ensure security by temporarily restricting some freedoms. Yet, such limitations are necessary to protect security and, thus, re-establishing civil freedoms once

terrorism is defeated (H8, H13). Likewise, in an interview to the radio *FranceInter* (whose audience is traditionally left-leaning), Valls claimed that 'more security means more freedoms' (V2). Following the Bataclan attacks, he reiterated that security 'is the first freedom' that might lead to 'temporally curtail other liberties to the strictly necessary extent' (V13).

The translated securitization was intelligible because of a common distal context shared by SP officials and audiences. Differently from right-wing rhetoric, *laïcité* and the balance between security and freedoms represent viable referent objects to condone a left-leaning securitization. Both are compatible - to use Stritzel's (2011a) terminology - with recent SP discourse on Islam, considered as too much religious at least since the automobile industry strikes in the Eighties, when the Socialist Minister of Labour, Jean Auroux, claimed that 'there is evidence of a religious and fundamentalist factor in the clashes we have experienced, which gives them a dimension that is not exclusively related to trade-unions' (Hajjat and Muhammad, 2013: 107). After three Muslim students were excluded from their high School in Creil in 1989 because of their *hijab*, many Socialist politicians agreed that students wearing religious symbols should not be admitted. When the SP Minister of Education Lionel Jospin sought a compromise by giving educators the responsibility to decide on a case-by-case basis whether girls wearing the *hijab* should be admitted to classes, several Socialists bashed Jospin's policy as a weak compromise while proposing more assertive measures against what they considered as an attack against *laïcité* (Bowen, 2007: 84-85).

The other referent object (balancing security and democratic freedoms) implies that translation is deeply entrenched in both distal and proximate contexts. Valls' argument is old wine in new bottle. The slogan 'security is the first freedom' was already uttered by Jospin in 1997, in the party meeting in Villepinte, regarded by scholars as crucial in the SP's shift from seeing security as a socio-economic issue to a problem of law-and-order (Cos, 2019). Aside from the distal context, the slogan was firstly vocalized by the Gaullist Minister of Justice Alain Peyrefitte, in 1981, and then turned into a leitmotiv of Jean-Marie Le Pen's electoral campaigns (Télérama, 2020). Thus, the SP emphasis on security results from a proximate context in which right-wing parties frequently treat immigration and Islam as security issues and accuse the Left of inability to protect French citizens (Bonelli, 2010: 182-183). Consequently, and despite using indirect speech acts to conceal the securitization of Islam, SP's previous cadres had already paved the way for Hollande and Valls to frame potentially all Muslims as security threats, revealing that securitization is not an exceptional and de-contextualized move.

That left-leaning securitization should be apprehended as a translation from the Right also emerges in how Hollande and Valls adjusted policies and vocabulary traditionally part of right-wing ideological arsenals. The constitutional reform to strip naturalized foreigners of French nationality echoed ideas expressed by Sarkozy during the 2005 riots (Le Monde, 2010) and Marine Le Pen in 2012, when she theorized the possibility of removing citizenship from dual nationals condemned for criminal offenses (Thierry, 2015). Denaturalization was also a pillar of Jean-Marie Le Pen's 2007 electoral program, feeding the argument that Hollande's project on denaturalization, and his firm counterterrorism policies, symbolized a clear ideological victory of the Right, as acknowledged by scholars (Seniguer, 2022) and ironically by the same National Front (BFMTV, 2015).

Part of Valls' discourse hinges on right-wing tropes. After the Bataclan attacks, Valls argued that Islamism is 'a gangrene' (V13) and 'a pathology' (V3) of Islam, recalling what Marine Le Pen (2015) said earlier about Islamist terrorism being 'a cancer of Islam'. The biological metaphor of cancer reinforces the Manichean opposition between 'good' and 'bad' Muslims, where the former represent healthy organisms invaded by 'alien cells, which multiply causing an atrophy or blockage of bodily functions' (Sontag, 1978: 14). Accordingly, biological metaphors serve to pit non-white bodies as inherently more contagious than white ones, and thus to racialize the disease.

Another common argument by Valls stresses French Muslims' individual responsibility to rebel against jihadism (V3, V25, V27) and cooperate with the state about issues including funding for mosques and formation of imams. The expectation that Muslim leaders should speak up to disassociate themselves from jihadism presupposes that Muslims share a feeling of hidden guilt and lack of loyalty to French secular values (Sèze, 2019: 153). It assumes that Islam is threatened by 'the tentation to withdraw' (V9, V17, V22) from the rest of French society and preyed by 'inner enemies' (V2, V25), which is a refrain circulating during the affair Dreyfus and the Vichy period to talk about, respectively, the Jews and the Communists (Dély, 2017: 285). Finally, a right-wing imprinting emerges in the way Valls argued that 'no social determinism can delete the individual responsibility' (V6) of wannabe jihadists. Such affirmations serve to discredit broader structural factors - such as socio-economic marginalization and widespread prejudices against Islam (Faury, 2023: 2) - as plausible co-

drivers of resentment, which Valls interpret instead exclusively as a phenomenon bred in radical versions of Islam.

Translation appears like a betrayal of own principles when it sounds too much similar to the literal source, as pointed by SP secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis who warned Hollande that denaturalization was an idea born on the Right (Le Figaro, 2015). To sort this predicament, securitizing agents actively translate security into referent objects aligning with their own distal context: this option enables centre-left parties to mark a difference with the Right and demonstrate to their audiences that their translated securitization is better than the original. Therefore, Hollande and Valls repeatedly argued that they would more carefully balance between security concerns and civil freedom than the Right, accused instead of fearmongering (H3, V5) and authoritarian solutions, such as challenging the independence of judiciary power, denying human rights, halting immigration and linking immigration to terrorism (H5).

The difference with the Right is also stressed regarding *laïcité*. As explained above, left-wing parties have been historically more consistent and proactive in embracing secularization, whereas right-wing parties (including the National Rally) began to appropriate *laïcité* more recently, priorly to weaponize it against Islam (Marzouki et.al. 2016; Almeida, 2017). In a circular movement, right-wing translation of *laïcité* pushes the SP to react by re-appropriating and claiming it as its own referent object, to show that the original version beats the translated one. In the words of Valls, *laïcité* should not be interpreted to exclude and stigmatize Muslims, as done by the National Rally, but to promote mutual respect of all confessions and guarantee the neutrality of the state (V4, V17). Still, there is evidence that the SP has substantially espoused a restrictive version of *laïcité* that indeed ended up focussing more on Muslims than on other religious groups.

Conclusion

Political parties are crucial actors in defining the threats to national security. Current research on securitization, including of Islam, tends to represent securitizing agents as if they did not follow any political ideology, assuming that they are of secondary importance when it comes to national security and 'survival' of the state (Williams, 2019: 18). This is what

Hollande and Valls also claimed: in front of terrorism, there are no more partisan cleavages (H13, V27). Yet, in exploring the left-wing securitization of Islam, I have argued that the discourse on insecurity travels across political parties through processes of intra-linguistic translations, which means that securitization changes across and inside parties represented in legislative and executive institutions. Interestingly, Hollande acknowledged this at the end of his mandate:

'I call for national unity. To achieve this, I am taking up proposals that *do not belong to my political family but that are in line with my principles*. It is for this reason that I find it acceptable to limit the loss of nationality to terrorist crimes. And to prevent abuses, it must be strictly regulated by the Constitution'. (H6)

My findings show that centre-left parties translate the securitization of Islam through indirect speech acts. These are adopted by securitizing agents to couch Islamophobic tropes into a sugar-coated form that sounds more justified to their audiences, as it is premised on the argument that the enemy is not Islam, but Islamism, namely a 'gangrene' potentially affecting all Muslims. While the declared enemy is Islamism, the securitization targets every manifestation of religious practice that is considered as too radical. Building on relevant literature, I have also showed that centre-left parties need to actively translate securitization of Islam according to their party ideology, history, and to a political setting marked by the meteoric electoral growth of far-right parties. The translators integrate the original source with ideas familiar to their party audiences to avoid passive reproduction. If they fail, loyal electors might feel betrayed in front of an extraneous language, whereas undecided voters will likely prefer the original instead of the facsimile, as showed by scholars arguing that chasing right-wing themes is not a fruitful strategy for left-wing parties (Abou-Chadi, Wagner, 2020).

Thus, public concerns about Muslims' religiosity and the understandable fear about jihadist-inspired terrorism led the SP to indulge in right-wing tropes (radicalization as a law-and-order rather than socio-economic issue, presence of 'inner enemies', Muslims' individual responsibility in tackling radicalization), and policies (state of emergency, denaturalization). SP decision-makers translated securitization into a version more legitimate in the eyes of left-leaning audiences, as they promised to uphold *laïcité* and respect democratic freedoms and human rights (Bogain, 2019). Yet, the party ended up reiterating the Islamophobic argument about the alleged pipeline Islamic religious practices = hate against French society = likelihood of embracing violent ideas and attitudes.

Translation yields significant insights to research in securitization, showing the metamorphosis of security not only across countries but also within the same national context. In stressing that political parties act as agents and audiences of securitization, it illustrates how the construction of security cannot be interpreted only as an illocutionary speech-act, but as a perlocutionary act that relies on the endorsement of distinct external and internal audiences. The co-production of security between agents and audiences situates my framework in sharp continuity with late generations of securitization scholars inspired by post-Copenhagen sociological models (Eroukhmanoff, 2019; Robinson, 2017). While external audiences like competitor parties might say that their original version is superior to the translated one, internal audiences, such as electors and party factions, ultimately decide whether to accepting or rejecting securitization. As explained earlier, the constitutional reform on denaturalization is a key example of internal party dissent that eventually pushed Hollande to abandon it. Many SP politicians deplored Hollande's right-wing turn, alongside with NGOs lamenting that emergency powers created economic hardships, traumatized children, and contributed to further stigmatizing the whole Muslim minority (Human Rights Watch, 2016). This dynamic of contestation invites for further research on intra-party discussions about the securitization of contested issues like Islam.

In conclusion, translation can be used to investigate how securitization travels across parties sharing similar security concerns, such as Islam, since Islamophobia is coterminous with European history. Yet, the possibilities for translation should be expanded to cover what is beyond the scopes of this paper. The possibility of a translated, liberal securitization of Islam should be investigated in relation to the discourse advanced by President Emmanuel Macron about 'Islamic separatism' (Seniguer, 2022: 175). Geographically, my approach can be generalized to other countries where centre-left parties have adopted a harsh stance on immigration and counterterrorism, such as Italy, Denmark and the UK. Cross-national findings may confirm the hypothesis about the mainstreaming of Islamophobia across the political spectrum and the right-ward move of several left-leaning parties (Mondon and Winter, 2017). Finally, I would suggest applying translation beyond the case of Islam, to other issues that are securitized by both right-wing and left-wing parties, but through distinct vocabulary, such as the environment and the protection of women's rights.

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