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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'We opened the door [too] much': The challenging desecuritisation of Colombian refugees in Ecuador

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Abstract
This article explores the analytical trajectory of desecuritisation strategies in the Global South through the case of Colombian refugees in Ecuador (2005–12). It maps desecuritisation strategies and their enabling and constraining factors against the backdrop of an entrenched infiltration discourse and an emerging rights-based discourse. The analysis of speeches, interviews, and policies demonstrates that governmental elites set in motion more transformative strategies when regional identity and emigration are raised in the political agenda. However, critical developments such as bilateral tensions and the lack of audience support sway desecuritisation towards more managerial strategies and ultimately, to resecuritisation. Shifting the empirical application of desecuritisation to this South American setting reveals the transformational capacity of desecuritisation strategies and reiterates the decisive role of the audience.

Keywords: Colombian refugees; desecuritisation; protection; refugees; securitisation of migration

Introduction

The age of (securitised) migration has been gaining traction. From the inhumane living conditions in 'refugee camps' across the European Union (EU) and the externalisation programme between the United Kingdom and Rwanda to Mexico's restrictive response to the Migrant Caravan, examples of the security–migration nexus abound. However, an unprecedented counter-narrative emerged in South America, providing fertile ground to explore desecuritisation. In 2007 and 2008, South American nations took a turn in migration policy discourse, placing the humanity of migrant persons at the heart of migratory policies and vouching to prioritise the full exercise of migrants' rights.[1] The regional position condemned criminalisation, xenophobia, discrimination, and mass deportations[2] and translated the seemingly welcoming approach to domestic initiatives in a piecemeal fashion.[3] Ecuador, for instance, abolished visas for all nationalities and integrated the rights-based approach at the constitutional level, becoming 'one of the most accessible countries

[1]South American Conference on Migrations (SACM), VII Final Declaration (2007), available at {https://csmigraciones.org/es/conferencias-csm/vii-conferencia-suramericana-sobre-migraciones}; SACM, VIII Final Declaration (2008), available at: {https://csmigraciones.org/es/conferencias-csm/vii-conferencia-suramericana-sobre-migraciones}.

[2]SACM, VII Final Declaration.

[3]Diego Acosta and Luisa Feline Freier, 'Turning the immigration policy paradox upside down? Populist liberalism and discursive gaps in South America', *International Migration*, 49:3 (2015), pp. 659–96.

in the world'.[4] This shift offers a promising context to explore desecuritisation against particular understandings of society, belonging, and identity, expanding the security–migration nexus beyond the Global North.

The Copenhagen School's (CS) securitisation theory (ST) emerged in the 1990s as a proposal to widen the concept of security to non-traditional issues, including migration and identity. The theory provided a constructivist explanation of how an issue becomes a security threat. While in the past, the consensus was that desecuritisation was underdeveloped, recent literature has advanced our understanding of this process. Conceptually, scholars have actively explored *how* desecuritisation operates. For instance, desecuritisation can be read as a modality of contestation,[5] the reconciliation of enemies through memory,[6] and the management,[7] reconstruction,[8] or transformation of identities[9] – particularly in the societal sector.[10] Studies have also debated whether desecuritisation, like securitisation, can operate through speech,[11] and how we can best capture the interactive relationship between securitisation and desecuritisation.[12] These efforts have been paired with empirical analyses focused on the (de)securitisation of migration and identity.[13] Despite the growing curiosity that desecuritisation has sparked, there are avenues to continue exploring. Notably, the existing work addressing desecuritisation strategies has provided guidelines for application drawing from Western prescriptions of society, belonging, and 'Othering'. In a similar vein, empirical studies of desecuritisation in the societal sector suffer from a geographical bias, as they predominantly focus on the Global North, mainly Europe, the United States, and Canada. In spite of prominent exceptions,[14] there is an opportunity to continue exploring desecuritisation beyond the Global North.

While Global South societies are not homogeneous or fixed, the usage of the term highlights the hierarchical relations of power in relation to the 'North'.[15] Stemming from the principle of

[4]Luisa F. Freier and Kyle Holloway, 'The impact of tourist visas on intercontinental south–south migration: Ecuador's policy of "open doors" as a quasi-experiment', *International Migration Review*, 53:4 (2018), pp. 1171–208.

[5]Thierry Balzacq, *Contesting Security: Strategies and Logics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

[6]Valerie Rosoux, 'The role of memory in the desecuritization of inter-societal conflicts', in Michael J. Butler and Zena Wolf (eds), *Securitisation Revisited* (London: Routledge, 2019) pp. 194–216.

[7]Paul Roe, 'Securitization and minority rights: Conditions of desecuritization', *Security Dialogue*, 35:3 (2004), pp. 279–94.

[8]Matti Jutila, 'Desecuritizing minority rights: Against determinism', *Security Dialogue*, 37:2 (2006), pp. 167–85.

[9]Lene Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation: The normative-political in the Copenhagen School and directions for how to apply it', *Review of International Studies*, 38 (2012), pp. 525–46; Roe, 'Securitization and minority rights'; Juttila, 'Desecuritizing minority rights'.

[10]Jef Huysmans, 'Migrants as security problems: Dangers of securitizing societal issues', in Robert Miles and Dieterich Thranhardt (eds), *Migration and European Integration: The Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1995), pp. 53–73.

[11]Andreas Behnke, 'No way out: Desecuritization, emancipation and the eternal return of the political – a reply to Aradau', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 9:1 (2006), pp. 62–9; Juha A. Vuori, 'Religion bites: Falungong, securitization/desecuritization in the People's Republic of China', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 186–211.

[12]Vuori, 'Religion bites'; Juha A. Vuori, 'Illocutionary logic and strands of securitization: Applying the theory of securitization to the study of non-democratic political orders', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14:1 (2008), pp. 65–99.

[13]Ian Paterson, 'Contesting security: Multiple modalities, NGOs, and the security-migration nexus in Scotland', *European Journal of International Security*, 8 (2023), pp. 172–91; Georgios Karyotis and Stratos Patrikios, 'Religion, securitization and anti-immigration attitudes: The case of Greece', *Journal of Peace and Research*, 47:1 (2010), pp. 43–57; Dimitrios Skleparis, 'A Europe without walls, without fences, without borders: A desecuritization of migration doomed to fail', *Political Studies*, 66:4 (2018), pp. 985–1001.

[14]Hawre Hasan Hara, 'The securitization and de-securitization of Kurdish societal security in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria', *World Affairs*, 183:4 (2020), pp. 291–314; Asli Ilgit and Audie Klotz, 'How far does "societal security" travel? Securitization in South African immigration policies', *Security Dialogue*, 45:2 (2014), pp. 137–55; Cai Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School on tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is securitization theory useable outside Europe?', *Security Dialogue*, 38:1 (2007), pp. 5–25.

[15]For Grovogui, the Global South extends beyond geography, it 'is an idea and a set of practices, attitudes, and relations. … a disavowal of institutional and cultural practices associated with colonialism and imperialism. It is also a call and a label signifying the coming into form of a different world.' Siba Grovogui, 'A revolution nonetheless: The Global South in International Relations', *The Global South*, 5:1 (2011), pp. 175–90.

uneven power relations and calls for additional studies beyond the North,[16] this article's empirical investigation of the desecuritisation of Colombian refugees in Ecuador (2005–12) brings important conceptual insights into how societies experiencing South–South migratory movements construct the boundaries of the 'Other'. I contend that the construction of Self–Other identities, imbued in desecuritisation strategies, are embedded and informed by three factors: colonial legacies, histories of migration, and regional identity discourses. The latter analytical move will allow us to recalibrate the balance from Global North understandings of society, which constitute the basis of desecuritisation processes in the migration domain. As Balzacq et al. and Côté recognise, empirical enquiries have the potential to invigorate the development of (de)securitisation, besides the mere adoption of concepts.[17]

The article investigates the following questions: how do desecuritisation strategies *operate*? How do audiences *interact* with desecuritisation strategies? And what *factors* enable or constrain the vulnerability of strategies? To operationalise desecuritisation, I apply Lene Hansen's strategies of stabilisation, replacement, and rearticulation. The focus of the strategies is Hansen's level 2 of analysis, conducting an in-depth empirical evaluation of the trajectory of a desecuritisation case study. Aware of and because of the Western underpinnings in Hansen's framework, this work unpacks the colonial foundations of society, the role of migration to this end, regional discourses on identity and belonging, and security understandings, bringing to light the particularities of South American societal security dynamics. It is worth noting that practices of security 'are not reducible to the features of specific empirical contexts. To imagine a contextual influence on security practices is one thing; to drain rules from content because of context matters, is quite another.'[18] As suggested by Vuori, empirical explorations challenging the literature's Western bias need to retain some basic rules in order to identify a securitisation and desecuritisation instance and avoid conceptual stretching.[19] Thus, the article analyses the *process* of desecuritisation, understanding it as intersubjective and open, engaging (de)securitising actors and audiences, against regional and national understandings of society and identity.

This empirical endeavour constitutes a valuable exercise for the literature on (de)securitisation strategies and societal security and migration, especially bolstering the studies of the CS framework 'on tour' beyond the Global North. Conceptually, it brings additional understandings of societal security to desecuritisation strategies by analysing a post-colonial society, recently democratised, with a developing regional identity, and where security has a particular history of military abuses and repression. Empirically, this work yields fruitful comparative insights. While this work is by no means prescriptive and it does not generalise its findings to every Global South scenario, it does provide relevant lessons and a desecuritisation path for other 'South–South' studies beyond South America, where 'welcoming' positions to refugees have been documented (e.g. Turkey's pro-refugee approach post-2011) and where regional understandings of generosity/hospitality are at play (e.g. *karam* in Middle Eastern societies).[20] Further, this work reveals the extent to which the desecuritisation of refugees in South America *differs (or not)* from Global North experiences, expanding the existing literature.[21]

[16]Mariana Selister Gomes and Renata Rodrigues Marques, 'Can securitization theory be saved from itself? A decolonial and feminist intervention', *Security Dialogue*, 52:5 (2021), pp. 78–87.

[17]Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Léonard, and Jan Ruzicka, '"Securitization" revisited: Theory and cases', *International Relations*, 30:4 (2016), pp. 494–531; Adam Côté, 'Agents without agency: Assessing the role of the audience in securitization theory', *Security Dialogue*, 47:6 (2016), pp. 541–58.

[18]Thierry Balzacq, 'Legitimacy and the logic of security', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Contesting Security: Strategies and Logics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1–9 (p. 2).

[19]Vuori, 'Illocutionary logic'.

[20]Burcu Toğral Koca, 'Syrian refugees in Turkey: From "guests" to "enemies"?', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 54 (2016), pp. 55–75; Başak Alpan, 'Readmission or desecuritization? The recent migration crisis and bordering narratives and practices in Turkey', in *BordEUr: Fences, Refugee Boats, and the New Borderlands*, pp. 67–83; Dawn Chatty, 'The duty to be generous (*karam*): Alternatives to rights-based asylum in the Middle East'. *Journal of the British Academy*, 5 (2017), pp. 177–99.

[21]Ilgit and Klotz, 'How far does "societal security" travel?'.

The article is structured in six sections. I will first address the theoretical framework, followed by an overview of South America's identity, society, and belonging. I will then address the methodology in the fourth section to set the scene for the empirical analysis in the fifth. The final section discusses the findings and provides concluding remarks.

Theoretical framework

Securitisation and desecuritisation

According to the CS, security is constructed when an actor with enough social capital declares that an issue is a threat and dictates emergency measures accordingly, with the approval of an audience.[22] The framework offers the possibility of constructing security issues in the political, environmental, societal, and economic sectors, in addition to the military sector. Drawing from speech act theory, securitisation gave prevalence to verbal forms of communication to transform an issue into a security concern. Security, from this lens, is a self-referential practice where 'the utterance itself is the act'.[23] However, securitisation is also an *intersubjective process* in which the securitising actor and audience engage in an exchange to establish a shared understanding of threats. Here lies the centrality of the audience: without their acquiescence, the actor's attempt to securitise remains a securitising move.[24] As much as it is possible to invest an issue as a security matter, it is also possible to move the issue away from such terms, via desecuritisation.[25]

Once an issue has been securitised, there is a transition from 'normalcy' into emergency mode. Normalcy happens in a public sphere of openness, bargaining, and deliberation where the usual course of politics takes place.[26] For Wæver, desecuritisation is about returning the issue to the realm of normalcy because 'transcending a security problem by politicizing it cannot happen through thematization in security terms, only away from such terms'.[27] The means to downgrade an issue from securitisation into the normal sphere is by adopting public policy, governmental decision-making, resource allocations, or communal governance.[28] Hence, desecuritisation downgrades a security issue to 'normalcy'. Pondering the normative implications of securitisation and desecuritisation,[29] the CS highlighted the potential of desecuritisation as a more optimal long-term, 'ideal', and 'effective' process.[30]

Contemporary studies of desecuritisation have expanded its scope. For instance, according to Huysmans, desecuritisation has a transformative capacity, 'unmaking' institutionalised and public portrayals of threatening images and altering the organisation of the political.[31] For Balzacq, desecuritisation is one modality of contestation. The assumption is that when there are crises of legitimacy, other ideas and principles can disrupt, transform, or even radically dismantle security practices. Desecuritisation is a mechanism to challenge security formations and their dominant register of meaning, its legality, and/or consent.[32] What desecuritisation is, however, is not to be confused with its *outcome* or *how* it unfolds. Desecuritisation could have as an outcome the politicisation or depoliticisation of an issue.[33] Yet desecuritisation itself 'is not an outcome or a

[22]Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap DeWilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rinner, 1998).

[23]Ole Wæver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, in Ronnie Lipschutz (ed), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 46–86 (p. 51).

[24]Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde, *A New Framework*, pp. 25–6.

[25]Wæver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, p. 56.

[26]Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde, *A New Framework*, pp. 29–30.

[27]Wæver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, p. 56.

[28]Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde, *A New Framework*, p. 23.

[29]Ibid., p. 30.

[30]Ibid., p. 57. Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde, *A New Framework*, p. 29.

[31]Jef Huysmans, 'The question of the limit: Desecuritisation and the aesthetics of horror in political realism', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 27:3 (1998), pp. 569–89 (pp. 574–5).

[32]Thierry Balzacq, 'Legitimacy and the logic of security'.

[33]Rita Floyd, *Security and the Environment: Securitisation Theory and US Environmental Security Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

state of affairs, but rather it is a sum of actions which is to say a *process* (e.g., it involves the unmaking of security practice) that has a *desecuritized state of affairs* as its outcome'.[34] Understanding desecuritisation as a process opens the enquiry to interactions with securitisation, as logically one needs to securitise an issue in order to desecuritise it. Thus, securitisation and desecuritisation moves interact in a 'political game', as a set of tactics or strategies.[35]

Desecuritisation strategies respond to the question of *how* one desecuritises an issue. This article follows Hansen's strategies of stabilisation, replacement, and rearticulation.[36] Hansen's updated reading of Wæver's change through stabilisation describes it as slowly moving an issue out of the security discourse, allowing for 'a less militaristic, less violent and hence more genuinely political form of engagement'.[37] Through interactions, it is expected that the constructed image of the issue will eventually change.[38] Stabilisation is to activate a non-threatening identity of the 'Other' even when the broader challenge such as increased migration flows is still ongoing.[39]

The second strategy is replacement. Here, desecuritisation is 'the combination of one issue moving out of security while another is simultaneously securitised'.[40] The dilemma in replacement is whether a simultaneous securitisation is inevitable. Some scholars such as Behnke would subscribe to the view that once an issue 'fades' from the security realm, another is securitised because political communities require the Other to exist. When taking this position 'one needs to look more closely to which forms of otherness appear and disappear, and what this implies for the public sphere'.[41] Taking refugees as an example, replacement swaps refugees as a threat for a different issue or group of foreign Others. In replacement, security dilemmas endure, and hence conflicts remain unresolved, increasing the likelihood of resecuritisations.

In addition to replacement, providing a political solution can strip the security label from an issue. In rearticulation, identities transform outside the friend–enemy distinction, since bargaining and dialogue open the public sphere. Rearticulating an issue entails the 'fundamental transformations of the public sphere, and of the identity and interests of Selves and Others, that this in itself offers an antidote against new securitisations'.[42] Consequently, the public sphere (dialogue/bargaining) and the identities of 'Selves and Others' go through fundamental changes to the point of shredding the antagonistic identity of the 'Other'. This transformation of the enemy implies transforming the Self: a desecuritisation that (re)creates both identities as practices occur, while transforming their interests. Given the transformation of enemy relations of rearticulation, it might be assumed that resecuritisations are less likely. The rearticulation strategy functions, for instance, when calling for a referendum or establishing a new political agenda to reframe the securitised issue. The strategy applied to the societal sector brings promises to the possibility of maintaining non-adversarial forms of identity[43] and transforming and politicising the refugee label in non-security terms.[44] Despite the merits of rearticulation, it implies a finality: the end of securitisation

[34]Rita Floyd, 'Just and unjust desecuritization', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Contesting Security: Strategies and Logics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 121–138 (pp. 128–9).

[35]Vuori, 'Religion bites'.

[36]Silencing has been excluded due to scope and since it has received less attention in empirical analyses.

[37]Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation', pp. 539–40.

[38]Thierry Balzacq, 'The political limits of desecuritisation', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Contesting Security: Strategies and Logics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 104–121 (p. 108).

[39]Skleparis, 'A Europe without walls', p. 993.

[40]Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation', p. 539.

[41]Ibid., p. 541.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Bahar Rumelili, 'Identity and desecuritisation: The pitfalls of conflating ontological and physical security', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 18 (2015), pp. 52–74; Christopher Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, 'From fratricide to security community: Re-theorising difference in the constitution of Nordic peace', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 16:4 (2013), pp. 483–513.

[44]Roger Zetter, 'More labels, fewer refugees: Remaking the refugee label in an era of globalisation', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20:2 (2007), pp. 172–92.

and its threat associations, overlooking the dynamic quality of politics.[45] Identifying the end of a conflict represents a challenge in empirical studies analysing rearticulation.

(De)securitisation devices, agents, and audience

Securitisation, as originally coined, is a matter of language. The consensus has been, however, that such a position paints a limited view. Thus, sociological readings have posited that securitisation operates through an ensemble of discursive and non-discursive tools that are social, political, and technical.[46] The repertoire to securitise has significantly expanded to include silence, images, technologies, databases, biometrics, practices, policies, institutional arrangements, and physical actions.[47] In terms of desecuritisation, there is controversy over the use of language and the risk of resecuritisation. In Behnke's view, it is dangerous to declare that a particular issue or subject is not a security threat as it 'opens up a "language game" in which more often than not the correctness of the declaration, its implications and consequences become the topic of further debate. Hence, the issue or actor never leaves the discourse on security within which the securitization embedded it.'[48] From this perspective, denying a nexus with security does not escape the possibility of a potential security connection, which leads Behnke to conclude that desecuritisation can only take place through the absence of speech.[49] However, empirical investigations have argued otherwise. For Vuori, explicit declarations count as a desecuritising move, and 'whether or not something is successfully desecuritised may perhaps depend on a withering away, but this withering may begin with active moves'.[50] This article concerns primarily the *process* of desecuritisation; thus, it adheres to Vuori's position, recognising speeches, policies, physical actions, institutional arrangements, and technologies as possible tools for both processes.

(De)securitisation processes are intersubjective, engaging various agents. The (de)securitising agent is someone with social capital, holding a salient role in a community.[51] Although securitisation can manifest 'from below',[52] the state is still a pivotal actor in migratory issues. In South America, for instance, the executive branch regulates migration via presidential decrees,[53] reiterating the importance of governmental actors. In the CS model, the audience should approve the arguments presented by the securitising agent, separating a securitisation move from a completed securitisation.[54] Given its central role, scholars have refined the scope of the audience, agreeing that audiences are not homogeneous, fixed, or passive.[55]

[45]Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation', pp. 543–4.

[46]Thierry Balzacq, 'A theory of securitization: Origins, core assumptions, and variants', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 15–19.

[47]Lene Hansen, 'The Little Mermaid's silent security dilemma and the absence of gender in the Copenhagen School', *Journal of International Studies*, 29:2 (1998), pp. 285–306; Williams, 'Words, images, enemies: Securitization and international politics', *International Studies Quarterly,* 47:4 (2003), pp. 511–531; Didier Bigo, 'Security and immigration: Toward a critique of the governmentality of unease', *Alternatives*, 27:2 (2002), pp. 1–92; Thierry Balzacq, 'A theory of securitization'; Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School'.

[48]Behnke, 'No way out', p. 65.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Vuori, 'Religion bites', p. 191.

[51]Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde, *A New Framework*, pp. 40–1.

[52]Lisa Hammerstad, 'UNHCR and the securitization of forced migration', in Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher (eds), *Refugees in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 237–60; Monica Barthwal-Datta, *Understanding Security Practices in South Asia: Securitization Theory and the Role of Non-State Actors* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[53]Victoria Finn and Sebastián Umpiérrez de Reguero, 'Inclusive language for exclusive policies: Restrictive migration governance in Chile 2018', *Latin American Policy*, 11:1 (2020), pp. 42–61; David James Cantor, Luisa Feline Freier, and Jean-Pierre Gauci (eds), *A Liberal Tide? Immigration and Asylum Law in Latin America* (London: ILAS, 2015).

[54]Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde, *A New Framework*, pp. 25, 31.

[55]Mark Salter, 'Securitization and desecuritization: A dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11 (2008), pp. 321–49. Côté, 'Agents without agency'.

From other perspectives, the existence and decisiveness of the audience are questioned. For instance, when securitisation is read through the logic of routine, constructing security is an ongoing process of bureaucratic, everyday practices linking security professionals, private companies, new institutions, and technologies.[56] It is through these practices that the securitisation of an issue takes place, and thus, a sanctioning audience is not needed. Yet the logic of routine can coexist with the logic of urgency. Choosing one logic over the other would present an 'incomplete picture', particularly in the remit of migration.[57] In Bourbeau's account of the securitisation of migration in France, he finds that both logics share analytical grounds. Critical moments, captured discursively, can point at shifts in recurrent everyday practices, and security routines illuminate how critical junctures (or emergency declarations) translate into 'lasting legacies'.[58]

Other studies acknowledge the existence of an audience but question its decisiveness. For instance, Floyd contends that the decisive factor in a successful securitisation is action – a change in the behaviour of the securitising actor or their designated agent, rather than speech.[59] In this light, 'a "successful" securitization is the implementation of security policy into practice'.[60] The only relevant agents are the securitising actor and someone instructed to act by the latter. As success is determined by action, the audience does not play a decisive role in securitisation.[61] Recently, Floyd has recognised that only functional actors, rather than audiences, can veto securitisation moves.[62] Although Floyd acknowledges that securitisation is intersubjective, intersubjectivity is limited mainly to a securitising actor and an implementer, and secondarily to functional actors vetoing moves on behalf of others.

However, existing scholarship demonstrates that securitisation as a process involves forming a broader consensus – whichever shape this takes – on who or what is perceived as a threat.[63] As posited by Balzacq, securitisation has a socially binding dimension, since its practices respond to widely accepted values[64] beyond the worldviews of the securitising agent and implementer. Thus, there should be enough people believing that this is the best way to secure what they commonly value. Consent is necessary to implement measures and for the public to comply with the implications of the latter.[65] The manifestation of consent, therefore, comes from 'empowered' sectors of society with a direct connection to the issue and the ability to enable the securitising actor to adopt the measures to tackle the threat.[66] A way to operationalise the audience is Balzacq's conceptualisation of moral and formal support.[67] Formal support refers to the official decisions taken by public institutions (e.g. ministries, parliament, and congress), while moral support refers to the general public.[68] The notions of formal and moral audiences serve a key purpose for studies on

[56] Bigo, 'Security and immigration', p. 73.

[57] Philippe Bourbeau, 'Moving forward together: Logics of the securitisation process', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 43:1 (2014), pp. 187–206.

[58] Ibid., pp. 193–5.

[59] Rita Floyd, 'Ordinary or extraordinary measures: What, and who, defines the success of securitization?', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 29:2 (2016), pp. 677–94.

[60] Ibid., p. 685.

[61] Ibid., pp. 686, 691.

[62] Rita Floyd, 'Securitisation and the function of functional actors', *Critical Studies on Security*, 9:2 (2021), pp. 81–97.

[63] Balzacq, 'The three faces of Securitization: Political agency, audience and context', *European Journal of International Relations,* 1:2 (2005), pp. 171–201; Sarah Leonard and Christian Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience in securitization theory', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 57–76; Côté, 'Agents without agency'.

[64] Balzacq, 'Legitimacy and the logic of security', p. 3.

[65] Ibid., pp. 6–7.

[66] Balzacq, 'A theory of securitization', p. 9.

[67] Balzacq, *The three faces;* Balzacq, 'A theory of securitization'.

[68] Balzacq, 'A theory of securitization'.

migration, where societal views on belonging and security shape public opinion, party politics, and policymaking.[69]

Consent gives legitimacy to security practices, but 'it is not all or nothing; in fact, it is more productive to characterize security legitimacy as a continuum. Therein lies the organic *vulnerability* of security practices, whatever the conventions of a specific context.'[70] If confidence in practices is lost in a crisis of legitimacy, a window of vulnerability opens, allowing contestation to take place.[71] In the same way that consent is crucial to establishing a shared understanding of the threat and its legitimacy, the views of relevant audiences are pivotal to endorsing contestation. This article analyses a specific mode of contestation, desecuritisation, in a Global South case study. To apply desecuritisation beyond the Global North, it is vital to first address societal security and its 'Western' bias, followed by the underlying factors that shape the identities of Self and Other in South America.

Another stop in the (de)securitisation 'tour': Identity, society, and belonging in South America

This article builds on Wilkinson's 'on tour' analysis of securitisation to unpack questions of society, belonging, and identity in a Global South region. To this end, I will first turn to societal security as the cornerstone of (de)securitising migratory issues. The concept relies upon identity construction and preservation and delineates the boundaries of membership and belonging. Security, in terms of identity, defines what 'we are, how and why one is part of a group, thus creating the sense of belonging'.[72] Thus, a society that loses its identity will not survive because '"we will no longer be us", no longer the way we were or we ought to be, to be true to our "identity"'.[73] From this perspective, a society holds a 'high degree of social inertia, continuity across generations, strong infrastructure of norms, and values and institutions'.[74] The existential threats jeopardising society take the shape of migratory movements, culturally dominant neighbouring countries, and secessionist regional projects.[75] As posited by Wilkinson, the theory's understanding of the state, society, and identity derives from a Euro–US American point of view and suggests that their model of state and political culture can be universally applied.[76] In this vein, identities are anchored to the state, establishing an overlapping relationship between citizenship, nationhood, and ethnicity, all of which determine who are the members of society.[77] Buzan et al.'s narrow understanding of society overlooks that stability, cohesion, and continuity might not be experienced in the same manner in other contexts.[78] Further, it is not so much about the absence or lack of experience of continuity, stability, and societal cohesion but rather how some societies have been constructed based on disruption, violence, and the creation of hierarchical identities, as has happened through colonial projects. Acknowledging that gender and race, embedded in colonial histories, are structural conditions of (de)securitisation is one way in which the framework can 'save itself'.[79] The latter is vital to unpacking Self and

[69]Pietro Castelli Gattinara and Laura Morales, 'The politicization and securitization of migration in Western Europe: Public opinion, political parties and the immigration issue', in Philippe Bourbeau (ed), *Handbook on Migration and Security* (Cheltenham, Northamptom: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), pp. 273–95.

[70]Balzacq, 'Legitimacy and the logic of security', p. 5 (emphasis added).

[71]Ibid., pp. 6–8.

[72]Ole Wæver, 'Societal security: The concept', in Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan, Michael Kelstrup, and Paul Lamaitre (eds), *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe* (London: Printer Publishers, 1993), pp. 24–5.

[73]Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde, *A New Framework*, p. 23.

[74]Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde, *A New Framework*, p. 39.

[75]Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde, *A New Framework*, pp. 24–5.

[76]Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School', p. 7.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Ibid., p. 10.

[79]Gomes and Rodrigues Marques, 'Can securitization theory be saved from itself?'.

Other relations in South America and in Ecuador in particular, which underpin the construction of a security threat, and thereby its desecuritisation.

As part of the territories colonised in the Americas by the Spanish crown, South American states, albeit different, share a common history of colonialism and hierarchical identities. Colonisation brought an 'unbridgeable gap' between whiter populations and Indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples ascribed as 'Others'.[80] In the 19th century, white creoles (*criollos*) sought independence to achieve political and economic autonomy.[81] Accordingly, the structure of governance and nation-building discourses highlighted the common thread between civilisation and Europeanisation. Through *mestizaje* (racial mixing), elites mobilised the idea of national unity while diluting Indigenous and Afrodescendant identities from the imagined nation. Thus, independence shaped the polity but in relation to Europe, and governance meant bringing to the new republics (European) civilisation,[82] turning immigration into an instrument.

An open approach to immigration is not a contemporary invention in the region. For instance, post-independence, regimes liberalised migration policy in selective terms, welcoming Europeans as desirable Others or 'agents of civilisation' while restricting the arrival of non-white foreigners.[83] This open position also applied to European refugees fleeing the world wars. Chimni's myth of difference accurately illustrates this constructed image of the 'normal' refugee Other of the time, 'white, male and anti-communist'.[84] As the Cold War advanced, the US influence in Latin American countries fed restrictive views towards migration. National security required tackling the internal enemy, and to this end, repression, forced disappearances, and persecution were mobilised. In this context, political refugees started seeking protection outside the region, and migration laws followed the national security doctrine.[85] The aim at the time was to deter arrivals and control foreign populations within the territories.[86] Power relations between countries in the region and hegemonic actors fundamentally defined the meaning of security, impacting the way foreign Others and national Selves were constructed.

Regional identity discourses are another factor shaping the foreign Other. A paradigmatic example is seen during the post-neoliberal tide where regional identity became a tool to pursue integration.[87] At the discursive level, left-wing governments championed the inclusion of migrant's human rights at the core of their agenda, compiled in several South American declarations.[88] However, the apparent openness was ambiguous towards South–South migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.[89] Public opinion embraced an open policy approach while rejecting 'ethnically "unwelcome" immigrants' from disadvantaged backgrounds.[90] Against this backdrop of active identity construction, I will analyse the extent to which governmental elites can recast securitised Other identities, and if so, how.

[80]Nelson Maldonado Torres, 'Colonialism, neocolonial, internal colonialism, the postcolonial, coloniality, and decoloniality', in Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui, and Marisa Belausteguigoitia (eds), *Critical Terms in Caribbean and Latin American Thought: Historical and Institutional Trajectories* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 67–78 (p. 68).

[81]Ibid., p. 71.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Diego Acosta Arcarazo, *The National versus the Foreigner in South America: 200 Years of Migration and Citizenship Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 201.

[84]Bhupinder S. Chimni, 'The geopolitics of refugee studies: A view from the South', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 11:4 (1998), pp. 350–74 (p. 352).

[85]Adela Pellegrino, 'La migración internacional en América Latina', *Notas de Población*, 62 (1995), pp. 177–210.

[86]Acosta Arcarazo, *The National versus the Foreigner*.

[87]Ana Margheritis, 'Piecemeal regional integration in the post-neoliberal era: Negotiating migration policies within Mercosur', *Review of International Political Economy*, 20:3 (2013), pp. 541–75.

[88]Acosta Arcarazo and Freier, 'Turning the immigration policy paradox upside down?'.

[89]Ibid., p. 659.

[90]Ibid., p. 689.

Methods

Securitisation scholars have positioned case-study analyses as the primary research strategy.[91] The article brings to the fore a novel desecuritisation case study: Colombian refugees in Ecuador (2005–12). The rationale for this case selection is, first, that empirical studies on the (de)securitisation of migration have largely focused on Global North cases. Second, South America's regional identity discourses during the 'post-neoliberal' tide generate interesting insights to explore governmental responses to refugees. Third, Ecuador is the main receiving country of Colombian refugees.[92] It is important to acknowledge that although this case brings valuable findings to explorations of the framework in the Global South, it cannot be taken as a definite blueprint of (de)securitisation of (forced) migration. As Yin suggests, a case study is about analytic generalisation, where the findings apply to concrete situations rather than generalising to a universe of cases.[93] The present analysis provides a *pathway* of *how* desecuritisation operates empirically in the realm of forced migration, against South American and specifically Ecuadorian understandings of identity, society, and belonging. As such, the case could offer comparable lessons for recently democratised receiving states with a record of rights-based attitudes towards mobility and/or colonial relations with foreign actors.

According to Buzan et al., a security argument is a powerful instrument, and as such, 'it is against its nature to be hidden'.[94] Therefore, texts can be valuable sources in empirical analyses of (de)securitisation. Texts 'should appear on the scene to battle with each other for *primacy*; thus, one does not need to read everything'.[95] Consequently, the following analysis includes policies, reports, and political speeches as 'central texts' or 'major instances' of a (de)securitisation argument. The first step in the data collection was to compile a media and literature database. From this database, I was able to establish a timeline for the period under study and, accordingly, identify key speeches, policies, and legal instruments. I then searched the documents on the official sites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the Presidency, and RefWorld. The policies sampled include general migration policy instruments, asylum-specific policies, executive decrees, and constitutional provisions.

In addition, the article analyses interviews with former civil servants and NGO/IO staff conducting migration-related activities. The interviews were collected in two rounds of fieldwork in 2018 and 2019 in Ecuador.[96] The participants' lived experiences are vital to identify practices that escape the formality of legal documents and public positions adopted by the government and are indicative of how the receiving society and other sectors of the government perceived (de)securitisation at the time, complementing existing survey data. The variety of sources will enhance the validity of the findings and triangulate, which mitigates the shortcomings of a single case.[97]

To map the transition from securitisation to desecuritisation and the strategies applied by the Ecuadorian government, I conducted a three-step exercise. First, I conducted a thematic analysis from which three shifts in desecuritisation strategies emerged, expanded in Table 1 below. Second, I applied discourse analysis (DA) to extracts of speeches and interview data. DA is a suitable method to uncover 'when and how something [or someone] is established as a security threat and by whom'[98] and how discourses from the past are related to present and future discourses.

[91] Thierry Balzacq, 'Enquiries into methods', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 31–54 (p. 32).

[92] According to the UNHCR, by February 2022, Ecuador had recognised 74,320 refugees, of which 96 per cent are Colombian. See ACNUR Ecuador, 'Informe Operacional 2022', available at {https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/98701}.

[93] Robert K. Yin, 'Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations', *Evaluation*, 19:3 (2013), pp. 321–32.

[94] Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde, *A New Framework*, p. 177.

[95] Ibid. (emphasis added).

[96] Fieldwork activities were funded by the Society for Latin American Studies and the University of Aberdeen's Student Development Trust Fund. For confidentiality reasons, the participants' names have been partially anonymised.

[97] Yin, 'Validity and generalization'

[98] Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde, *A New Framework*, p. 176.

Table 1. Three shifts in (de)securitisation strategies by the Ecuadorian government (2007–12).

Shift	Transformation of the migratory agenda	Management of the asylum system	Deterrence and removal of infiltrations
Aims	Recognition of rights	Prevent	Identification and removal
Identities	Emigrant Self Equal Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other	Cautious Self Suspicious Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other	Protector Self Infiltrated Colombian Refugee Other
Rhetorical devices	Migration as tragedy Neoliberal night Mirror of pain Openness as a counter-discourse	Fears of spillover (Colombian conflict)	Uncontrolled open door Deficient asylum system Corrective duties Bogus asylum seekers
Measures	'We are all migrants' campaign National Development Plan 2007 Migration Policy, 2007 Creation of SENAMI Plan Ecuador 2007 Visa liberalisation for tourism National Asylum Policy, 2008 New constitution, 2008	Decree 1417 Decree 1635 Enhanced Registration Programme 2009–10	Raids Operation Identity New 'reception' facility Removal of refugee status Decree 1182

As Balzacq remarks, this method has 'impressive credentials'[99] and empirical studies have applied it to several issues, particularly migration.[100] Through DA, I was able to identify (i) Self–Other identities, (ii) the power relations between governmental actors, audiences, and the Colombian refugee population, and (iii) past and emerging discourses. The third step involved linking the analysis to the elements comprising each of Hansen's strategies. Table 1 synthesises the three shifts identified in the data, and their aims, identities, rhetorical devices, and measures.

Desecuritisation, strategies, and Colombian refugees in Ecuador

Securitisation of Colombian asylum seekers

Ecuador is a small state located in the north-west of South America and shares a 600 km porous border with Colombia.[101] Against the backdrop of the Washington Consensus, and like other Latin American countries, Ecuador has experienced deep economic and political instability. In the 2000s, with a recently dollarised economy and constant social unrest, Ecuador became a key country of origin for the United States and Europe and the main receiver of refugees in the region. Emigration rates reached unprecedented levels, turning remittances into the second source of income after oil.[102] Between 2 and 3 million Ecuadorians emigrated to the United States and Spain, representing 14 per cent of the economically active population and 12 per cent of the population.[103] The emigration drivers were exacerbated poverty, extreme poverty, inflation, and unemployment.[104]

The political landscape of the time was critical. From 1997 until 2005, seven presidents sat in office. In 1997, elected president Abdalá Bucaram was removed by the congress due

[99]Balzacq, 'Enquiries into methods', p. 39.

[100]Karyotis and Patrikios, 'Religion, securitization and anti-immigration attitudes'.

[101]In the following empirical sections, I will use the term asylum seeker for persons who have sought international protection, regardless of their recognised status. When using the term refugee, I refer to people who have been granted refugee status.

[102]Pellegrino, 'La migración internacional'; Banco Central del Ecuador, *Evolución de las remesas 2012* (Quito: Banco Central del Ecuador, 2013).

[103]Gioconda Herrera, María Isabel Moncayo, and Alexandra Escobar García, *Perfil migratorio del Ecuador 2011* (Quito: OIM, 2012), p. 35.

[104]In 2000, the GDP decreased, poverty and extreme poverty exacerbated, reaching 56 per cent and 21 per cent of the population respectively, inflation reached 100 per cent, and unemployment reached the highest levels ever registered.

to an alleged mental incapacity, and in 2000, Jamil Mahuad was removed by the army. In April 2005, the congress removed Lucio Gutiérrez Borbúa. All removals took place among mass protests, establishing an important precedent for future governments.[105] Against the backdrop of several domestic crises, Colombian asylum seekers arrived in Ecuador. Although the shared border has historically been a binational space where Colombians and Ecuadorians work, transit, and live, in this case, displacement was forced due to the exacerbated violence of the conflict.

The government framed the arrival of asylum seekers primarily in security terms. An important aspect in this securitisation context is the existing image of Ecuador as an 'island of peace', which denied the presence of violence within Ecuadorian territory. The end of the territorial dispute between Ecuador and Peru in 1999 reinforced the idea that there were no more external enemies, and thus the 'island of peace' persisted in the imagination of the nation.[106] The Self was an inhabitant of a 'peaceful' territory, untouched by surrounding violence in Peru and Colombia. Therefore, as early as 2002, the White Book of Defence recognised the Colombian conflict as the most concerning short-term and future security issue, and the forcibly displaced population as a consequential threat.[107]

Once Gutiérrez's term began in 2003, Colombians were framed as dangerous Others, an extension of the armed conflict. The joint Declaration between Ecuador and Colombia deployed urgent measures such as harsher entry requirements for Colombian nationals, requesting criminal records, prioritising voluntary returns, and setting up databases to cross-check 'risky' Colombian citizens who 'act against the law and intend to cross the shared border'.[108] The securitisation apparatus expanded and incorporated traditional security institutions such as the Ministries of the Interior and National Defence and the National Police of Ecuador and Colombia into migration-control duties.[109] Similarly, routine practices included requesting additional documents such as the Colombian national identity card/Andean card and rejecting asylum applications without clear justification, conflicting with international protection instruments.[110]

The government mobilised securitisation practices beyond the shared border by using economic arguments to conduct raids and limit the labour rights of Colombians.[111] For the incumbent minister of foreign affairs, it was urgent to raise migration to 'yellow alert' as Colombians 'snatched' Ecuadorian jobs.[112] Raids targeted working spaces, public spaces, and neighbourhoods.[113] Consequently, deportations escalated from 480 in 2002 to 4,770 by 2004, of which the majority were Colombian nationals.[114] Deportations and harsher entry requirements received support from the general public[115] and elites. For instance, the president of the International Affairs Commission advocated for a special travel pass for Colombians so that 'the entry of delinquents and

[105]Leon Zamosc, 'Popular impeachments: Ecuador in comparative perspective', in Luis Roniger and Mario Szchnajder (eds), *Shifting Frontiers of Citizenship in Latin America* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 237–265.

[106]Fernando Carrión, 'Una inmejorable plataforma para el crimen organizado en la Mitad del Mundo', in Ivon Guzmán (ed.), *El Contagio: El comienzo y el fin de la Isla de Paz* (Quito: Mediato, 2018), pp. 111–27 (pp. 111–12).

[107]Ministerio de Defensa del Ecuador, 'Ecuador: Libro blanco de Defensa Nacional' (Quito: Ministerio de Defensa del Ecuador, 2002).

[108]Álvaro Uribe and Lucio Gutiérrez Borbúa, 'Declaración Conjunta' (Bogotá: Comentario Internacional, 2004).

[109]Uribe and Gutiérrez, 'Declaración Conjunta', p. 182.

[110]Freddy Rivera and Paulina Larreategui, 'Políticas públicas sobre refugio en Ecuador', in Freddy Rivera, Holger Ortega, Paulina Larreategui, and Pilar Riaño-Alcalá (eds), *Migración forzada de Colombianos: Colombia, Ecuador, Canadá* (Medellín: Corporación Región, UBC, FLACSO-Ecuador, 2007), pp. 37–60 (p. 55).

[111]Rivera and Larreategui, 'Políticas públicas sobre refugio en Ecuador', p. 55.

[112]*La Hora*, 'Alerta amarilla por ilegales' (8 October 2004) available at: {https://lahora.com.ec/noticia/1000278896/alerta-amarilla-por-ilegales}.

[113]*El Universo*, 'Comenzó control a extranjeros que trabajan en el país', (1 July 2004) available at: {https://www.eluniverso.com/2004/07/01/0001/8/23FEA7C0B46B45518F778A91B5D4707D.html}.

[114]Gioconda Herrera, *Ecuador: La migración internacional en cifras* (Quito: FLACSO-Ecuador, 2008), pp. 86–7.

[115]Javier Ponce Leiva, *Historia comparada de las migraciones en las Américas* (Quito: FLACSO Ecuador, 2005).

guerrilla men that are causing insecurity and violence in Ecuador will be prevented'.[116] The infiltration discourse comprised several measures to deter arrivals and control asylum seekers within the territory, constructing the Colombian Other as dangerous guerrilla men and/or criminals, and potential job competitors.

Shift 1. Transformation of the migratory agenda: Constructing the emigrant Self and equal Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other

The first shift identified in the data is the government's transformation of the migratory agenda, and its main aim was the recognition of rights for migrant populations.[117] The main governmental actor is President Rafael Correa Delgado (2007–17), whose administration followed the post-neoliberal[118] ideological trend of the region. Accordingly, Correa sought distance from the United States and International Financial Institutions, declared Ecuador's foreign debt illegitimate, and rejected the lease of military bases for US security operations.[119] The openness of the migratory agenda began with the inclusion of emigration as a prime concern followed by Colombian asylum seekers. The Self–Other identities mobilised during this shift turned the Ecuadorian Self into an Emigrant Self, and the Colombian Asylum-Seeking Other as an Equal, challenging the infiltrations discourse.

The Emigrant Self emerged as a counter-discourse to the securitisation of South American immigration in the United States and Europe. Correa publicly challenged restrictiveness in the 'North', labelling the 2008 European Returns Directive as the 'directive of shame'.[120] The Directive had detrimental effects on the Ecuadorian diaspora, exacerbating racist and xenophobic attitudes against Ecuadorians living in Europe.[121] The Ecuadorian emigrant was ascribed as a courageous victim of the neoliberal system and the restrictive responses in their countries of abode. Correa's speeches, as seen below, show the ambivalent identity of the emigrant Self.

Correa addressed emigrants abroad as 'millions of brothers and sisters expelled from their own land in that national tragedy called migration', the 'exiles of poverty' who 'by the sweat of their brow have maintained this economy alive through remittances'.[122] The language used to construct the emigrant Self highlights the gravity of the national crisis expelling impoverished emigrants, an unwilling exodus from the polity. The subject position of excluded Ecuadorian emigrants abroad, subordinated to the Global North's restrictive frameworks, reiterated their victimhood. In return, the government became the protector of emigrants 'in any place of the planet'.[123] The economic crisis, the tense bilateral relations with the United States, and the regional discourse were key features in Correa's construction of the emigrant Self:

> Migrant brothers: this president will never forget that during the long and sad neoliberal night … Ecuador was supported by the poor, the humble, those who never received the right to work in their homeland, but never forgot, and never stopped sending remittances from abroad, nor

[116] *El Universo*, 'Congreso ecuatoriano insiste en necesidad de salvoconducto en frontera', (15 August 2004) available at: {https://www.eluniverso.com/2002/08/15/0001/678/02045971061F468F84E578E2433B66F9.html}.

[117] In the Ecuadorian context of this period, the term *politica migratoria* (migration policy) is typically used as an umbrella term for all forms of mobility. In some instances, the government uses the term asylum policy to refer to asylum seekers and refugees.

[118] Jean Grugel and Pia Riggirozzi, 'Post neoliberalism: Rebuilding and reclaiming the state in Latin America', *Development and Change*, 43:1 (2012), pp. 1–21.

[119] Liisa North, 'New Left regimes in the Andes? Ecuador in comparative perspective', *Studies in Political Economy*, 9:1 (2013), pp. 113–36 (p. 114).

[120] Rafael Correa Delgado, 'Carta del presidente Rafael Correa sobre la Directiva de Retorno dirigida a autoridades de la UE', Quito, 10 July 2008.

[121] BBC, 'Ecuador takes on "racist attack"', BBC News, available at: {http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7060006.stm}.

[122] Rafael Correa Delgado, 'Discurso de posesión del presidente Rafael Correa', Quito, 7 January 2007.

[123] Ibid.

> stopped loving the homeland, or nurturing it with their effort, with hope. To our migrant brothers, thank you, this is your government.[124]

There are various symbols alluding to the nation and belonging. Emigrants were heroic and courageous 'countrymen' from the 'homeland'. The rhetorical device of the 'neoliberal night' indicates traces of the region's ideological position. Economic contributions through remittances positioned emigrants as heroic and deserving of rights. This discursive construction of the emigrant Self was supported by new transnational policies to protect and promote emigrants' rights, encourage their return, and strengthen their links with Ecuador. The slogan 'We are all migrants' championed by the Correa administration and used in campaigns abroad captures this politicisation move.[125] Another important measure to transform the migratory agenda was the creation of the National Secretariat of the Migrant (SENAMI), as the lead institution for the planning, management, and evaluation of migration policy, primarily focused on emigration.[126]

The openness of the political agenda included other migratory groups besides Ecuadorians abroad. The agenda expanded as a matter of coherence, as elaborated by a former secretary of SENAMI, Francisco Hagó:

> we cannot talk about rights without responsibilities and the Ecuadorian state, the Ecuadorian society cannot ask to recognise rights for the diaspora without the same society recognising rights for immigrants.[127]

Another interviewee from the assembly bluntly adds:

> You could not treat the immigrant like a dog and at the same time tear your heart out when Spain asked Ecuadorians for an entry visa. No, no, you had to speak about both at the same time … and that demanded coherence.[128]

Both interviewees mention coherence as a catalyst for the expansion of the agenda. The simile of treating the immigrant 'like a dog' alludes to the previous xenophobic and exclusionary language (i.e. 'job snatchers', guerrilla men, criminals) and measures used to securitise Colombian arrivals. The metaphor of 'tearing your heart out' illustrates the emotional charge of the emigration experience and reaffirms the government's construction of emigrants as courageous victims. In parallel to the discursive moves from the government, policy changes opened the political space to other forms of mobility. For instance, Ecuador's first Migration Policy recognised the human rights of migrants and established that migration is a right.[129] The administration also eliminated tourism visas for all nationalities, advocating for the principle of freedom of movement.[130]

Another proposal was the National Development Plan (2007), which explicitly condemned the implementation of a criminalising and military approach to the 'Colombian displacement issue'. Instead, the plan focused on status regularisation, assistance, and humanitarian responses for Colombian asylum seekers.[131] A key display of such an attempt to transform the Colombian Other

[124]Rafael Correa Delgado, 'Discurso de posesión del presidente Rafael Correa', Quito, 10 August 2009.

[125]Gioconda Herrera, 'Ecuatorianos/as en Europa: De la vertiginosa salida a la construcción de espacios transnacionales', in Isabel Yépez and Gioconda Herrera (eds), *Nuevas migraciones latinoamericanas en Europa: Balances y desafíos* (Quito: FLACSO-Ecuador, OBREAL, 2007), pp. 189–214. Anna Margheritis, '"Todos somos migrantes" (We are all migrants): The paradoxes of innovative state-led transnationalism in Ecuador', *International Political Sociology*, 5 (2011), pp. 198–217.

[126]Rafael Correa Delgado, 'Decreto Ejecutivo 150–2007', Quito, Presidencia del Ecuador, 2007.

[127]Interview with Francisco Hagó, former member of the assembly, secretary of SENAMI and migrant activist, Guayaquil, 25 July 2019.

[128]Interview with former civil servant from the National Assembly, 25 July 2018.

[129]Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio e Integración, 'Política migratoria del Ecuador', Quito (2007), pp. 4–6.

[130]Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio e Integración, 'Boletin 806', available at: {http://www.ecuador.org/esp/boletines/0806_eliminacion_visas.html}.

[131]Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo, 'Plan nacional de desarrollo 2007–2010', Quito (2007).

is Correa's speech on Plan Ecuador (2007), a counter-initiative to Plan Colombia. Invoking the emigrant Self, a non-threatening identity emerged for Colombians:

> When we think about Colombian refugees, the dismay of our exiled Ecuadorians due to poverty, lack of employment, opportunities and hopes for the future, comes to our mind. They, like Colombian citizens, left everything behind: the memory, the flag, the breeze of their peoples. They left behind their family, loved ones, children, shoes, their songs.
>
> The displaced Colombians cannot look back, not because of fear of becoming a pillar of salt but because they are certain that if they do, they will forever be a forgotten coffin, a lost memory. This is why Ecuador also protects the Colombian displaced, not because of a bounty hunting game. Because we see ourselves in their mirror of pain because we cannot have double standards demanding fair treatment for our own, our fellow countrymen, and forget refugees from other nations. Because we believe there are no illegal human beings.[132]

Weaving parallels between emigration and asylum was central to including Colombian refugees in the political agenda. The loss of the nation, the injustice of displacement, and the limited agency when uprooting are common themes. Through similes and metaphors, Correa depicts Selves and Others as equals, grounded on similar predicaments stemming from the migratory experience: 'the dismay of our Ecuadorians' is the dismay of Colombians because 'They like Colombian citizens' left all behind. More tellingly, both groups see each other in the metaphoric 'mirror of pain' and share common understandings of the homeland. The extract conveys the dangers of returning to Colombia as the biblical tale of the 'pillar of salt' and ultimately facing death in a coffin. This discursive move reframed the constructed identity of Colombians as equals who share the tribulations of displacement, and whose humanity is acknowledged despite the legality of their status. However, their Otherness is retained, after all, Colombians are 'refugees from other nations' outside the political community. Besides presidential rhetoric, paradigmatic constitutional and policy changes reiterated the emerging construction of the equal Colombian Asylum-Seeking Other.

The 2008 Constitution recognised an ensemble of rights and protections for migrant and refugee populations. This desecuritisation move shows the government's rearticulation of interests from a position of control towards the recognition of rights. Approved by 63.96% of voters, the constitution redrew the understandings of nation, identity, and belonging.[133] For instance, it recognised the right to migrate (Article 40), to seek asylum, universal citizenship (Article 416.6), equality between foreigners and nationals, and it prohibited discrimination due to migratory status (Article 11.2). In terms of refugee protection, the constitution guaranteed the exercise and enjoyment of rights, humanitarian and legal assistance, non-refoulment, non-criminalisation or prosecution for illegal entry (Article 41), and the prohibition of mass expulsions (Article 66). Furthermore, domestic, regional, and international human rights instruments were of direct and immediate application (Article 11), which was especially important since restrictive secondary laws were still in force. Another example is Ecuador's Asylum Policy (2008), which addressed regularisation and local integration for the Colombian asylum-seeking population. According to the policy, the rights-based approach guaranteed the rights of people outside (Ecuadorians abroad) and inside (Colombian refugees and immigrants) the Ecuadorian territory independently of migratory status.[134]

Following the steps outlined in the methodology, I will now turn to Hansen's strategies. According to Hansen's guidelines, there are two main signs of rearticulation, the existence of a political solution and the transformation of the friend–enemy distinction. During the first desecuritisation shift, the migratory agenda in Ecuador transformed, opening the public sphere Hansen refers to. The government politicised the emigrant identity as an extension of the nation, against

[132] Correa Delgado, Discurso presentación de, (2007).

[133] Jacques Ramírez Gallegos, 'Migration policy in the new Ecuadorean constitution: Toward the formation of a transnational nation-state', *Latin American Perspectives*, 43:175–186 (2016) (pp. 175–86, p. 179).

[134] Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio e Integración, 'Política del Ecuador en materia de refugio', Quito (2008).

the backdrop of uneven power relations between the country and the region and foreign actors. Crafting the Self as courageous and a contributor to the economy justified policy changes and the creation of specialised institutions. The governmental discourse established parallels between the migratory tragedies of Ecuadorians and Colombians, who inhabit the same mirror of pain, and whose return is not possible. In this context, the political agenda opened for other forms of migration, including asylum. The governmental discourse, supported by paradigmatic constitutional and policy changes, challenged previous images of threat ascribed to the Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other, turning their identity into Equal Others. In the first shift, the political agenda opened, and the identities of Self–Other underwent significant changes, reconstructing what it meant to be a Colombian asylum seeker.

Shift 2. Management of the asylum system: Suspecting the Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other

In the second shift, the dominant theme was the management of the asylum system. Here, the main aim was to prevent a possible spillover of Colombia's internal armed conflict. The identity of the Self now includes caution and turns the previously Equal Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other into the Suspicious Refugee Other. The Angostura crisis facilitated this shift. In March 2008, the Colombian army conducted Operation Phoenix, an attack on FARC's campsite on the shared border.[135] The Correa government argued that the attack was a violation of sovereignty, while his Colombian counterpart accused Correa of having links with FARC. Both governments froze relations until 2010.[136] Amid the crisis, a discourse of uncontrolled open doors emerged.

Angostura opened fissures in the trajectory of desecuritisation. Via Executive Decree 1417, the government diluted the rights-based discourse by re-instating criminal records for Colombians as an entry requirement on the grounds of safety and public order.[137] In May 2009, Decree 1635 aimed at filtering asylum applications. Nevertheless, given the contradiction with constitutional provisions, the decree did not enter into force.[138] While the Self became a Cautious Self, the identity of the Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other fluctuated between recurrent associations with criminality and danger and subjects to be protected.

In 2009–10, the government implemented the Enhanced Registration Programme (ERP). The ERP sought to recognise minimum standards of protection for de facto Colombian refugees.[139] In a year, the programme recognised 27,740 Colombian refugees, which constituted a significant feat considering that by 2008, the total number of applications approved was 20,682.[140] The ERP achieved relative success and received international recognition as an iconic and unprecedented example of asylum protection in the region.[141] Despite the merits of the programme, in its aftermath, popular and elite discontent surfaced and ruptured desecuritisation.

The second shift in the desecuritisation of Colombian refugees was ambiguous. There were glimpses of the securitisation discourse from the Gutiérrez administration and existing attempts to maintain the politicisation of Colombian refugees via the ERP. As such, it shows synergy with Hansen's view of stabilisation. The political engagement is still present, in a 'less militaristic, less violent' manner, pushing the issue to the background. Stabilisation is about activating the Other's

[135]Hernán Moreano Urigüen, 'Frontera Ecuador–Colombia: Desarrollo, securitización y vulnerabilidades', in Grace Jaramillo (ed.), *Construyendo puentes entre Ecuador y Colombia* (Quito: FLACSO, OEA, PNUD, 2009), pp. 35–56.

[136]Moreano Urigüen, 'Frontera Ecuador–Colombia', pp. 36–8.

[137]Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana, 'Ecuador establece condiciones para el ingreso de ciudadanos colombianos a territorio ecuatoriano', available at: {https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/ecuador-establece-condiciones-para-el-ingreso-de-ciudadanos-colombianos-a-territorio-ecuatoriano/}.

[138]Coalición por las Migraciones y el Refugio, 'En el país de la ciudadanía universal: Informe sobre movilidad humana', Quito, AECID-Save the Children (2011), p. 91.

[139]Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana, 'Ecuador establece condiciones'.

[140]ACNUR, 'Refugiados en el Ecuador: Datos básicos sobre la operación de ACNUR', Quito, 2009.

[141]UNHCR, 'In northern Ecuador, mobile teams bring rights to Colombian refugees' available at: {https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2010/2/4b7d70962/northern-ecuador-mobile-teams-bring-rights-colombian-refugees.html}.

non-threatening identity even when the broader challenge is active. In this second shift, the internal armed conflict is ongoing, as is the bilateral crisis, but the government 'manages' the Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other through the ERP.

Shift 3. Deterrence and removal of infiltrations: The re-infiltrated Colombian Refugee Other

The third shift in desecuritisation's trajectory shows a retreat to the infiltration discourse. Accordingly, the main aim was to identify potential infiltrations from the ERP and remove them. The identities constructed in this shift are of Self as protectors of the political community and Infiltrated Colombian Refugee Others. The Angostura crisis opened a window of vulnerability whereby sectors of the government and the public rejected the rights-based position seen in the previous shift. By consensus, interviewees from the legislative branch, Public Defenders' Office, and the NGO sector agree that there was a generalised perception that guerrilla, paramilitary, and criminal elements had successfully infiltrated the country given the expedient and flexible recognition process of the ERP.[142] For instance, the general district attorney described the refugee status as a 'protective shield' to break the law and commit crimes,[143] while the undersecretary of migratory affairs believed that the infiltration of criminals was an 'evident' consequence of the ERP.[144] The testimony of an interviewee who participated in the ERP is illuminating:

> The ERP moves forward and there is a constant doubt, a feeling that we [the government] had opened the door too much … Various cases were revised later by the Commission because many people I believe did not, did not necessarily deserve status and this casts doubts for the state: 'so, I have opened the door and I believe I recognised more [people] than I should have'.[145]

The infiltrations discourse seen in the Gutiérrez administration now takes a new form, tied to the 'open doors' metaphor. The identity of the Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other acquired a new understanding morphing into an Infiltrated Refugee Other. Power relations change accordingly, diluting the protection needs of refugees in favour of depictions of deceit and danger, questioning the trustworthiness of the refugee status. In this vein, the cautious Self became protective, mobilising urgency language and measures. For the president, Colombian refugees recognised in the ERP were infiltrated criminals, demonstrating the widespread support for the infiltration discourse:

> It [the ERP] had deficiencies, there were abuses, it was not well-controlled … before, anyone presented an asylum application, there were too few requirements. Sometimes delinquents sought asylum and they became refugees. This is coming to an end.[146]

Correa's infiltration discourse constructs the categories of bogus and legitimate applicants, a central device to tighten the asylum process and mobilise a set of restrictive measures. The need to revise and filter the bogus, potentially dangerous 'Other' contrasts with the discourse of equality and recognition championed in the first shift. The Other, whose migratory experience was allegedly similar to the Self and who deserved rights, became the threatening Other associated with criminality and abuse of the asylum system.

[142]Interview with former civil servant, National Assembly, Quito, 25 July 2018; Interview with former civil servant, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Quito, 27 July 2018.

[143]Diana Mejía, 'La institucionalidad de la Fiscalía en la frontera norte: Hacia la prevención y sanción del delito', *Fronteras: Programa de Estudios de la Ciudad*, 2 (2010) pp. 2–4.

[144]*El Universo*, 'Delincuencia motiva depuración del plan de visa de refugiados', (27 June 2011) available at: {https://www.eluniverso.com/2011/06/27/1/1355/delincuencia-motiva-depuracion-plan-visa-refugiados.html}.

[145]Interview with former coordinator and officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commerce, and Integration, former NGO officer, and former civil servant of the Executive Branch, Quito, 10 July 2019.

[146]*El Universo*, 'Correa señala que se endurece requisitos para conceder estatus de refugiado', (25 June 2011) available at: {https://www.eluniverso.com/2011/06/25/1/1355/correa-senala-endurece-requisitos-conceder-estatus-refugiado.html}.

The receiving society supported the infiltration discourse. Colombian refugees in Ecuador were perceived as criminals, drug traffickers, and guerrilla members, and Colombian women as sex workers.[147] In a survey conducted at the time, 73.1% of the population believed that foreigners generated insecurity, 64.2% had a bad or very bad opinion about Colombians, and 65.1% disagreed with flexible entry for foreigners. Yet border controls (65.9%) and deportations (49.4%) were welcomed.[148] In the experience of a former civil servant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as migration control intensified, locals voiced their rejection of the ERP:

> Ecuadorians came to our offices to complain because we gave visas to refugees. For them, Colombians 'were thieves and scammers'.

> Every night, every bus that passed by was stopped. Sniffer dogs searched the luggage on the bus, they looked for weapons, drugs, and migrants. And what are you looking for? I asked, and they replied 'Weapons, drugs, and migrants'.[149]

The return of the infiltration discourse took the form of raids, detentions, and policy changes to filter 'bogus applicants'. The raid Operation Identity, for instance, targeted Colombian and Cuban persons.[150] The most salient measure was Decree 1182 from 2012, which limited the lodging time frame of applications to 15 days, removed the extended definition of refugee, and allowed the removal of refugee status. In practice, the removal of status targeted the cases recognised in the ERP. Likewise, the decree incorporated a security provision to reject applications when there are 'founded reasons to consider that [the applicant] has committed crimes in Ecuadorian territory' or 'considered as threatening security or public order' (Article 26). Finally, given the increased focus on control, the Ministry of the Interior set up a private hotel as a Temporary Reception Shelter (known as Hotel Carrión, Centro de Acogida Temporal) to host applicants. However, in practice, the shelter operated as a detention facility.[151]

The main characteristic of this shift is the re-emergence of the infiltration discourse, diluting the fragments of the rights-based position seen in the second shift. As prescribed by Hansen, the risk of stabilisation is having a broader issue in the background. The ERP underwent a 'crisis of legitimacy' in the aftermath of Angostura. Moral audiences and public authorities manifested their dissent towards the ERP and the 'open doors' position, vouching for stricter measures. Correa himself pointed at the deficiencies of the ERP and warned about possible infiltrations, which justified the persistent deployment of securitising measures to identify, filter, and remove the infiltrated and bogus Colombian Refugee Others. As the data demonstrates, resecuritisation undermined the managerial strategy of stabilisation.

Further remarks

The 'open doors' moment in Ecuador demonstrates that, albeit temporarily, the desecuritisation of asylum seekers and refugees is possible. Desecuritisation involves the re-politicisation of securitised actors or issues. For Buzan et al., 'politicization means to make an issue appear to be open, a matter of choice, something that is decided upon' as part of public policy, demanding resources

[147] Pilar Riaño Alcalá and Marta Inés Villa, *Poniendo tierra de por medio: Migración forzada de colombianos en Colombia, Ecuador y Canadá* (Medellín: Corporación Región, 2008); Stuart Schussler, *Entre la sospecha y la ciudadanía: Refugiados colombianos en Ecuador* (Quito: FLACSO Ecuador, 2009); Carlos Ortega and Oscar Ospina, *No se puede ser refugiado toda la vida …* (Quito: FLACSO-Ecuador, 2012).

[148] Beatriz Zepeda and Luis Verdesoto, *Ecuador, las Américas y el mundo 2010: Opinión pública y política* (Quito: FLACSO Sede Ecuador, 2010), p. 105.

[149] Interview with former civil servant of the Refugee Directorate, Quito, 16 July 2018.

[150] Javier Arcentales, *Cuadernos de protección: Garantías jurisdiccionales y migraciones internacionales en Quito* (Quito: ACNUR, UASB, 2014), pp. 289–90.

[151] Global Detention Project, 'Global detention report: Immigration detention in Ecuador', Geneva (2015).

and decision-making.[152] In this case, a rights-based approach to emigration, immigration, and asylum *politicised* Colombian asylum seekers and refugees, downgrading the issue from the securitised realm. Desecuritisation relied upon rhetorical, legal, and institutional changes, reflecting the government's ideological stance and alignment with the regional discourse. Importantly, the reconfiguration of the 'threatening' Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other took place in parallel to the politicisation of Ecuadorian emigrants in the Global North. Thus, welcoming Colombian asylum seekers became a matter of coherence in contrast to the restrictive legal systems and xenophobia that Ecuadorians experienced abroad. The creation of specific policies and institutions addressing migration and asylum is not only a sign of politicisation but also evidences a departure point from the previous securitisation apparatus, regulated by an obsolete Migration Law from the 1970s which enshrined the national security doctrine and where traditional security institutions led migration matters. An iconic example of Ecuador's rights-based desecuritisation is the 2008 Constitution. The constitution was a product of deliberation in the constituent assembly and had support from the public as seen in the referendum results. It incorporated paradigmatic provisions such as the right to migrate and seek asylum, equality between nationals and foreigners; it prohibited discrimination due to migratory status, decriminalised illegal entry, and acknowledged the protection and exercise of rights for refugees. Another distinctive measure was the 2008 Asylum Policy and the implementation of the Enhanced Registration Programme (ERP) (2009–10), recognising the status of 27,740 Colombian refugees.

There were three shifts in the trajectory of desecuritisation, bringing relevant insights into our empirical understanding of Hansen's strategies and the transitions between securitisation and desecuritisation. In the first shift, desecuritisation emerged via the transformation of the migratory agenda. Against the expectations of a managed transitional period before a desecuritisation,[153] in this case, there was an abrupt move from securitisation to desecuritisation via rearticulation, the most 'radical'[154] or transformative strategy.[155] Multiple policies were enacted during this short period including the new constitution, aligning with Hansen's view of rearticulation as 'actively offering a political solution to the [perceived] threat'.[156] The government's framing of the emigrant Self as a courageous victim of the 'neoliberal night' and the 'tragedy' of migration paved the way for a new perception of Colombian Others. Here, the identity of the Other transitioned from infiltrated guerrilla members and criminals to equals who share the 'tragedy' of uprooting, in a 'mirror of pain'. Colombian asylum seekers became non-threatening Others, outside the friend–enemy relations.

As Hansen observes, there might be voluntarism and power dynamics shaping rearticulation. The rights-based approach used in rearticulation could be interpreted as an instrument in the bilateral tensions, since the government portrayed Plan Ecuador as the antithesis of Plan Colombia. The politicisation of emigration, in addition to regional and binational factors, allowed rearticulation to take place. Another less explicit factor is the shared historical, linguistic, and cultural affinities between Ecuador and Colombia. In particular, the shared border has been a space where inhabitants from both sides of the border coexist and where national identities are more difficult to untangle.

In the second shift, the government focused on managing the asylum system. As bilateral relations worsened, the trajectory of rearticulation devolved into stabilisation. This moderate strategy unfolded as Colombian asylum seekers continued moving outside of the security discourse, while the bilateral crisis loomed in the background.[157] To prevent infiltrations, the government attempted to request criminal records before entry and modify the asylum procedure via executive decrees.

[152] Buzan, Wæver, and DeWilde , *A New Framework*, pp. 23, 29.

[153] Paul Roe, 'Reconstructing identities or managing minorities? Desecuritizing minority rights: A response to Jutila', *Security Dialogue*, 37:3 (2006), pp. 425–38.

[154] Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation', p. 543.

[155] Balzacq, 'The political limits of desecuritisation', p. 109.

[156] Hansen, 'Reconstructing desecuritisation', p. 542.

[157] Ibid., pp. 539–40.

These legal moves aimed at limiting the 'open doors' approach. However, the political space was not fully constrained as Colombian asylum seekers continued to be politicised. Despite glimpses of the security narrative, the Correa administration implemented the mass Registration Programme (ERP, 2009–10), pushing desecuritisation's trajectory forward. Consequently, the identity of the equal Colombian Asylum-Seeker Other became ambivalent, tapping into previous associations with the internal armed conflict.

The third shift was about deterrence and removing perceived infiltrations marked by a general rejection of the ERP. A relevant finding here is that Angostura prompted a crisis of legitimacy for the ERP, confirming that consent is central to securitisation and desecuritisation processes.[158] Formal and moral audiences bluntly rejected the outcome of the ERP (i.e. the recognition of Colombian refugees). The crux of the rejection was the perceived sheer number of refugees recognised in the programme, which allegedly opened the door to infiltrated criminals. Accordingly, there were sexist, xenophobic, and discriminatory reactions to Colombian refugees. Discursively, the Colombian Refugee Other was deemed as an infiltrated criminal, abusing the asylum system. Considering the audiences' disapproval, the government deployed measures of control which mimicked the infiltration discourse from the Gutiérrez administration. Raids, harsher entry requirements, stricter rules for the asylum procedure, the removal of status, and the creation of a processing facility evidenced the return to securitisation. The fragments of the infiltration discourse advanced in the securitisation stage show that the issue was no longer managed through the normal course of politics but taken to the realm of urgency.

To conclude, this article's aims were to analyse the trajectory of desecuritisation strategies in a Global South case study, Colombian asylum seekers and refugees in Ecuador (2005–12). The article offers an overview of the factors that enabled and constrained the trajectory of desecuritisation strategies. One of the factors that enabled rearticulation was the ideological cleavage in the region and its respective shift in migration policy. In this case, the Ecuadorian government crafted the rights-based position as a counterforce to the securitarian approach in the Global North, reaffirming the value of recognising differential power relations between the North and South. Another enabling condition was the Ecuadorian context of democratic invigoration in migration politics. Here, the politicisation of emigration might explain the continued move towards the inclusion of Colombian asylum seekers in the agenda. This factor is particularly interesting because the openness of the public sphere and recognition of human and political rights are no guarantees of pro-immigration reforms, as seen in other Global South settings.[159]

There were two constraining factors in the trajectory of desecuritisation. First was the bilateral crisis with Colombia, and second, as the ERP ended, formal and moral audiences bluntly rejected the initiative. The lack of consent from audiences undermined the legitimacy of the ERP, putting the stabilisation strategy to test. The latter proved to be decisive given the re-emergence of the infiltrations discourse and the plethora of securitising measures that ensued. Therefore, while the question of whether resecuritisation is inevitable remains unanswered, the analysis confirms that stabilisation is prone to securitisation. The centrality of the audience in this analysis reaffirms Balzacq's contention that consensus is needed to legitimise practices and construct/recast shared meanings.

This study has provided a narrative of desecuritisation in an under-explored region, contributing to the conceptual exploration of desecuritisation strategies in the societal sector and the empirical analyses of (forced) migration beyond the Global North. The analysis brings to the fore interesting findings with comparative implications. For instance, the (re)securitisation of Colombian asylum seekers and refugees in Ecuador focused on nationality rather than other dimensions of identity, as it is typically identified in European societies where culture, religion,

[158] Balzacq, 'Legitimacy and the logic of security'.

[159] Katharina Natter, 'Tunisia's migration politics throughout the 2011 revolution: Revisiting the democratisation–migrant rights nexus', *Third World Quarterly*, 43:7 (2022), pp. 1551–1569.

and ethnic background are more explicitly addressed.[160] In a similar vein, the Ecuadorian government did not recall religious arguments to set in motion desecuritisation, as seen in Turkey's Islamic discourse of hospitality and ethnic kinship.[161] However, in terms of securitisation, the tools deployed by the Gutiérrez and Correa administrations are similar to those of the European Union, including a recurrent association with criminality.[162] While this case has paved the way to locate desecuritisation in South America, there is potential for future comparative studies with other countries during the post-neoliberal wave and in its aftermath, especially as new refugee groups in the region continue to arrive from Venezuela. Furthermore, given the salient role of the audience, another way forward for desecuritisation studies is turning to receiving societies and how they perceive and embrace diversity. This analytical move is especially important in less homogeneous societies where various identities coexist. Be it *interculturalidad* in Latin America or *karam* in Islamic societies,[163] the (de)securitisation 'tour' should continue expanding the geographical scope of the framework.

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[160] Ayse Ceyhan and Anastasia Tsoukala, 'The securitization of migration in Western societies', *Alternatives*, 27 (2002), pp. 21–39.

[161] Alpan, 'Readmission or desecuritization?'.

[162] Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity*, *Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006).

[163] Chatty, 'The duty to be generous'.

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