The edited collection of essays, *Segurança, Liberdade e Política: pensar a Escola de Copenhague em Português* (Security, Liberty and Politics: thinking the Copenhagen School in Portuguese), organised by Maria Raquel Freire and André Barrinha, provides a critical engagement with the theoretical framework advanced by the Copenhagen School as seen from unconventional places. Though some of the chapters deal with traditional topics and sub fields of international politics, such as armed conflict, migration and regionalism, their approach and research questions convey a different understanding of the problems and prospects of reading politics through the lenses of securitisation processes. Written in Portuguese and combining chapters whose authors navigate (personally or professionally) the lusophone world, the book aims at assessing and filling a gap in how critical security studies (CSS) have travelled to and been appropriated by scholars in the south (of Europe and the Americas). Clearly situated outside the conventional Anglo-American dyad of IR, the book also offers a refreshing take on how an expanded and focused research agenda on processes of de/securitisation can advance our conceptual tools and assist us in better understanding empirical phenomena.

Published by Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, the publisher of the University of Lisbon, the book is organised in three parts. Part I deals with ‘(de)securitisations’, encompassing five chapters that analyse and apply a performance-based understanding of security to non and supra state actors as well as specific issue areas such as private violence and immigration. Part II does what its title suggests: a critical assessment of the concept of ‘regional security complexes’ as seen from the periphery. Latin America, the Western Balkans and Morocco provide the geo-historical location of these critiques. Part III concludes the collection with a sociologically oriented take on the Copenhagen School’s contemporary legacy in light of the increasing epistemological and theoretical plurality in security studies.

The book starts off with an introductory note by Stefano Guzzini that digests the oeuvre’s main concept – de/securitisation. Guzzini provides an overview of what he defines as a ‘dual history of securitisation’. On one hand, if we are to speak of a theory of securitisation, we need to be aware of its own historical background, namely that of the emergence of a conceptual approach later known as the Copenhagen School and its direct contextual underpinnings (the imminent end of the Cold War and a
response to the strategic studies understanding of security). On the other hand, to analyse securitisation processes, Guzzini argues, we also need to understand how the “discourse of security acquires its inherent logic” (p. 21). In that sense, securitisation processes are not merely derived from certain speech acts, but rather constitute a performance process. This has important consequences for any analysis since “a security discourse always leads to securitization, but a security discourse is not always mobilized or prevalent, since it is a discursive resource for some. For such discourse to have this capacity it has to be a constitutive component of the way of thinking and legitimating politics for all” (p. 24). In other words, de/securitisation processes are as much about security as they are about political legitimacy. The cultural politics of such processes acquires, consequently, a central role in how security is performed and enacted. The chapters that follow provide an attempt to tackle the performance and cultural dimensions of de/securitisation processes in what can be tentatively framed as a Portuguese speaking view on specific empirical and conceptual security problems and threats.

Many of the contributors reflect on the relevance and applicability of the conceptual framework of the Copenhagen School (CS), particularly in relation to four points of critique or engagement. The first refers to CS’ state-centrism and its consequences for broadening the study of de/securitisation processes. Brandão, for example, analyses how (and whether) one can apply the Copenhagen School ‘tool kit’ to the case of the European Union’s agenda regarding transnational terrorism. The specific nature of a supranational institution such as the EU – where decision-making processes are multilevelled and often fragmented – seems ill-suited for a theory that has the state as its central actor. The same seems to apply to other issue areas within the regional agenda, as Herz and Coutinho point out, in relation to the study of Latin America as a regional security complex. Similarly, Oliveira’s chapter points to the importance of private actors, connected to the maritime industry, in enacting Somali piracy as an international security problem. In fact, he argues, insurance companies, transportation services and a whole range of private institutions were the first assemblage of forces to push forward the understanding of Somali piracy as an international threat. The fact that it resonated with a particular international and national actors’ agenda as well as the specific circumstances of the Somali case allowed for its successful enactment.

The second dimension lies in CS’ reliance on a discursive mode of analysis. Though it is important to understand how particular narratives of threat and enmity are constructed, such an emphasis silences the importance of other forms of linguistic engagement and the ways in which materiality affects power relations and positions. Santos uses the role of social communication media as a desecuritising actor. She argues that what defines an actor is not its identity, “but the way it works and the results it obtains” (p. 182). As such, despite deprived of a coherent or monolithic self, the media has a performance subjectivity granted by its power of mediation, its ‘social authority’ and its diverse discursive and extra discursive force. In fact, one of media’s resources to construct political influence and legitimacy lies precisely in the use of visual language. These characteristics allow such institutionalised forms of social communication to enable or disable particular ways of making and enacting security. Political legitimacy is also central to Barrinha’s argument about the relationship between securitisation and armed conflict. Barrinha’s pivot line states (and reiterates Guzzini’s opening remarks) that processes of desecuritisation
are central to any analysis of conflict transformation. In a way, Santos’ take on media provides an empirical case for Barrinha’s general argument.

The third point focuses on the linkage between securitisation and desecuritisation as interrelated processes and on what we can frame as a ‘politics of scale’ inherent in the CS’ view of security. Mateus’ chapter on border and migration policies in the EU shows precisely how these two facets are central to the enactment of a porous yet controlled EU external border. A dual logic of immigration policies articulated in the binary opposition of wanted/unwanted, legal/irregular movement articulates concomitantly a securitised and a desecuritised take on mobility flows. This enacts a particular understanding of where, how and what EU borders should be: simultaneously permeable (for desired foreign workers and tourists) and impenetrable (to undocumented migrants and asylum seekers). Cierco’s chapter on the Western Balkans as a sub-regional security complex echoes this dialogical ambiguity. The location of the Balkans as both inside and outside of Europe geographically and politically is implemented through interdependent de/securitising moves. In that sense, the Balkans are a highly ambiguous ‘partner’ of the EU: a potential source of permanent threat, a necessary cooperating partner in relation to transnational security agendas and an area in transition (to Western values and modes of political operation). Scaling up and down the locus of the Balkans in EU de/securitisation discourses enables the sub-region to be concurrently constructed as threat, referent object, security actor and audience.

The fourth, concluding and potentially more disruptive, source of dispute with the Copenhagen School lies in the relationship between de/securitisation and politics. This is a point advanced in Part III and in some of the contributors’ chapters, particularly in Messari’s reading of Morocco/EU relations and in Barrinha’s essay on conflict transformation. A central aspect of Messari’s critique of the Copenhagen School is the strategic use of de/securitisation processes. He argues that one of CS’ major drawbacks is to separate security from politics (a critique that echoes Guzzini’s emphasis on the performance and legitimacy aspects of securitisation). Using an empirical study, Messari shows that Morocco uses its cooperation with the EU and the United States to advance its own political interests. For example, by aligning itself with a Western agenda of anti-terrorism, Morocco constructs its identity as a reliable global partner but also legitimates its own policies against ‘internal threats’. There are, he argues, “in Moroccan security policy, goals outside of the field of security … securitisation should not, therefore, be considered an exceptional tool, but rather one of the many tools available in the political playing field” (p.258). In the Moroccan case, there is autonomy in dependency, and securitisation or desecuritisation are always part of a political process. By enacting a securitised agenda, Morocco is “neither assimilated, nor coopted”. Taken to its limit, Messari’s argument is fatal to a conventional reading of CS, since, as pointed out by Carrapiço and Pinéu, if “an act of securitisation is not an abnormal act [not an exceptional negative act], but rather an act characteristic of political practice, then the possibility of desecuritising an object no longer makes sense” (p. 278).

To bring the political back in requires not only reframing the concept of security but to move “beyond securitization” (p. 272). One element that seems particularly problematic refers to the temporal dimension of security practices. For example, the rise of technology and the temporal disconnections they produce in terms of a linear conception of past, present and future tend to disrupt the more conventional view
of recurrence and stability that lie beneath the Copenhagen School’s conception of securitisation. Such transformations make it harder, empirically, to understand the articulation between ‘securitisation speech acts’ and the myriad of discursive and extra-discursive phenomena upon which a successful broadening of security depends. Similarly, hybrid subjectivities, such as those of peripheral states, regional complexes and supranational arrangements, defy the traditional limits of security practices and the unitary conceptions of securitising actors, as defended by the CS. Such elements make it harder for de/securitisation theoretical constructs to travel.

The effort of thinking ‘security’ from and for the periphery lies way beyond the replication and adaptation of conceptual kits and theoretical approaches such as those provided by the Copenhagen School. It requires a serious engagement with (and at certain points refusal of) the not-so-hidden epistemologies they carry. In conclusion, the book brings to the fore a serious effort to reflect upon and engage with the contribution of CS to security studies in the South. There is no agreement among contributors about the conceptual utility or empirical applicability of CS proposals to the new realities of contemporary security politics. But there is no denying the Copenhagen School’s influence in the current security research agenda, a fact attested by the publication of this volume.