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Liquid Fear, Agency and the (Un)conscious in Securitisation Processes: The Case of the UK's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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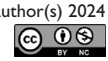
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Abstract

Scholarship on securitisation in International Relations is stratified into different strands of research that compartmentalise fear into narrow logics that focus on either its agential or unconscious aspects. We take Zygmunt Bauman's notion of 'Liquid Fear' to develop a framework that offers a conceptualisation that allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between the emotion of fear and agency, intentionality and unconscious. We argue that pre-existing affective dynamics outside of individual actors' control are instrumental for securitisation to occur. Actors can attempt to stir and instrumentalise these dynamics by channelling them into particular objects, whereas every channelling always entails the risk of overflowing and unintentional side effects. We demonstrate the analytical utility of our approach through the case study of the securitisation of COVID-19 in the United Kingdom which we argue can only be understood by accounting for agential and unconscious aspects.

Keywords

anxiety, fear, ontological security, securitisation, United Kingdom, COVID-19 pandemic

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Résumé
Les études sur la sécuritisation dans les relations internationales se subdivisent en différents courants de recherche qui compartimentent la peur en logiques étriquées se concentrant soit sur ses aspects agentiels, soit sur ses aspects inconscients. Nous empruntons la notion donnée par Zygmunt Bauman de « peur liquide » pour développer un cadre qui offre une conceptualisation permettant une interprétation plus riche et nuancée de la relation complexe entre l'émotion de la peur et de l'action, l'intentionnalité et l'inconscient. Nous soutenons que les dynamiques affectives préexistantes échappant au contrôle des acteurs individuels jouent un rôle déterminant dans la sécuritisation. Les acteurs peuvent essayer de provoquer et d'instrumentaliser ces dynamiques en les canalisant vers des objets particuliers, mais chaque canalisation comporte un risque de débordement et d'effets secondaires involontaires. Nous démontrons l'utilité analytique de notre approche à travers l'étude de cas de la sécuritisation de la Covid-19 au Royaume-Uni qui, selon nous, ne peut être comprise qu'en tenant compte des aspects agentiels et inconscients.

Mots-clés
Anxiété, peur, sécurité ontologique, sécuritisation, Royaume-Uni, pandémie de Covid-19

Resumen
¿Los estudios académicos sobre la securitización en el ámbito de las relaciones internacionales se estratifican en diferentes líneas de investigación que compartimentan el miedo en estrechas lógicas centradas ya sea en sus aspectos relativos a la agencia o a lo inconsciente. Este artículo retoma la noción de «miedo líquido», desarrollada por Zygmunt Bauman, para elaborar un enfoque que ofrezca una conceptualización orientada a una comprensión más compleja y matizada de la intricada relación entre la emoción del miedo y la agencia, la intencionalidad y el inconsciente. Así, se argumenta que las dinámicas afectivas preexistentes, ajenas al control de actores individuales, son fundamentales para que se produzca una securitización. Los actores pueden intentar agitar e instrumentalizar estas dinámicas al canalizarlas en objetos particulares, pero estas canalizaciones siempre conllevan el riesgo de desbordarse y producir efectos colaterales involuntarios. Para demostrar la utilidad analítica de este enfoque, se analiza el caso práctico de la securitización de la COVID-19 en el Reino Unido, que solo puede entenderse, a nuestro parecer, cuando se consideran los aspectos relativos a la agencia y a lo inconsciente.

Palabras clave
ansiedad, miedo, seguridad ontológica, securitización, Reino Unido, pandemia de COVID-19

Introduction

Fear is arguably the most theorised emotion in the study of world politics.[1] Fear constitutes the very basis for mainstream International Relations (henceforth IR) theories[2] and it is integral to the study of securitisation, irrespective of whether it is understood in terms of emergency politics and breaking free of rules,[3] material practices of various sorts and intensities[4] or unconscious psycho-political processes.[5] Whilst these three approaches to securitisation analyse different forms of security practices, they share a common interest in the concept of fear. However, their understandings of fear have significant differences when it comes to theorisation and the matters of agency, intentionality and the unconscious, resulting in a stratification of scholarship with limited points of interaction. We can identify three different *logics of fear* in securitisation literature.

One strand of research operates through the primal *logic of fear as fight-or-flight* that individuals experience when their, or a referent object's, physical security-as-survival is threatened; this emphasises actors' agency in constructing objects of fear and the role of fear in facilitating emergency politics.[6] Another strand utilises a *logic of fear as institutionalisation*; this can be both the result of intentional actions and discursive formative moves.[7] Yet, another strand works with the *logic of fear as an unconscious psychodynamic relief mechanism* that allows for the alleviation of existential anxiety, which is experienced when one's sense of self and ontological security-as-being is under threat. Fear, in this logic, is often beyond the reach of agency and intentionality but guided by the unconscious and socio-cultural phenomena.[8]

We argue that IR's tendency to stratify and compartmentalise fear into these different logics is artificial and detrimental to understanding contemporary security dynamics and that narrow understandings of fear can undermine the explanatory power of these different frameworks.[9] Indeed, focusing exclusively on either agential or unconscious

1. Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 24.
2. Neta C. Crawford, 'The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships', *International Security* 24, no. 4 (2000): 116–56.
3. Eric Van Rythoven, 'Learning to Feel, Learning to Fear? Emotions, Imaginaries, and the Limits in the Politics of Securitization', *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 5 (2015): 458–75.
4. Didier Bigo, 'Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease', *Alternatives* 27, no. 1 (2002): 63–92; Jeff Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006); Michael C. Williams, 'The Continuing Evolution of Securitization Theory', in *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, ed. Thierry Balzacq (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 212–22.
5. Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, 'Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security in World Politics: Thinking With and Beyond Giddens', *International Theory* 12, no. 2 (2020): 240–56.
6. For an overview see Van Rythoven, 'Learning to Feel'.
7. See for example Bigo, 'Security and Immigration'; Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity*; and Williams, 'Evolution of Securitization Theory'.
8. For an overview see Kinnvall and Mitzen, 'Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security'.
9. This is not to say that all scholarship fits neatly within these stratifications, yet it largely remains the norm that one logic of fear is privileged over the other.

processes risks neglecting the far-reaching ramifications of securitisation processes, how they reverberate and with what consequences. The politics of security are enabled and driven by fear,[10] raising crucial questions regarding how objects are constructed as fearsome in securitisation processes, and the purposes that these processes serve.

To answer these questions, it is necessary to understand fear as an affective experience that is simultaneously subject to agency and intentionality, as well as to unconscious processes beyond individuals' control. Therefore, this article develops a framework that appreciates these different dynamics by synthesising the literature on *fear* and securitisation theory with the literature on the *anxiety-fear nexus* and ontological security,[11] complementing them with insights from psychoanalytic theory, sociology and emotion research in IR. Thereby, this article moves beyond the unconscious–intentionality, mind–body, ontological–physical security and anxiety–fear divides in the literature, towards a more nuanced understanding of the role of affectivity in the politics of security of the 'self-in-the-body'.[12] This contributes to the literature on fear in securitisation processes as well as to ontological security scholarship and emotion research in IR by offering a conceptualisation that allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between the emotion of fear and agency, intentionality and unconscious.

Psychoanalytic theorists[13] have compared affective dynamics to a stream or river that can be channelled, diverted, unequally dispersed or blocked altogether, as well as ebb or (over)flow. For these psychoanalysts, the dynamic liquidity of fear allows human affective experience to be conceptualised as changeable, rather than static. To contrive a conceptual language that appreciates this analogy but remains focused on securitisation dynamics, we deploy Zygmunt Bauman's conception of fear as *liquid*, emphasising its dynamism, its instability and its potential to be manipulated.[14] Liquids can accumulate, they occupy a particular space at a particular time and they can be controlled and channelled if the right tools are available, but they also react to alterations in their environment and can spill over when handled carelessly or overflow when they are insufficiently contained. Conceptually, we distinguish between anxiety and fear, the former being the accumulation of affective flows and the latter the result of channelling and containment of this liquid in a particular container, an object of fear. However, the concept of

10. Crawford, 'The Passion of World Politics'; Kinnvall and Mitzen, 'Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security'; Van Rythoven, 'Learning to Feel'.
11. Notably, both securitisation theory and ontological security theory have overlapping research interests but their different understandings of fear have not been brought into conversation.
12. See Nina C. Krickel-Choi, 'The Embodied State: Why and How Physical Security Matters for Ontological Security', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 25 (2022): 159–81. See also Kandida Purnell, 'Bodies Coming Apart and Bodies Becoming Parts: Widening, Deepening, and Embodying Ontological (In)Security in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Global Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2021): ksab037.
13. See, for example, Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), 22. Carl G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, *Volume 6: Psychological Types* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); and Jacques Lacan, *The Object Relation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).
14. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

liquid fear implies that analytical categories of anxiety and fear are inherently linked. Importantly, understanding fear as liquid has significant analytical value as it allows capturing the relationship between agency, intentionality and the unconscious which overcomes the aforementioned limitations of securitisation research.

To illustrate the analytical added value of our argument, we use the example of the UK government's securitisation of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the exact response is, of course, unique to the United Kingdom, British (de)securitisation processes were influenced by and simultaneously influenced international politics, as the pandemic was a global event that all governments had to address. These (de)securitisation processes furthermore intersected with transnational dynamics relating to migration, racism and racist imaginaries that influenced the construction of objects of fear and transcended national boundaries through global patterns and discourses. Thus, the theoretical insights we can derive from the case of the United Kingdom are relevant for securitisation dynamics more broadly. The UK case is illuminating for our argument because it involved multiple agential efforts to (de)securitise COVID-19 and the implementation and lifting of exceptional security measures in the form of national lockdowns, both of which also developed unintended and sometimes unconscious but well-documented side effects. We primarily focus on government actors to provide a deeper analysis of tangible policies related to COVID-19 and their influence on affective dynamics at the time. The case of the pandemic is illustrative in several ways, as government (in)action was motivated by both 'physical' and 'ontological' security-seeking practices. The government initially refrained from securitising COVID-19 before ultimately engaging in securitising processes once liquid fear had accumulated to a degree that required immediate government action. Once the government started to treat the virus as a security issue, it required the population to be fearful of the coronavirus for securitising moves to be successful, to enable emergency politics, and for individuals to comply with the implemented measures. Once successfully securitised by the government, fear *alleviated* widespread anxieties but also *spilled over* onto objects other than the intended targets, most significantly onto East Asian "looking" individuals as well as certain spaces. Put differently, the conscious effort to render the coronavirus fearsome resulted in unconscious and often problematic side effects that facilitated a significant increase in hate crimes. Moreover, once the security measures were lifted, there were reports of *heightened* anxiety among parts of the population that continued to avoid public spaces.[15] Overall, to explain the intricate securitisation processes at the time, we need to appreciate the interplay between conscious and unconscious processes and between concrete objects of fear and broader affective dynamics.

To develop our argument, we first review the role of fear in securitisation studies before discussing the scholarship on anxiety in IR. We then conceptualise the notion of liquid fear and how it can capture both the agential and unconscious aspects of anxiety

15. Sasha Mistlin, 'Lockdown Ending Could Trigger Anxiety for Many, Say UK Charities', *The Guardian*, 13 March 2021. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/mar/13/lockdown-ending-could-trigger-anxiety-for-many-say-uk-charities. Last accessed January 31, 2022.

and fear. Subsequently, we illustrate the analytical added value of the concept of liquid fear by applying it to the case of the United Kingdom and COVID-19.

The Three Logics of Fear

Fear and Securitisation Theory

Fear is a crucial, if tacit, part of securitisation scholarship,[16] a strand of research largely drawing inspiration from Buzan et al.'s magnum opus *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*.[17] Even though Buzan et al. have referred to fear as the 'foundational motivation' for securitisation, explicit attempts to theorise it have been limited.[18] Nonetheless, the literature is full of references to fear and this section offers an overview of its conceptualisations in the field.

Drawing on Schmittian and realist understandings of politics,[19] securitisation studies emphasise how actors, usually governments, attempt to convince relevant audiences, usually the public, of the existential threat a particular object poses, its *fearsomeness*, which, in turn, justifies the breaking free of rules and the implementation of emergency measures.[20] Instrumental here are the deliberate and strategic securitising moves by actors that attempt to deal with a political issue in concrete material and practical terms to (allegedly) ensure the *physical security* and survival of a referent object of security and to pursue their political agendas. Importantly, actors are not necessarily 'unemotional' as these deliberate and strategic securitising moves might themselves be motivated by fear.[21] Convincing an audience to fear a particular object facilitates the acceptance of securitising moves and emergency measures, whilst the failure to install fear in an audience can result in a failed securitising move.[22] Actors might consider the local security imaginary, and specific contextual factors to render their securitising moves more convincing[23] yet securitisation scholars largely neglect broader affective dynamics. Fear, in this understanding of securitisation as exception,[24] is conceptualised

16. See Van Rythoven, 'Learning to Feel' for a comprehensive overview.
17. Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998).
18. Ibid., 26.
19. Michael C. Williams, 'Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics', *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2003): 511–31.
20. Van Rythoven, 'Learning to Feel'. We understand the differentiation between actors and audiences as a heuristic device, because actors can be audiences and members of the audience can be actors.
21. Buzan, Weaver and De Wilde, *Security*, 26.
22. Van Rythoven, 'Learning to Feel'.
23. Thierry Balzacq, 'The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context', *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 2 (2005): 171–207; Holger Stritzel, 'Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond', *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 3 (2007): 357–83; Van Rythoven, 'Learning to Feel'.
24. Phillipe Bourbeau, 'Moving Forward Together: Logics of the Securitisation Process', *Millennium* 43, no. 1 (2014): 187–206.

as socially constructed through securitisation processes and ultimately created by the respective securitising actor. Moreover, the political implications of fear are theorised through the primordial psychological *logic of fight-or-flight*. Fear is argued to be sparked by one particular input, an existential threat to a referent object's physical or ontological security, and has one particular output, emergency politics and the breaking free of rules of normal everyday politics.

However, many securitisation scholars have moved away from the understanding of security as an exception, emergency and struggle for survival[25] as security 'cannot be tied exclusively to extremity and emergency, but comprises a wider spectrum of intensification, including unease and risk, and a variety of institutional settings and practices for its enactment'.[26] What security practices have in common, thus, is not that they constitute a form of emergency politics, but that they are all connected to different registers of *fear*.[27] However, in this understanding, fear is not a specific emotion category, in the psychological sense, that is engendered by specific stimuli with pre-defined universal outcomes (e.g. fight or flight). Rather, it is an ambiguous affective experience that is subject to political agency and takes on different shapes and intensities. Fear is conceptualised as a pervasive, permanent, normal and routinised condition in liberal societies which takes multiple forms and is not inherently negative, as it both facilitates and constrains securitising moves and security politics.[28] Nonetheless, this fear is often managed and regulated by techniques of government and bureaucratic apparatuses by channelling them in discourses, such as on migration, to structure social relations.[29] Overall, in the understanding of securitisation as routine,[30] fear operates through the *logic of institutionalisation* and functions as a political resource. Whilst not artificially created by actors, fear can nonetheless be strategically utilised and manipulated for various political ends. As such, it is integral to the politics of security because it can both facilitate and inhibit securitisation processes.

Overall, securitisation scholars contrive an instrumental approach to fear that emphasises securitising actors' agency and intentionality in material securitisation processes. These different logics are useful not only because they speak to different aspects of securitisation but also because they demonstrate the importance of affectivity in the politics of security. Yet, these approaches neglect the role of non-intentionality and affective dynamics beyond the concrete emotion of fear. Put differently, the unconscious affective

25. For an overview see T. Balzacq, ed., *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (London: Routledge, 2011).
26. Williams, 'Evolution of Securitization Theory', 218.
27. Ibid., 218–9.
28. Michael C. Williams, 'Securitization and the Liberalism of Fear', *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4–5 (2011): 453–63; Eric Van Rythoven, 'A Feeling of Unease: Distance, Emotion, and Securitizing Indigenous Protest in Canada', *International Political Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2021): 251–71.
29. Bigo, 'Security and Immigration'; Clara Eroukhmanoff, *The Securitisation of Islam: Covert Racism and Affect in the United States Post-9/11* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019); Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity*.
30. See Bourbeau, 'Logics of the Securitisation Process'.

processes which enable and underlie securitisation processes remain undertheorised and underexplored. This unconscious aspect, however, has been discussed extensively by scholarship concerned with anxiety in IR.

The Anxiety-Fear Nexus in Ontological Security Theory

For existentialists and psychoanalytic theorists, anxiety is an ever-present condition and part of human subjectivity that originates in uncertainty, as both an individual and social experience.[31] The field of ontological security studies (OSS) has translated these insights into the field of IR and developed a thriving field of research. In the process, OSS has developed a nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms associated with securitisation processes by emphasising the role of anxiety and its derivatives.[32]

Yet, securitisation has been understood in remarkably different terms. OSS conceptualises security-as-being, which is contrasted with securitisation theory's understanding of physical security-as-survival.[33] The difference is both the referent subject, in the case of the former it is the sense of self, often operationalised as the integrity or stability of certain identities, practices and routines; in the case of the latter, the physical body or embodiment of the referent subject, as well as the affective reaction to the experience of threat, anxiety and fear respectively.[34] The fundamental difference between the affective experience of anxiety and fear is their resolution, which has far-reaching political implications. Fear always has an object and necessitates immediate action to address the source of fear which renders it attractive to political entrepreneurs (see above), whereas anxiety requires resolution but is impossible to act upon; hence, its alleviation takes the form of unconscious psychological mechanisms.

Anxiety is derived from uncertainty and has no (representational) object to it, rather it is a concern with an unknown 'something'.[35] Since it is concerned with uncertainty, the 'something' of anxiety is not actionable. Yet, in everyday life, the experience of anxiety is successfully managed and avoided through the enactment of routines, habits and practices that provide subjects/individuals with a sense of stability, continuity and certainty.[36]

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31. See, for example, Ali Bilgic and Jordan Pilcher, 'Desires, Fantasies and Hierarchies: Postcolonial Status Anxiety through Ontological Security', *Alternatives* 48, no. 1 (2023): 3–19; Bahar Rumelili, '[Our] Age of Anxiety: Existentialism and the Current State of International Relations', *Journal International Relations and Development* 24 (2021): 1020–36; Marco A. Vieira, '(Re-)imagining the 'Self' of Ontological Security: The Case of Brazil's Ambivalent Postcolonial Subjectivity', *Millennium* 46, no. 2 (2018): 142–64.
32. Kinnvall and Mitzen, 'Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security'.
33. Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).
34. Bahar Rumelili, 'Identity and Desecuritisation: The Pitfalls of Conflating Ontological and Physical Security', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18, no. 1 (2015): 52–74.
35. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dogmatic Problem of Hereditary Sin* (London: Liveright, 2015), 94.
36. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

In Mitzen's words, this is the establishment of a 'stable cognitive environment'.[37] In times of crisis, this stable cognitive environment is ruptured, and often leads to uncertainty and widespread anxieties.[38] Experiencing anxiety either leaves individuals immobilised or activates psychological mechanisms that manage anxiety in an attempt to re-instate or adapt to the stable cognitive environment of everyday life.

This brings us back to fear, a key feature of which is its capacity to mobilise. When something is securitised and thereby constructed as an existential threat that requires immediate action, it is rendered an object of fear.[39] From a psychological perspective, this constructed existential threat is not necessarily the source of fear itself but rather a container for general anxieties.[40] Indeed, general anxieties tend to transpose into other emotions attached to particular objects, specifically fear and shame, which renders these anxieties actionable.[41] Crucially, this is not a deliberate choice but an unconscious defence mechanism against anxiety. Thus, fear displaces anxiety and anxiety displaces fear. Fear is, of course, not the only means of displacing anxiety and ontological insecurity; however, it is a common form that provides the impetus and capacity to mobilise around a specific issue.

Successful securitisation, therefore, channels general anxieties into a concrete object, whereas successful desecuritisation can dissolve an object of fear and, in turn, lead to anxiety[42] which also means that securitising moves are more likely to be successful in contexts where anxiety is widespread.[43] The channelling of anxiety into fear is thus not only or necessarily a deliberate strategic move of securitising actors but can also be an entirely unconscious psychological process and is, at the very least, guided by it.[44] Put differently, actors' capacity for reason, reflection and strategic behaviour and their attempts to instrumentalise fear are themselves guided by unconscious affective dynamics that orient their priorities, attention, preferences and appraisals.[45]

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37. Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological Security in World Politics: State identity and the Security Dilemma', *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3: 341–70.
38. Filip Ejdus, 'Critical Situations, Fundamental Questions and Ontological Insecurity in World Politics', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21, no. 4 (2018): 883–908.
39. Van Rythoven, 'Learning to Feel'.
40. Catarina Kinnvall, 'Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security', *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 741–67.
41. Kinnvall and Mitzen, 'Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security'; Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*. On attachment more generally see Anne-Marie Houde, 'Emotions, International Relations, and the everyday: Individuals' emotional attachments to international organisations' Review of International Studies, 2023, 1–19. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210523000554.
42. Bahar Rumelili, 'Ontological (In)security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution', in *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties*, ed. Bahar Rumelili (London: Routledge, 2015), 10–29.
43. Rumelili, '[Our] Age of Anxiety'.
44. Kinnvall and Mitzen, 'Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security'.
45. Todd H. Hall and Aandrew A. G. Ross, 'Affective Politics After 9/11', *International Organization* 69, no. 4 (2015): 856. See also C. Nicolai L. Gellwitzki and Anne-Marie Houde, 'Narratives, Ontological Security, and Unconscious Phantasy: Germany and the European Myth During the So-Called Migration Crisis', *Political Psychology* 44, no. 2 (2023): 435–51; Nina C. Krickel-Choi, 'The Concept of Anxiety in Ontological Security Studies', *International Studies Review* 24, no. 3 (2022): viac013.

The transformation of anxiety into fear through securitisation processes is an unconscious attempt at managing anxiety, but this is not the only way of doing so. Managing and mitigating against anxiety is the primary concern of actors seeking ontological security and motivates much of human behaviour.[46] There are multiple ways of reducing anxiety to aid with feelings of ontological security, including (re)establishing everyday routines and practices,[47] forming consistent and positive biographical narratives,[48] setting up routinised social relationships[49] and a secure and comforting home[50] to establish a sense of trust in the continuity of life along the trajectory of the past.[51] From a securitisation perspective, ontological security-seeking practices not only reduce anxiety but also potentially constrain and frustrate securitising moves since less anxious audiences are less likely to accept that an object constitutes a fearsome existential threat.[52] Simply put, individuals unconsciously deal with uncertainty and anxiety, which often leads to the transposition of anxiety into fear; at the same time, the absence of anxiety makes securitisation less likely.

Overall, OSS indicates that psychological needs and unconscious processes can facilitate and constrain securitisation processes. The resolution of general anxiety can lead to the construction of fearsome objects through *psychological* securitisation processes, providing individuals with certainty regarding the cause of discomfort and the location of the danger. Conversely, desecuritising an object can lead to general anxieties. In these processes, affective energy flows from one state to another, where it lingers until it is moved on to another state; it is *liquid*.

Liquid Fear

We take the term *liquid fear* from Zygmunt Bauman[53] and insert a psychoanalytic dimension to develop a conceptual language that appreciates the volatile affective dynamics of (de)securitisation processes. While fear and anxiety are often conceptualised as distinct because of their (non)attachment to specific objects, liquid fear is a framework that can connect both understandings. In Bauman's work, the notion of *liquid* captures the instability and uncertainty endemic to late modernity and societal experiences thereof, which turns fear into a '*perpetuum mobile*' that draws 'its energy

46. Krickel-Choi, 'The Concept of Anxiety'.
47. Ben Rosher, '"And Now We're Facing That Reality Too": Brexit, Ontological Security, and Intergenerational Anxiety in the Irish Border Region', *European Security* 31, no. 1 (2022): 21–38.
48. Anne-Marie Houde, 'Navigating Anxiety: International Politics, Identity Narratives, and Everyday Defense Mechanisms', *International Political Sociology* 18, no. 1 (2024): olad028.
49. Lauren Rogers, 'Cue Brexit: Performing Global Britain at the UN Security Council', *European Journal of International Security* 9, no. 1 (2024): 122–40.
50. Jennifer Mitzen, 'Feeling at Home in Europe: Migration, Ontological Security, and the Political Psychology of EU Bordering', *Political Psychology* 39, no. 6 (2018): 1373–87.
51. Joseph Haigh, '"Every One (Re)Membered": Anxiety, Family History, and Militarised Vicarious Identity Promotion During Britain's First World War Centenary Commemorations', *Review of International Studies* (2024): 1–22. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210524000160
52. Rumelili, '[Our] Age of Anxiety'.
53. Bauman, *Liquid Fear*.

from *existential tremors*'.[54] Crucially, Bauman argues that in the contemporary condition, fears tend to be '"decoupled" from their sources, set afloat, diffused, underdefined and unfocused' and to be displaced into 'areas of life largely irrelevant to [their] genuine source'.[55] Fears, thus, are either turned into a diffuse affective state or what the OSS literature has referred to as anxiety or displaced into particular objects, more often than not other humans, and questions of physical safety.[56] These dynamics are neither merely unconscious nor apolitical; indeed, as Bauman puts it, the 'capital of fear can be turned to any kind of profit – commercial or *political*' and drawing on fears' 'apparently inexhaustible and self-reproducing supplies [. . .] is a temptation many a politician finds difficult to resist'.[57]

Liquid fear emphasises the dynamism and interactive relationship between what the IR literature has referred to as "fear" and "anxiety". It moreover suggests that, while fear and anxiety are ultimately different phenomenological emotional states, they are inextricably and intimately interwoven. Whilst Bauman uses the term liquid fear to signify both affective states, we retain fear and anxiety as analytical categories in the theoretical tradition of psychoanalysis, existentialism and IR.[58] This is also consistent with relevant findings in the natural sciences,[59] as suggested by Johnson[60] and Neumann.[61] We thus use the concept of liquid fear as an umbrella term that comprises both fear, which is 'displaced [. . .] to [the sphere] of safety (that is, of shelter from, or exposure to, threats to one's own person and its extensions)' and attached to an object, and anxiety 'which is free-floating, unanchored, and unfocused' and thus objectless.[62]

In a similar vein as Bauman, psychoanalytic theorists describe various properties of affects, through the metaphor of the 'liquid'.[63] Lacan draws out the liquid metaphor by comparing affect to a river and a hydroelectric dam; it can be accumulated and '[a]ll the force that is already there can be transformed'.[64] As Solomon puts it, 'we may presume that the river has forceful potential, but we can work with that potential only after it is channelled through the dam, where its force can be manipulated directly'.[65] Applied to

54. Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, 133; emphasis in original. See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (London: Polity Press), 2000.
55. Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, 133, 144.
56. Ibid., 131, 134.
57. Ibid., 144, 155; emphasis in original.
58. See, for example, Kinnvall and Mitzen, 'Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security'.
59. Thierry Steimer, 'The Biology of Fear- and Anxiety-Related Behaviors', *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 4, no. 3 (2002): 231–49.
60. Dominic D. P. Johnson, 'Survival of the Disciplines: Is International Relations Fit for the New Millennium?' *Millennium* 43, no. 2 (2015): 749–63.
61. Iver B. Neumann, 'International Relations as a Social Science', *Millennium* 43, no. 1 (2014): 330–50.
62. Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, 134, 145.
63. See, for example, Freud, *Three Essays*, 17, 34, 43–4; Jung, *Psychological Types*, 26–7, 45, 292, 306, 601; Lacan, *The Object Relation*, 25–6, 35–8, 42.
64. Lacan, *The Object Relation*, 38.
65. Ty Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 47.

the affectivity of securitisation processes, this metaphor becomes conceptually insightful. We understand *anxiety* as affective potential in the form of accumulated liquid, which puts pressure on the dam. *Fear* is one of the ways through which pressure can be released, with this release being done in specific directions. The affective potential is in the liquid; for this anxious potential to be rendered actionable, it needs to be channelled towards and into specific objects of fear.

This conceptual metaphor helps capture the intricate relationship between anxiety and fear, whilst appreciating agency, intentionality and unconscious in attempts to direct these affective dynamics. Thereby, we can bring together different strands of securitisation scholarship through a shared focus on affectivity. Liquids are not simply changeable, they are also dynamic, volatile and directable. Thus, the liquid implies that actors can utilise anxiety's affective potential to attain a certain goal[66] through a process that we term *channelling*: the deliberate movement of anxiety into an object of fear through securitising moves and continuous securitisation processes to influence individuals' behaviour and legitimise the implementation of security measures. Channelling is agential and accepted either consciously or unconsciously; accepting an object as fearsome does not require a self-reflective affirmation, but simply an embodied response that incites individuals to support and/or comply with the suggested security measures. Crucially, channelling is a process; objects of fear must be continually (re)asserted as such to retain their status, the flow cannot ebb.

Lacan's dam metaphor has further implications. First, there needs to be liquid in the dam for channelling practices to be successful. For securitisation to be successful, the relevant audience needs to be anxious; in other words, there needs to be what the literature has called a public mood of anxiety.[67] As scholars of late modernity and existentialists argue, anxiety is ever-present due to the uncertainty of life and whilst it is sometimes successfully (if temporarily) evaded it always threatens to break through again. This anxiety can be unleashed, exacerbated and further stoked by political agency. Populist leaders, for example, often speak of crisis and nostalgia to (re)construct existential questions and anxieties which makes their audience more receptive to their rhetoric.[68] Actors can also invoke collective memories of past 'chosen' traumas to make sense of their

66. See, for example, Baumann, *Liquid Fear*, 152.
67. See C. Nicolai L. Gellwitzki, 'Stimmung and Ontological Security: Anxiety, Euphoria, and Emerging Political Subjectivities During the 2015 "Border Opening" in Germany', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 25, no. 4 (2022): 1101–25; Karl Gustafsson and Nina C. Krickel-Choi, 'Returning to the Roots of Ontological Security: Insights from the Existentialist Anxiety Literature', *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 3 (2020): 875–95; Rumelili, '[Our] Age of Anxiety'.
68. Christopher S. Browning, 'Brexit Populism and Fantasies of Fulfilment', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2019): 222–44; Alexandra Homolar and Ronny Scholz, 'The Power of Trump-Speak: Populist Crisis Narratives and Ontological Security', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2019): 344–64; Francesca Melhuish, 'Euroscepticism, Anti-Nostalgic Nostalgia and the Past Perfect Post-Brexit Future', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 60, no. 6 (2022): 1758–76.

presence.[69] Collective traumas are an ever-present, if dormant, source of anxiety that can be deployed for 'short-term political manipulation'.[70] They are derived from events that radically disrupt individuals' everyday lives and are thus extremely anxiety-inducing;[71] in the British context, as analysed below, narratives of the Second World War and the 'Blitz' fit this frame. Crucially, collective trauma and invocations of its affectively charged collective memories are not only cognitive processes but can also inject feelings from the past into the present[72] which subsequently needs to be managed. Over time, such collective traumas are prone to being deliberately translated into more clearly articulated 'victim narratives' in which a group is subjected to unfair injustice.[73] However, during the period under study, there was neither the time nor discursive stability for full-fledged victim narratives to emerge and any efforts to produce such narratives were highly contested, which was further complicated by the virus being non-agential. This rendered it difficult to develop narratives of injustice about the virus; whilst victim narratives failed to widely resonate, the affective transference of collective trauma was widespread. We show that the case of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom is an excellent example of this phenomenon. However, even though actors may attempt to generate, stir and navigate these general affective dynamics, they are ultimately outside of individual actors' direct control. Fear, thus, is not an aethereal conjuration, it requires a background anxiety that can be channelled towards objects and as a liquid, it occupies a particular space. This also means that liquid fear can differ greatly in its intensity.

Second, there are *always* several ways a dam can release pressure to avoid collapse. The presence of widespread anxiety does not necessitate actors to incite securitisation processes; anxiety can be managed in other ways.[74] Crucially, however, psychoanalytic theory insists that anxiety needs to and will be managed, either consciously or unconsciously. Even in cases where individuals endure or embrace anxiety and tap into its potential for radical agency,[75] this anxiety will ultimately be transformed into a different form of affective experience, be it fear, shame, euphoria, trauma or something else,[76]

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69. C. Nicolai L. Gellwitzki and Anne-Marie Houde, 'From Realpolitik to Gefühlspolitik: Strategically Narrating the European Union at the National Level', *Journal of European Public Policy* 31, no. 2 (2024): 403–27; Kinnvall, 'Globalization and Religious Nationalism'.
70. Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison, 'Fear No More: Emotions and World Politics', *Review of International Studies* 34, no. S1 (2008): 391.
71. Hutchison, *Affective Communities*.
72. Andrew A. G. Ross, *Mixed Emotions: Beyond Fear and Hatred in International Conflict* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019).
73. Adam B. Lerner, 'The Uses and Abuses of victimhood Nationalism in International Politics', *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 1 (2020): 62–87.
74. For an overview see Krickel-Choi, 'The Concept of Anxiety'.
75. Felix Berenskoetter, 'Anxiety, Time, and Agency', *International Theory* 12, no. 2 (2020): 273–90; Gellwitzki, 'Stimmung and Ontological Security'; Karl Gustafsson, 'Why Is Anxiety's Positive Potential So Rarely Realized? Creativity and Change in International Politics', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 24, no. 4 (2021): 1044–9.
76. Gellwitzki, 'Stimmung and Ontological Security'.

thereby releasing pressure from the dam. In sociological terms, the accumulated anxiety can be alleviated through different means, be it through securitisation or the implementation of novel everyday practices, habits and routines, or biographical narratives.[77] Thus, whilst channelling anxiety into fear is never purely instrumental, it is also never a solely unconscious process beyond human agency.

Third, liquids are unstable which is especially applicable to fear, a feeling that often flows from one object to another,[78] it moves 'sideways',[79] and migrates from one context to another.[80] In psychoanalytic terms, fear moves from one object to another through displacement and transference. Any process of channelling therefore always entails the risk of spilling over onto unrelated and unintended targets, whereas such affective spillover effects can happen even if there is a 'lack of cognitive connection between its initial source and subsequent target';[81] fear is seldomly truly contained in one object. Understanding fear as the liquid is relevant to securitisation theory as it allows a more nuanced understanding of both actors' attempts to utilise fear for political mobilisation as well as unintentional and unconscious side-effects of fear that nonetheless have political implications.

Overall, this means that the role of liquid fear in securitisation processes is contentious, ambivalent and ambiguous. Thus, it cannot be essentialised as a causal mechanism that always engenders emergency measures[82] or extreme political mobilisation.[83] Rather, the forms of political mobilisation fear engenders are subject to context and political agency. In this sense, (liquid) fear is a necessity for securitisation but its presence is not sufficient to cause it. Actors' attempts to channel liquid fear into a specific object are securitising moves but this fear can be alleviated by different kinds of responses.

Understanding securitisation processes through the concept of liquid fear links securitisation theory and ontological security theory by acknowledging the importance of agency, intentionality and the unconscious. Securitisation theory maintains that every securitising move always has at least two elements, the identification and construction of an existential threat, an object of fear and a referent object that is being threatened. OSS emphasises that threat construction entails a (re)construction, reification and homogenising of a referent subject of security, which is a subject (identity) that is being threatened.[84] By contrast, focusing on the channelling of anxiety into objects of fear entails a

77. Bauman, *Liquid Fear*; Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*.
78. Bauman, *Liquid Fear.*
79. Sara Ahmed, 'Affective Economies', *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 120.
80. Ross, *Mixed Emotions*.
81. Hall and Ross, 'Affective Politics', 850. See also C. Nicolai L. Gellwitzki and Anne-Marie Houde, 'Feeling the Heat: Emotions, Politicization, and the European Union', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 60, no 5 (2022): 1470–87.
82. See also Williams, 'Evolution of Securitization Theory'.
83. See also Eroukhmanoff, *The Securitisation of Islam*; Eric Van Rythoven, 'Fear in the Crowd or Fear of the Crowd? The Dystopian Politics of Fear in International Relations', *Critical Studies on Security* 6, no. 1 (2018): 33–49.
84. Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, 'Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity', *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 31–47; Kinnvall, 'Globalization and Religious Nationalism'.

double move. Every emotion entails an object of feeling (here the existential threat) and a subject of feeling (here the referent subject of security).[85] Fear, in particular, influences how humans relate to one another.[86] The notion of liquid fear directs us towards how the channelling of anxiety for the construction of objects of fear also always entails the (re) construction of fearing subject identities that structure social relationships and are inclusive of some and exclusive of others.

Conceptualising fear as liquid contributes to the growing literature that recognises that physical and ontological security are not unrelated properties, but inextricably linked. A threat or damage to actors' physical security impinges on their sense of ontological security and vice versa.[87] In this sense, actors are always embodied,[88] a 'self-in-the-body'.[89] To paraphrase Martin Heidegger,[90] subjects, be they individuals, groups or states, do not *have* a body, they *are* bodily. Yet, in IR literature, the differentiation of fear and anxiety is partially based upon the assumption that anxiety is about the self, that is, ontological security, whereas fear is about the body, that is, physical security. The concept of liquid fear, in contrast, helps us to acknowledge the embodied nature of self and to transcend the discipline's prevailing mind-body dualism.

In this section, we argued that the notion of liquid fear conceptualises the integral role of anxiety and fear in securitisation processes and helps capture the intricate relationship between agency and the unconscious in said process. Actors can attempt to *channel* anxiety into fear by attaching it to specific objects through securitising moves. Yet, channelling requires the prevalence of a public mood of anxiety and can always entail unintended side effects as fear can spill over onto unrelated objects. Importantly, the success of, and embodied responses to, securitisation processes is contingent on affective dynamics outside of individual actors' control even though actors can attempt to generate and navigate these affective dynamics through securitisation discourses. The channelling of anxiety not only requires an object of fear but also fearing subjects/individuals; in other words, the construction of objects of fear also comprises the (re)construction of specific identities and modes of relating. To demonstrate the analytical value of the concept of liquid fear, we turn to the case of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom.

The Securitisation of the 'Coronavirus' in the United Kingdom

Here we investigate the illustrative case of the (de)securitisation dynamics of the coronavirus in the United Kingdom from March 2020 to March 2021. Within this timeframe,

85. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).
86. Bauman, *Liquid Fear*; Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity*; Kinnvall, 'Globalization and Religious Nationalism'.
87. Krickel-Choi, 'The Embodied State'.
88. Purnell, 'Bodies Coming Apart'.
89. Krickel-Choi, 'The Embodied State'.
90. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Erster Band* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), 118.

the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Coronavirus a global pandemic on 11th March 2020. UK lockdowns took place from 26th March to 23rd June 2020, and 6th January to 8th March 2021 (the latter fully ending on 19th July), with a smaller lockdown from 5th November to 2nd December 2020.[91] We demonstrate throughout this section how the British government's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic shaped and were shaped by liquid fear. We make our case by exploring public discourse, government practices and (in)action, and various surveys attempting to quantify feelings of anxiety and fear at the time. Whilst securitisation is not an exclusive government enterprise, the emphasis on the government is a pragmatic choice that helps us to illustrate the analytical utility of the concept of liquid fear. First, we look at the initial failure of the UK government to exercise agency by either alleviating public anxieties or channelling them into fear through securitising COVID-19; we argue that this is analogous to the dam holding back water. Following this, we explore the government-led securitisation process through the channelling of liquid fear and its spillover effects through the releasing of pressure which had built up against the dam. Finally, we discuss how affective experiences oscillated between anxiety and fear during the pandemic, demonstrating the value in understanding fear as an unstable and dynamic liquid.

Attempted Anxiety-Mitigation Prior to Lockdowns

Prior to lockdowns, UK media helped foster uncertainty by showcasing harrowing situations abroad, whilst depicting the government as ineffectively preparing and dealing with the virus. Lockdowns and their responses in Italy and Spain received widespread publicity in the United Kingdom[92] and helped exacerbate an existing public mood of anxiety. COVID-19 anxiety manifested, even before the WHO's pandemic declaration, as people in the United Kingdom began panic buying items such as toilet paper and hand sanitiser,[93] further aggravating the situation. This is a case where the reservoir was filling up and the dam had yet to be opened, leaving liquid fear unchanneled. The public was left to deal with this reservoir, there was anxiety that had yet to be addressed; the dynamic potential of liquid fear was not yet being utilised. As the primary securitising actor, the government had the power to release pressure on the dam by channelling anxiety towards specific objects of fear, but it did not do so until later.

Rather than securitising COVID-19 and channelling anxiety, then Prime Minister Boris Johnson attempted to alleviate public anxieties by routinely downplaying the threat

91. Jennifer Brown, et al, 'Coronavirus: A History of English Lockdown Laws', House of Commons Library, no. 9068, 2022. Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9068/. Last accessed March 24, 2022.
92. Miles Johnson and Davide Ghiglione, 'Italy's Record Casts Shadow Over Hopes of Post-Covid Recovery', *Financial Times*, 21 May 2020. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/e777c1ef-c031-42f1-8cb2-610920f7efbb. Last accessed March 21, 2022.
93. Helen Pidd, 'UK Supermarkets Ration Toilet Paper to Prevent Stockpiling', *The Guardian*, 8 March 2020. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/08/coronavirus-stockpiling-supermarkets-toilet-paper-hand-gel

of the virus. Johnson shook hands with COVID-19 patients against government advice,[94] claimed the United Kingdom would 'send coronavirus packing' within 12 weeks[95] (despite the WHO affording it pandemic status) and did not attend COBRA (the Civil Contingencies Committee that deals with national emergencies) meetings.[96] More generally, the Prime Minister urged the public to remain calm and emphasised the NHS's ability to cope with the virus.[97] Managing anxiety through other means than channelling and securitisation is always a possibility, yet in the case at hand, it failed and had the opposite effect. Instead of alleviating anxiety, Johnson's actions exacerbated public anxiety; the government was seen to be doing little to combat the virus's spread in and around the United Kingdom.[98]

Overall, data suggest that there was widespread anxiety about the coronavirus and a desire for securitisation that was not met by the government.[99] In a study from mid-March 2020, 62% of respondents reported anxiety[100] about the pandemic.[101] The Office for National Statistics recorded that in March 2020 as many as 86% of respondents reported feeling anxious,[102] not including those who were affected but non-self-reflective

94. *The Guardian*, '"I Shook Hands with Everybody," Says Boris Johnson Weeks Before Coronavirus Diagnosis – Video', *The Guardian*, 27 March 2020. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2020/mar/27/i-shook-hands-with-everybody-says-boris-johnson-weeks-before-coronavirus-diagnosis-video
95. Peter Walker, 'Boris Johnson: UK Can Turn Tide of Coronavirus in 12 Weeks', *The Guardian*, 19 March 2020. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/19/boris-johnson-uk-can-turn-tide-of-coronavirus-in-12-weeks
96. Kate Proctor, 'Boris Johnson Will Not Hold Coronavirus Crisis Meeting Until Monday', *The Guardian*, 28 February 2020. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/feb/28/boris-johnson-not-to-hold-coronavirus-crisis-meeting-cobra-until-monday
97. *ITV News*, 'Boris Johnson Urges UK to Remain "Confident and Calm" Amid Coronavirus Threat', *ITV News*, 11 February 2020. Available at: https://www.itv.com/news/2020-02-11/coronavirus-uk-boris-johnson-nhs-covid-19
98. Gemma Francis, 'Nearly Half of UK Adults Believe Government Is Not Doing Enough to Contain Coronavirus Outbreak', *The Independent*, 2 March 2020. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/coronavirus-outbreak-government-response-public-concern-poll-a9369931.html
99. To reiterate, we analyse government action in securitisation. Whilst prevalent, the engagement of non-state actors is not the focus of this research.
100. The ONS uses this term; whilst individuals may have different understandings of what it means to be anxious or fearful, liquid fear is about addressing the interrelation between these concepts. Any conceptual confusion on the part of the respondent illustrates our point because this is a concept that deals with emotional displacement and transference.
101. Mental Health Foundation, 'Wave 2 Summary: Early April 2020, A Week into Lockdown', 6 May 2020. Available at: https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/coronavirus-mental-health-pandemic-study/wave-2-summary
102. Office for National Statistics, 'Coronavirus and the Social Impacts on Great Britain', 18 March 2022. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/18march2022

about their embodied experiences. Indeed, people were increasingly anxious and requesting measures to combat the virus, but the government did not act.[103] Therefore, people were afraid of the virus and simultaneously anxious about the possibility of potential harm to their bodies in the future due to government inaction. Simply put, the self-in-the-body was under a dual threat as the feeling of physical insecurity and the possibility of bodily harm were major sources of anxiety and helped foster ontological insecurity.

In lieu of mitigating public anxieties, the government's downplaying the pandemic and general inaction arguably further fuelled them, as the government offered no clear way for the United Kingdom and its people to deal with (feelings regarding) COVID-19.[104] Thus, individual citizens made attempts to mitigate anxiety by adapting their everyday practices and preparing for worst-case scenarios. Trust in the government to provide for its people reached its lowest recorded level for decades, during the pandemic.[105] This record lack of trust suggests that there was an exceptional level of government failure and resulting public anxieties at this time. The Prime Minister's conscious and agential inaction may be demonstrative of his lack of fear but facilitated the accumulation of anxiety (through non-channelling). Simply put, the dam was full of affective potential and ready to burst.

The Securitisation of the Coronavirus and Its Spillover Effects

On 23rd March, the United Kingdom announced a national lockdown which included far-reaching social contact restrictions, a 'stay at home' order, a general shutdown of public life and a closure of non-essential shops.[106] These directives, and the language that comprised them, positioned COVID-19 as a threat and asserted it as a security concern. This came after widespread public anxiety as the government's 'language *followed* public pressure for extraordinary measures, rather than language *enabling* support'.[107] Thus, accumulated anxieties required management and the government consciously channelled them towards the virus, turning it into an object of fear to legitimise security politics. The various implemented security measures provided individuals with certainty and a range of new everyday routines to cope with the emergency and avoid the existential threat of the virus. It is important to stress that the dam holding back liquid fear did not have to be

103. Jessica Kirk and Matt McDonald, 'The Politics of Exceptionalism: Securitization and COVID-19', *Global Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (2021): ksab024.
104. Jim Duffy, 'Coronavirus: Why Daily Briefings from Boris Johnson and Co Are Fuelling Public Anxiety', *The Scotsman*, 2 April 2020. Available at: https://www.scotsman.com/news/uk-news/coronavirus-why-daily-briefings-from-boris-johnson-and-co-are-fuelling-public-anxiety-jim-duffy-2527701
105. Merlin Sugue, 'Survey: Trust in British Government Has Dropped to Lowest Level in Decades', *POLITICO*, 8 October 2020. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/survey-trust-in-british-government-dropped-to-record-low
106. Alex Finnis, 'When the First Covid Lockdown Was in the UK Ahead of Anniversary', *inews.co.uk*, 23 March 2021. Available at: https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/lockdown-start-when-uk-covid-rules-national-day-reflection-23-march-anniversary-restrictions-924550
107. Kirk and McDonald, 'The Politics of Exceptionalism', 6.

'filled up' to a certain level for channelling to occur. It was an agential decision by the government to give in to public pressure and begin channelling, and it could have opted to not act and let the public (continue) manage anxiety by itself. In fact, the United Kingdom was comparatively late to securitise COVID-19[108] with other governments beginning channelling processes far earlier.

Whilst it is hard to gauge how fearful a population may be, data suggest that around 45% of people in the United Kingdom felt 'scared' or 'fairly scared' of contracting the virus in the early stages of the lockdowns,[109] immediately following the government's securitising moves. Furthermore, UK government data suggest that 'fear of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and passing it on to others, especially the vulnerable, motivated many participants across all groups to comply with the guidance'.[110] Whilst the level of compliance can be contested,[111] it is reasonable to claim that individuals felt fear during this time, facilitating the acceptance of the government's securitising moves and adjusting their behaviour accordingly. Some argued that the government tried to rule through fear, asserting its authority to handle a disease they believed to be near harmless.[112] Whilst incorrect about COVID-19, the 'lockdown-sceptics' were right about governments producing climates of fear that legitimised emergency powers. By channelling anxieties into objects of fear, the government was able to implement emergency measures to deal with COVID-19, we take this as a clear example of liquid fear. Conversely, this suggests that a lack of fear amongst the public is what facilitated a lack of compliance with the rules, making government efforts to maintain and channel fear central to the management of both the people and the pandemic.

Through its *Opinions and Lifestyle Survey*, the Office for National Statistics attempted to gauge public anxiety levels throughout the pandemic. Respondents recorded their highest levels of anxiety from 20th to 30th March 2020.[113] This was immediately before and during the beginning of the first lockdown. Anxiety dropped after this point, which suggests that lockdowns provided a sense of relief. The *Opinions and Lifestyle Surveys*

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108. Jackie Mehlmann-Wicks, 'The Public Health Response by UK Governments to COVID-19', British Medical Association, 2023. Available at: https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/what-the-bma-is-doing/the-public-health-response-by-uk-governments-to-covid-19. Last accessed February 22, 2023.
109. James Weinberg, 'Coronavirus Lockdown: Fresh Data on Compliance and Public Opinion', *The Conversation*, 9 April 2020. Available at: http://theconversation.com/coronavirus-lockdown-fresh-data-on-compliance-and-public-opinion-135872
110. Office for National Statistics, 'Coronavirus and Compliance with Government Guidance, UK: April 2021', 12 April 2021. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronavirusandcompliancewithgovernmentguidanceuk/april2021
111. Liam Wright, Andrew Steptoe and Daisy Fancourt, 'Trajectories of Compliance with COVID-19 Related Guidelines: Longitudinal Analyses of 50,000 UK Adults', *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 56, no. 8 (2022): 781–90.
112. See, for example, Laura Dodsworth, *A State of Fear: How the UK Government Weaponised Fear During the Covid-19 Pandemic* (London: Pinter & Martin, 2021).
113. Office for National Statistics, 'Coronavirus and the Social Impacts on Great Britain'.

indicate that pre-pandemic anxieties persisted but also anxiety peaks correlated with the beginnings of lockdowns; these peaks fell as the lockdowns continued. The lockdowns were cases of exceptional practices facilitated by securitisation which required, and affirmed, fear to function. Through securitisation, and in particular restrictive measures and lockdowns, public anxieties flowed into fear which was actionable.

Yet, it is difficult for a virus to be rendered as an object of fear because it can only be seen and felt once it has been contracted. Therefore, a securitisation of COVID-19 from a liquid fear perspective, required concrete objects of fear to which anxieties could be channelled. However, channelling processes also risk spillover. It may be a necessity that additional objects become fearsome for securitisation to be effective, but the dynamism and fluidity of liquid fear mean that unintentional effects of securitisation can be unconscious and unpredictable, irrespective of intention. Here, the unconscious dimension of securitisation becomes apparent. The disease itself was securitised for the public, but associated individuals and public spaces also became objects of fear through channelling. For many, it was other people that became objects of fear. People became scared of strangers, even family members and friends[114] because they were seen as potential spreaders of the disease, rendering them potentially harmful. Public spaces, in which these dangerous others could be encountered, also became fearsome. Conversely, some also considered themselves to be dangerous if they unknowingly spread the disease, but this still rendered these spaces fearsome because these were the locations where the spreading could occur.

Whilst rendering other people as objects of fear fell within the government's strategy to ensure compliance with security measures, some spillover effects seem unintended. The securitisation of the virus and the deployment of nationalist rhetoric resonated with racist imaginaries and previously racialised constructions around securitised migration,[115] constructing people of East Asian background as objects of fear and facilitating racial violence. In other words, the government's securitisation of COVID-19 in combination with the alleged origin of COVID in China thus unintentionally tapped into existing security dynamics, general societal racism and stereotyping of East and Southeast Asians which led to a spillover effect. Indeed, hate crimes against East Asians rose significantly during the pandemic.[116] From the outset, COVID-19 was framed as China's fault,[117] people who were assumed to be Chinese were constructed as objects of fear and resentment. Spillover resulted in hate crimes against people of East and Southeast Asian

114. Marisa Bate, 'Stranger Danger: When Will We Stop Being Scared of Other People?', *The Independent*, 5 September 2020. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/coronavirus-social-anxiety-fear-strangers-how-help-pandemic-a9694201.html

115. See, for example, Harriet Gray and Anja K. Franck, 'Refugees as/at Risk: The Gendered and Racialized Underpinnings of Securitization in British Media Narratives', *Security Dialogue* 50, no. 3 (2019): 275–91.

116. *BBC News*, 'They Shouted "You Are the Chinese Virus"', 3 May 2021. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-56937299

117. Kate Proctor, 'Michael Gove Appears to Blame China Over Lack of UK Coronavirus Testing', *The Guardian*, 29 March 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/mar/29/michael-gove-appears-to-blame-china-over-lack-of-uk-coronavirus-testing

ancestry. One study showed that hate crimes against East and Southeast Asians in London increased by 80%[118] during the pandemic. Another showed that hate crimes against East and Southeast Asians across the United Kingdom had increased by approximately 50% from 2019 to 2021,[119] whilst an NGO reported an increase of hate crimes by 300% in the first quarter of 2020.[120] This made the pandemic particularly anxiety inducing for the UK's East Asian and Southeast Asian communities as it rendered other (white) people even more fearsome. This also means that different fearing subjects emerged, a British subject fearing the virus (see below) but also different fearing minority subjects that, although technically included in the former, were also effectively alienated and violently excluded from it.

Overall, people were afraid of the virus, it had been successfully securitised, but by channelling pre-existing anxiety into the virus as an object of fear, other objects were securitised through spillover effects; these objects were unconsciously accepted as fearful by the population. These other objects were: people, public spaces and people considered other (specifically people of East and Southeast Asian background). With these objects becoming threatening, there was little to do but follow the government slogan: 'stay home, protect the NHS, and save lives'.[121]

Securing and (Re)constructing the 'Home'

To (re)securitise COVID-19, the UK government had to continue channelling liquid fear into objects. However, it also required some space wherein people could feel ontologically and physically secure, the home. The imperative to 'stay home' was central to the government's securitisation efforts.[122] Indeed, throughout the pandemic, the 'home-as-house'[123] was presented as a safe space to escape fear and anxiety. Yet, lockdowns increased feelings of loneliness and separation from friends and family.[124]

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118. *ITV News*, 'Covid Racism Fuels 80% Rise in Hate Crimes Against East and South East Asians in London', 7 October 2021. Available at: https://www.itv.com/news/london/2021-10-07/hate-crimes-against-east-and-south-east-asians-in-london-rose-80-during-covid.
119. *ITV News*, 'Covid Racism: Hate Crime Attacks Against East and South East Asians in UK Rise by 50% in Two Years', 7 October 2021. Available at: https://www.itv.com/news/2021-10-06/true-scale-of-covid-hate-crime-against-asians-in-uk-revealed-as-victims-speak-up
120. Protection Approaches, 'COVID-Related Hate: East and South East Asian Communities' Experiences of Racism During the COVID-19 Pandemic', 2020. Available at: https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/131c96cc-7e6f-4c06-ae37-6550dbd85dde/Covid-related%20hate%20briefing%20FINAL.pdf. Last accessed March 21, 2022.
121. GOV.UK, 'New TV Advert Urges Public to Stay at Home to Protect the NHS and Save Lives', 10 January 2021. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-tv-advert-urges-public-to-stay-at-home-to-protect-the-nhs-and-save-lives
122. Ian Sample, 'Covid Timeline: The Weeks Leading Up to First UK Lockdown', *The Guardian*, 11 October 2021. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/12/covid-timeline-the-weeks-leading-up-to-first-uk-lockdown
123. See Mitzen, 'Feeling at Home', 1376.
124. Mental Health Foundation, 'Wave 2 Summary'.

Securitising public spaces beyond the house-as-home turned previous homes, such as community centres, workplaces, schools, etc., into sites of fear. Thus, anxiety was channelled towards objects previously not considered to be fearsome, rendering the individual's home, as well as the national home of an imagined community, particularly affectively appealing and authoritative figures frequently invoked it.[125] The NHS, a source of national pride,[126] became a rallying point for the government's securitisation of Covid-19, epitomised by the 'stay home, protect the NHS, and save lives' campaign.[127] The intertwining of these imperatives helped in the production of patriotic subject, whose core patriotism was based on the protection of a nationally valued provider of healthcare. However, the national home became a referent object of security that needed to be protected against the virus.

This was furthered by the mainstream deployment of metaphors suggesting the United Kingdom was at war with a virus[128] and evoking the so-called 'Blitz Spirit'.[129] Deploying the 'Blitz Spirit' helped (re)produce a patriotic British subject through a nostalgic reading of the Second World War, wherein British society was mobilised to protect itself from a foreign entity. This militarised response was inspired by wider practices of commemoration of the world wars in British society which tend to be selective in remembering predominantly white British male soldiers rather than women or people of colour from commonwealth countries that fought for Britain,[130] further feeding into the racialised dynamics discussed above. This nostalgic patriotism, combined with a contemporary one over the NHS, was invoked by the government to justify securitisation processes and widely resonated with the UK public. This is illustrated by efforts like 'Clap For Our Carers', which encouraged people to show support for NHS staff,[131] alongside figures like 'Captain Tom' who raised money for the NHS[132] which further fostered patriotic

125. Christopher S. Browning and Joseph Haigh, 'Hierarchies of Heroism: Captain Tom, Spitfires, and the Limits of Militarized Vicarious Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Global Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (2022): ksac026.
126. Sunder Katwala, 'The NHS: Even More Cherished Than the Monarchy and the Army', *New Statesman*, 14 January 2013. Available at: https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/01/nhs-even-more-cherished-monarchy-and-army
127. GOV.UK, 'New TV Advert Urges Public to Stay at Home to Protect the NHS and Save Lives'.
128. Kirk and McDonald, 'The Politics of Exceptionalism'; Megan Specia, 'U.K., With Surging Cases, Is on "War Footing" Against Virus', *The New York Times*, 30 December 2021. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/30/world/europe/uk-covid-omicron-london-england.html; Matt Ridley, 'The Government Is Still Fighting the Wrong War on Covid-19', *The Telegraph*, 27 November 2021. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/11/27/government-still-fighting-wrong-war-covid-19/
129. Reuters, 'UK Government Evokes Wartime Blitz Spirit for Fight Against Coronavirus', 15 March 2020. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-britain-idUSL8N2B80B1
130. Victoria M. Basham, 'Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance: The Everyday Geopolitics of the Poppy', *Gender, Place & Culture* 23, no. 6 (2016): 883–96.
131. Clap For Our Carers, 'Clap For Our Carers | Discounts for NHS and Carers', 2021. Available at: https://clapforourcarers.co.uk/. Last accessed March 26, 2022.
132. *BBC News*, 'The 99-Year-Old Veteran Raising Money for the NHS', 10 April 2020. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-52248189

sentiment, with a specific focus on healthcare provision and military prowess.[133] This served as a means of stabilising a positive British autobiographical narrative, provided a sense of meaning and belonging to a larger community and constituted a form of securitisation of *subjectivity.*

Therefore, the construction of an object of fear, COVID-19, also entailed a reconstruction of a feeling, that is, *fearing*, a British subject. Through the liquidity of fear, a new fearing British subject was created, one which had to be fearful to be British. To conform with this Britishness, individuals had to be *fearing subjects.* In an effort to appeal to the British people and through materially securitising COVID-19, another, more psychological securitisation developed. This psychological process secured and homogenised the identity of the British people as patriotic subjects. This securitised subjectivity also had to be performed to provide a sense of ontological security, since individuals' usual self-identity narratives and everyday routines and habits were severely disrupted by the pandemic.

To be patriotic British subjects, individuals had to stay home and protect themselves and others. People were not only fearful of certain spaces, but their identities were also partly premised on their bodies not entering such spaces and, more generally, performing patriotic duties to protect the nation. With Krickel-Choi's concept of 'self-in-the-body',[134] we see that the body is the site of selfhood and therefore central to physical and ontological (in)security. In this case, both the body and the self were under threat, the body from disease and the self from loss of subjectivity. Thus, the 'self-in-the-body' had a dual problem of non-being, the disease could take the body and damage the self and the self's subjectivity could be lost through non-performance of patriotic duties. The patriotic British subject stayed home to protect its own body, others, the nation and the NHS but also its subjectivity as a British subject. This production of a novel British subject provided a sense of ontological security through maintaining a stable positive self-identity and through a lack of physical harm.

This is demonstrative of the fluidity and unconscious aspect of securitisation, an effort to securitise the virus allowed for the production and securitisation of a patriotic British subject, a subject that was centred on identification with the welfare state and a glorified national past.[135] These deployments positioned the people of the United Kingdom as actors capable of defending it from a foreign other. This was a powerful securitising move that justified emergency politics in the protection of both individuals and the state, asking individuals to do both. Yet, the reconstruction of the fantasy of a homogeneous nation at war with a foreign other also contributed to the increase in racist violence against those assumed to belong to this other, namely individuals of East and Southeast Asian ancestry.

The Ebb and Flow of Liquid Fear

Whilst liquid fear (when taking the form of anxiety) may build behind the dam and then be released through channelling, it is not always fully controlled. Therefore, we suggest

133. Browning and Haigh, 'Captain Tom'.
134. Krickel-Choi, 'The Embodied State'.
135. Browning and Haigh, 'Captain Tom'.

that fear and anxiety were in a state of ebb and flow throughout the pandemic. The dynamism of liquid fear is apparent when it spills over to other objects but can also be seen in how quickly individuals' experience may flow from anxiety to fear and vice versa. This phenomenon is observed by research on ontological security but neglected by securitisation scholars, which means the latter struggles to account for the unconscious aspects of securitisation. The suggestion that lockdowns would be lifted was enough to move established fears towards conditions of anxiety through their detachment from specific objects. During these lockdowns, certain spaces and people became objects of fear, but these helped with alleviating anxiety. This is well documented for January 2021, when levels of anxiety increased, cases of the virus spiked, and the United Kingdom returned to lockdown.[136] Levels of anxiety subsequently decreased throughout February.[137]

The lifting of restrictions was coupled with governmental efforts to consciously desecuritise COVID-19. These desecuritisation efforts were often done implicitly through the presentation of a 'world leading' vaccine rollout[138] or the promotion of the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme which incentivised citizens to return to public spaces, in particular restaurants and pubs.[139] Yet, whenever ends to restrictions were announced, societal levels of anxiety swelled, as the lifting of these restrictions began.[140] After the

136. Office for National Statistics, 'Coronavirus and the Social Impacts on Great Britain', 29 January 2021. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/29january2021

137. Office for National Statistics, 'Coronavirus and the Social Impacts on Great Britain', 5 February 2021. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/5february2021; Office for National Statistics, 'Coronavirus and the Social Impacts on Great Britain', 12 February 2021. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/12february2021; Office for National Statistics, 'Coronavirus and the Social Impacts on Great Britain', 19 February 2021. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/19february2021

138. GOV.UK, 'UK Marks One Year Since Deploying World's First COVID-19 Vaccine', 8 December 2021. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-marks-one-year-since-deploying-worlds-first-covid-19-vaccine

139. GOV.UK, 'Get a Discount with the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme', 15 July 2020. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-a-discount-with-the-eat-out-to-help-out-scheme

140. Farrah Jarral, 'The Lockdown Paradox: Why Some People's Anxiety Is Improving During the Crisis', *The Guardian*, 29 April 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/29/coronavirus-lockdown-anxiety-mental-health; Keiran Pedley, Gideon Skinner and Cameron Garrett, 'Majority of Britons Uncomfortable Returning to Large Sport or Music Events, Public Transport and Bars or Restaurants Post Lockdown', 1 May 2020. Available at: https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/majority-britons-uncomfortable-sport-music-bars-coronavirus; YoungMinds, 'Managing Anxiety About the Easing of Lockdown', 23 April 2021. Available at: https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/blog/coping-with-anxiety-about-the-easing-of-lockdown-restrictions/

first lockdown, many people were uncomfortable going to public spaces or using public transport[141] and the Office for National Statistics reported that a majority of people surveyed did not feel 'safe' or 'very safe' outside their homes due to COVID-19.[142] These phenomena were referred to as the 'fear of going out' and, the aforementioned, 'post-lockdown anxiety'.[143]

Thus, despite desecruitising moves, people were still afraid of the virus and the different objects of fear that had been constructed during the pandemic. Therefore, they still complied with the everyday security practices that had provided them with a system of certitude throughout the lockdowns. Nonetheless, many became anxious as the potential for interacting with fearsome objects reappeared, due to the easing of restrictions which disrupted their everyday practices and the certainty that these objects could be avoided. Interaction was not a necessity, but it was a *possibility* that facilitated a general return of anxiety. The NHS has continued to assist in dealing with COVID-19 anxiety,[144] suggesting this condition continued post-easing of restrictions. At the same time, research observed a decrease in compliance with security measures over time,[145] indicating that many individuals became used to living with the constant threat of COVID-19 and for those, the objects of fear became less threatening. For most people, the ending of lockdowns and restrictions ended the government-sanctioned fear-derived securitisation of COVID-19 and governmental channelling processes stopped directing anxiety towards fear.

The end of channelling does not mean that there was an absolute return of anxiety, fear also remained. Fear and anxiety will never be entirely removed; one can become more dominant, the purpose of channelling is to produce this dominance, but this does not mean that the other is completely depleted. Despite channelling efforts, there will always be something left behind the dam. Liquid fear flows, but it is only ever directed by agents and not all of it will follow this direction. In sum, through securitisation processes, liquid fear *flowed into* objects of fear, whereas through desecuritisation processes, it *ebbed back* into a more ambiguous state of anxiety. Without efforts to channel anxieties into objects of fear, general anxieties returned. This is demonstrative of the dynamic and fluid nature of the relationship between fear and anxiety, which requires appreciation when understanding deployments of fear in securitisation theory. Crucially, agency, (un) intentionality, and unconscious processes interact in processes of material and psychological securitisation.

141. Pedley, Skinner and Garrett, 'Majority of Britons'.
142. Office for National Statistics, 'Coronavirus and the Social Impacts on Great Britain'. 2020. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/12june2020
143. Robert Smith, 'Post-Lockdown Anxiety and Fear of Going Out', 10 June 2020. Available at: https://www.topdoctors.co.uk/medical-articles/fear-of-going-out-fogo-during-the-covid-19-pandemic
144. nhs.uk, 'Worried About Coronavirus? Tips to Help Manage Anxiety – Every Mind Matters', 2021. Available at: https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/coronavirus/covid-19-anxiety-tips/. Last accessed March 24, 2022.
145. Michael Ganslmeier, Jonathan Van Parys and Tim Vlandas, 'Compliance with the First UK Covid-19 Lockdown and the Compounding Effects of Weather', *Scientific Reports* 12, no. 1 (2022): 3821.

The case of the British government's response illustrates the analytical value of conceptualising fear as liquid, with anxiety forming part of this liquid too. Employing securitisation theory's logic of fear as intentionally constructed by actors explains the government's attempts to channel anxiety into objects of fear, yet it neglects the unconscious and unintended side effects, such as racist violence against people of East Asian and Southeast Asian descent. Whilst OSS's logic of fear as a relief mechanism against anxiety appreciates these unconscious dynamics, it struggles to understand the government's agency in (de)constructing certain objects of fear rather than others. Lastly, the understanding of fear as institutionalisation certainly offers a convincing account of the role fear plays in structuring social relationships and its reification into government practices and everyday habits and routines. Yet, this fails to appreciate the psychological processes and side effects of these moves as well as how they were institutionalised in the first place. These explanatory frameworks, of course, offer analytical insights that are useful for their respective field. Understanding of fear as liquid, however, offers a more complex and nuanced understanding of the role of fear in securitisation processes as well as its consequences.

Conclusion

Our article illustrated the necessity for further integration of securitisation studies and OSS. Research into ontological security and securitisation has significant overlap in the attention afforded to the concept of fear, but the understandings of fear are profoundly different. Whilst useful in conceptualising the agential social construction and deployment of fear, understanding the role of fear in securitisation processes as purely instrumental fails to grasp how actors are always subject to unconscious affective dynamics, as well as the socio-psychological side effects of security politics. Likewise, conceptualising fear as merely a derivative of psychodynamic processes downplays the role of actors who attempt to navigate and utilise the affective dynamics in which they find themselves. Liquid fear builds a conceptual bridge between securitisation studies and OSS through showing that fear can be both instrumentalised by actors but also that these actors can be subject to affective dynamics and the effects of action are not always intended. We argued that whilst significant differences between both scholarships exist, they share a common conceptual focus, liquid fear, either in the form of fear of specific objects or anxiety over uncertainty.

Overall, we posited that (1) successful securitising moves are contingent on pre-existing affective dynamics, an accumulation of liquid fear; actors cannot conjure up fear but they can attempt to divert and channel existing affective dynamics; (2) liquid fear will channel into certain objects, either because of actors' instrumental use of securitisation or because of an (unconscious) overflow of the stream of affect; (3) liquid fear is usually unequally dispersed and structures social relations; (4) liquid fear is a dynamic process that is never static or contained for long, it moves back and forth from one state to another and (5) it ebbs and flows and audiences' acceptance of and compliance with security measures follows this.

Through the case of COVID-19 in the United Kingdom, we have illustrated the fluidity and dynamism involved in the emotional politics of securitisation and demonstrated the value of understanding fear as a liquid. During the initial stage of the pandemic, public anxieties put significant pressure on the government to engage in securitisation processes and to transform the uncertainty around COVID-19 into concrete measures to ensure its citizens' physical safety and survival. After the government gave in to this pressure and treated the virus as a security issue, attempts to channel these anxieties into concrete objects of fear were largely successful but also resulted in unintended spillover effects onto other objects, leaving people afraid of friends and family, and facilitated violence against people of East and Southeast Asian ancestry. The success of securitising moves relied upon the pre-existence of public anxieties around COVID-19, in part produced through government (in)action, which were then channelled into objects of fear. The fearsome status of these objects was (re)asserted through government and media discourse; certain objects needed to be fearsome for COVID-19 securitisation to work (public spaces, other people, etc.), which then ensured individual citizens' compliance with security measures. Overall, the illustrative case study showed that the notion of liquid fear provides the conceptual language to develop an understanding of the role of agency, intentionality and the unconscious in stirring affective dynamics in in securitisation processes.

Recent ontological security scholarship illustrates the need to overcome the artificial stratification of research along the lines of (un)consciousness, pointing out that physical security and ontological security are not neatly separated.[146] The experience of security of the 'self-in-the-body', then, is closely connected to *liquid fear* that oscillates between the fear of bodily harm and the anxiety of non-being. To be anxious, requires a body that can feel, whilst being afraid presupposes a self-reflective mind and its unconscious psychological properties that enable and underly a fearful response. Future research, thus, should further interrogate the nexus of conscious and unconscious aspects of securitisation of objects and subjectivity, to push both fields beyond the prevailing mind–body dualism. Looking forward, this also raises questions of the potential liquidity of other emotions such as shame and how they relate to securitisation dynamics.

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146. Krickel-Choi, 'The Embodied State'; Purnell 'Bodies Coming Apart'.

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