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Research Article

COVID-19 and the Limits of Critical Security Theory: Securitization, Cosmopolitanism, and Pandemic Politics

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Abstract

Recent years have witnessed a growing and important series of efforts to make sense of the post-2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic through diverse lenses within the field of critical security studies (css). In this article, we set out to reverse this analytical gaze, asking not "what can css tell us about COVID-19?" but rather, "what can COVID-19 tell us about css?" In order to do this, we pair two important moments in the UK pandemic response with two prominent, yet very different, strands of critical security research: (i) "covid-secure spaces" with securitization theory and (ii) "self-isolation" imperatives with security cosmopolitanism. COVID-secure spaces, we argue, pose a significant challenge to securitization theory's framing of security's spaces and times. Self-isolation practices, meanwhile, raise profound ethical questions for the universalizing aspirations of security cosmopolitanism. By analyzing a ubiquitous, if heterogeneous, security challenge to everyday lived experiences within as well as beyond the Global North, the article develops a novel theoretical contribution to recent work rendering visible the Eurocentric foundations and limitations of critical security theory.

Resumen

En los últimos años, hemos sido testigos de una creciente e importante serie de esfuerzos para dar sentido a la época posterior a la pandemia del coronavirus (COVID-19), la cual tuvo lugar en 2019, a través de diversas lentes dentro del campo de los estudios críticos de seguridad (ECS). En este artículo, nos proponemos invertir esta mirada analítica, preguntándonos no "¿qué nos pueden decir los ECS sobre la COVID-19?", sino más bien, "¿qué puede decirnos la COVID-19 sobre los ECS?" Para llevar esto a cabo, combinamos dos de los momentos importantes de la respuesta del Reino Unido a la pandemia con dos vertientes destacadas, aunque muy diferentes, de la investigación crítica en materia de seguridad: (i) combinamos los "espacios libres de Covid" con la teoría de la securitización;

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y, (ii) los imperativos en materia de "autoaislamiento" con el cosmopolitismo de la seguridad. Argumentamos que los espacios libres de Covid plantean un desafío significativo para el encuadre de los espacios y los tiempos de la seguridad de la teoría de la securitización. Las prácticas en materia de autoaislamiento, por su parte, plantean profundas cuestiones éticas con respecto a las aspiraciones universalizadoras del cosmopolitismo de la seguridad. Este artículo analiza un desafío de seguridad ubicuo, aunque heterogéneo, para las experiencias cotidianas vividas dentro y fuera del Norte global, lo que nos permite desarrollar una nueva contribución teórica al trabajo reciente, la cual hace visibles los fundamentos y limitaciones eurocéntricos de la teoría crítica de la seguridad.

Résumé

Ces dernières années, maints efforts, en constante augmentation, ont visé à donner un sens à l'après-pandémie de coronavirus de 2019 (Covid-19) en adoptant différents angles dans le domaine des études de sécurité critique (ESC). Dans cet article, nous tentons d'inverser ce regard théorique, en nous demandant ce que la Covid-19 peut nous dire sur les ESC, et non l'inverse. Pour ce faire, nous rapprochons deux moments importants de la réponse britannique à la pandémie de deux courants éminents, quoique très différents, de la recherche en sécurité critique: (i) les "espaces sécurisés contre la Covid" avec la théorie de la sécuritisation; et, (ii) les impératifs "d'auto-isolement" avec le cosmopolitisme sécuritaire. Selon nous, les espaces sécurisés contre la Covid représentent un défi considérable pour le cadrage des espaces et des moments de sécurité par la théorie de la sécuritisation. Les pratiques d'auto-isolation, quant à elles, soulèvent de profondes questions éthiques pour les aspirations universalistes du cosmopolitisme sécuritaire. En analysant un défi de sécurité répandu, quoiqu'hétérogène, pour les expériences que l'on vit au quotidien au sein et au-delà des pays du Nord, l'article développe une contribution théorique inédite à un travail récent mettant à jour les fondements eurocentriques et les limites de la théorie de sécurité critique.

Keywords: COVID-19, critical security studies, securitization theory, security cosmopolitanism, security politics, health security
Palabras clave: COVID-19, estudios críticos de seguridad, teoría de la securitización, cosmopolitismo de la seguridad, políticas de seguridad, seguridad sanitaria
Mots clés: Covid-19, études de sécurité critique, théorie de la sécuritisation, cosmopolitisme sécuritaire, politique de sécurité, sécurité sanitaire

Introduction

It did not take long for the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019, to become one of the most profound security issues confronting states and their citizens around the world. Although initially framed as a "public health emergency" by the World Health Organization (n.d.), the pandemic was swiftly confronted with the techniques and discourses of security. New Biosecurity Centers, for example, were established to monitor the virus' spread, and militaristic metaphors competed with distinct but similarly securitized references to human and national security in political communication and messaging (Schnepff and Christmann 2022). Efforts to prevent transnational transmission led swiftly to quarantine practices, screening technologies, travel restrictions, and diverse other initiatives aimed at "securing" national borders (Murphy 2021). More localized initiatives in states such as the United Kingdom—our focus in this article—saw the designation of "COVID-secure" spaces associated with new rules governing the spatial and temporal proximity of restaurant diners, retail customers, and others. The consequences of such initiatives for employers inspired new initiatives to "save jobs and *secure* livelihoods" as Business Secretary Alok Sharma (2020, our emphasis) implored in one of the United Kingdom's earliest daily press conferences. As UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson (2020c, our emphasis) argued in a June 2020 statement to the House of Commons: "We are living through a daily demonstration of how events on the far side of the world influence not only British security and prosperity, but something as elemental as *the state of our*

health, and *whether we can go to work or buy our daily bread*."

Given the vast human cost of the virus—the World Health Organization was reporting a total of 7,059,612 deaths from COVID-19 by September 2024—one might imagine this securitized framing common-sensical, even inevitable. Yet, as we know from 30 years of critical security scholarship, such framings are always contingent, always contestable, and always constitutive rather than reflective of reality (see Browning and McDonald 2013). As Nyman (2016: 831) summarizes of "contextualist" approaches to security: "security means different things in different contexts. . .it doesn't have an unchanging 'essence'." Recognizing this is not to deny the consequences or severity of COVID-19. Rather, it is to emphasize and take seriously the intrinsically political dynamics through which (some) specific bringers of harm *become* security challenges (Edkins 1999, 2–6), whereby, "security utterances are not always used to refer to pre-existing threats; instead, they are employed to confer a social reality on security issues or to establish a new order of things" (Balzacq 2019, 33). As recent literature discussed below demonstrates, critical security scholarship has significant resources upon which we might draw to make sense of such dynamics in the construction, communication and governance of this global security crisis.

This article shares a concern with the relationship between COVID-19 and critical security studies (css). However, rather than asking "What can critical security studies tell us about this pandemic?" we focus our efforts on reversing this analytical gaze to ask instead: "What can this pandemic tell us about critical security studies?" In order to do this, the article is organized around a pairing of two important moments in the United Kingdom's response to COVID-19 with two prominent, yet very different, critical security theories: (i) "covid-secure spaces" with securitization theory and (ii) "self-isolation" with security cosmopolitanism. This structure helps us to bring out some of the particular challenges COVID-19 posed to specific and distinct traditions within contemporary security research, and, at the same time, to situate the roots of these challenges in their common geographical, historical, and social contexts. The United Kingdom's response to COVID-19, put otherwise, not only offers a useful point of entry for unpacking sense-making within critical security theories (see also Weber 2020). It also helps highlight analytical and normative occlusions shared by such theories, including their generalisations around security's production and performance, their proposition of a universal ethics of appropriate security conduct, and ultimately their common Eurocentric heritage.

Using the pandemic's security politics to reflect on these universalizing impulses, we argue, offers a new opportunity to engage the privileges and peculiarities of critical security theory's formative contexts, including the continued naturalization of Europe's Kantian peace as a generalized ontological background rather than a specific, contested, and imagined historical moment. Recognizing that theory is always of some context—and thus for *some*body, not *every*body (e.g., Cox 2012)—our normative aspiration is to contribute to recent efforts at highlighting the blindspots and biases within contemporary critical theorizations of security in order potentially to expand their reach and utility (e.g., Wilkinson 2007; Bilgin 2010; Bilgin 2015; Hansen 2020; Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2020, 2023; Sabaratnam 2020; Wæver and Buzan 2020; Hobson 2022). In doing this, the article also offers original contribution to ongoing discussion around the politics of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Duarte and Valença 2021; Kirk and McDonald 2021; Jarvis 2022; Finlayson et al. 2023) and the importance of space, context, and exceptions to the geographical imagination (e.g., Gregory 1995, 2004; Tuathail and Toal 1996), especially as related to formative ontologies (e.g., Sampson 2002).

To make this argument, the article analyzes the UK response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on initial adaptations introduced in 2020 and extending into 2021 (see also Jarvis 2021a, 2022; Finlayson et al. 2023). The United Kingdom's response is illuminating, we suggest, for three reasons. First, COVID-19 had a dramatic impact on British public health, especially in the pandemic's first year, with the United Kingdom's death rate exceeding that of other major European economies such as France and Spain (Cuffe and Rogers 2023). Second, the United Kingdom introduced an extensive and innovative response to the pandemic, which included the rapid development, procurement, and rollout of medical interventions—becoming "the first Western state to licence a vaccine against COVID" (Marsh 2021)—as well as the invention of new and evolving geographies of risk and its mitigation. As intimated above, our focus here is on two distinctive—and distinctively spatial—tropes within this imagined geography: "covid secure" spaces and "self-isolation" practices. Constructions of the former, we argue, are important because they threatened to reverse the geopolitical imagination of securitization theory (e.g., Wæver 1993; Buzan et al. 1998), positioning security as the exception to insecurity's norm. The urgent security paradigm of "self-isolationism," in turn, is significant because of the challenges it posed to the ethical universalisms of cosmopolitan conceptions of security through discouraging actions

serving more proximal imperatives than "the greater good."

Our third reason for focusing on the United Kingdom is its ripeness for unpacking the eurocentricity of security knowledge in the context of COVID-19. With triumphalist and isolationist nationalisms (James and Valluvan 2020) both contributing to and drawing from a ready supply of imperial nostalgia (McCormick 2020; Martin 2021), the pandemic saw the United Kingdom positioning itself at the very center of this crisis' unfolding story (see Hobson 2007, 92–5). Taking the United Kingdom as our case study here obviously risks reinforcing this self-centeredness through neglect of other encounters with the pandemic and its responses, and through neglect of the interconnectedness of Western and non-Western experiences (Hobson and Sajed 2017). The value of so doing, however, is to facilitate an inside-out deconstructive engagement with the foundations of critical security theory from the center of its imagined geography (see Sabaratnam 2011, 787–8). COVID-19, put otherwise, helps to demonstrate the limitations of (eurocentric) css *within* the core of its eurocentric vision of the world, enabling the illumination and critique of its limitations beyond (see Barkawi and Laffey 2006). Together, these render the United Kingdom's pandemic response a "critical case"—"of strategic importance to the general problem," permitting more generalized "logical deductions"—for the purposes of css' critique (Flyvbjerg 2004, 127–8).

From here, the remainder of the article proceeds in five stages. First, we begin with a brief contextual introduction to the United Kingdom's (counter-)pandemic experience, focusing on COVID's outbreak (in the United Kingdom), in the period from 2020 to 2021. A second section then situates our analysis of this period within two bodies of contemporary academic research: (i) on COVID-19 and British politics and (ii) on css and COVID-19. The third section then asks, "what did the pandemic tell us about securitization theory?" and, more specifically, "what did the introduction of 'covid-secure' spaces do to securitization theory's spatio-temporal logics and normative preferences?". Fourth, we explore what the pandemic told us about security cosmopolitanism and, specifically, what the demand to "self-isolate" revealed of a universal cosmopolitan security ethics. We conclude by laying out the challenge of the pandemic for critical security theory and mapping a research agenda that seeks reflection and improvement, rather than abolition, notwithstanding the significant risks and implications revealed herein.

COVID-19 and the United Kingdom

On March 23, 2020, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that the United Kingdom was to enter a prolonged period of lockdown, characterized by new restrictions on movement, heightened hygiene measures, and a ban on indoor household mixing (Johnson 2020b). With a little under 2 months having passed since the January 31 announcement of its first positive cases (BBC 2020), UK residents were now permitted to leave home for only limited periods of exercise, the purchase of food and essentials, or for medical reasons. Commercial, leisure, and entertainment facilities shut abruptly, and life as British residents knew it had come to an unexpected halt for unknown duration. The message—stay home, save lives, protect the NHS [National Health Service]—was reinforced through apocalyptic national television broadcasts, with Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty a newly prominent presence delivering key soundbites against backdrops populated by hazard warnings. Relatively suddenly, having eschewed earlier opportunities to act, the United Kingdom found itself in a composite crisis of health, economics, and well-being (Finlayson et al. 2023, 339–40).

Notwithstanding the presence of "COVID sceptics" (Shackle 2021), extreme security measures such as these enjoyed widespread acquiescence within the United Kingdom in the pandemic's opening stages (Newton 2020; Kirk and McDonald 2021, 510). Numbing news coverage relaying case data, hospitalization figures, and the daily national death toll contributed to a sense that the government's response was, essentially, unavoidable (see Kettell and Kerr 2022). Fears that the United Kingdom's health services could be overwhelmed, as had happened in Northern Italy, were employed to rally Britons to "protect the NHS" by "flattening the curve" of the pandemic's first wave. The imposition of new restrictions on everyday activities—purchasing groceries, hugging elderly relatives, using children's playgrounds, and so on—generated profound epidemiological and ethical debate (debate that returned with a vengeance amidst the subsequent "Partygate" revelations of late 2021). And fear of the virus undoubtedly spread across the United Kingdom as a result. One Ipsos poll (2020a) of April 2020, for instance, found 75 percent of the British public either very or fairly concerned about the risk of COVID to oneself, with 93 percent very or fairly concerned about the risk to the country as a whole. A March 2020 Report by the United Kingdom's Mental Health Foundation (2020), in collaboration with the Institute of Public Health at the University of Cambridge, similarly, found that

> over one in five (22%) of UK adults had felt panicked, and three in ten (30%) had felt afraid because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost one in five people (18%) had felt hopeless…almost one in three (29%) felt unprepared, while one in ten (10%) felt lonely.

Such fears were understandable given the pandemic's especial impact on the United Kingdom. The country ranked fifth globally in total case numbers across 2020 and 2021, with particularly high per capita rates (Kirk and McDonald 2021). A total of 9,500 excess deaths were attributed to the virus in mid-April 2020, with the United Kingdom's daily COVID-19 death toll not peaking until January 19, 2021 when 1,490 registered deaths were recorded amidst the United Kingdom's first major vaccine rollout (BBC 2023). Although these figures might be partly explained by comparatively effective detection and data handling measures, the United Kingdom still constituted something of an "outlier" in the pandemic's first 2 years (Kirk and McDonald 2021, 5). As Kirk and McDonald (2021) note, early government musings about "herd immunity" were quickly abandoned, as a community of scientists urged far tighter security measures in response to the emerging threat. Thus, the passage of the 2020 Coronavirus Bill saw Health Secretary Matt Hancock and Prime Minister Boris Johnson both position the government's response as an effort to save lives via actions that were unprecedented in peacetime (Kirk and McDonald 2021; Jarvis 2022). In fact, with over half of the United Kingdom population wanting *more* emergency measures in place than those introduced by the government at this time (Kirk and McDonald 2021, 6; Coates 2020), political elites found themselves having to keep pace with societal expectations around security (ibid). The situation was only reinforced with news of the Prime Minister's hospitalization: His recovery and return to Downing Street offering a politically productive metonym for UK national resilience embodied in Boris Johnson's own Churchillian imitations (Jarvis 2022, 24).

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Security Politics

Despite the recentness of the coronavirus pandemic, there has already emerged a valuable, and growing, scholarship grappling with the dynamics discussed above. A first body of literature of importance to our argument in this article concerns the impact of COVID-19 on the United Kingdom specifically. This work includes discursive analyses unpacking the political rhetoric of policymakers and others in response to the crisis. Such work, to date, has focused on constructions of expertise (Kettell and Kerr 2022), credibility (Jarvis 2021b), and temporality (Jarvis 2022) in UK political speech in this context. Related scholarship pays attention to the form—rather than content—of political discourse here, detailing specific linguistic features of COVID-19 discourse, such as the prominence of numbers therein (Billig 2021) or the importance of particular pronoun choices (Williams and Wright 2022). This discursive scholarship dovetails with related work on governance styles in the United Kingdom—frequently with reference to the populism of Boris Johnson's conservative government. Here, we encounter research on the crisis' (mis)management (Foster and Feldman 2021; Ward and Ward 2021), as well as literature on the positioning of citizens and citizenship within the pandemic (Andreouli and Brice 2022; Finlayson et al. 2023). In this article, we contribute to this growing literature—with its attentiveness to the contingency of the United Kingdom's pandemic politics—by paying specific attention to "COVID-secure spaces" and "self-isolation" as two largely neglected features of the United Kingdom's response.

The second important literature for our analysis concerns critical security scholarship on COVID-19. Beyond helping us to de-essentialize COVID-19's inherent security-ness through attention to the construction of (in)security, such work provides resources to think through the pandemic's implications for individual ontological security (Purnell 2021; Kinnvall 2023), to reflect on the gendering of COVID-19's consequences (Harman 2021), and to explore how the pandemic exposed "divisions, inequity, and injustices rooted in systems of domination such as racism, sexism, neoliberal capitalism, and ableism" (Forester and O'Brien 2020, 1151). Postcolonial and decolonial research in this area, moreover, provides us with resources with which to confront racialized explanations of the virus' origins and the ostensibly retributive violences subsequently enacted against individuals identified as "Asian" or "Chinese" (see Pan 2021). Such work is important, in part, for spotlighting the exclusion of non-Western epistemologies and experiences in responses to the pandemic (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020).

Broadly constructivist work within this second body of scholarship has helped to unpack the pandemic's militaristic framing via "heroic" figures such as retired military personnel (Browning and Haigh 2022). Kirk and McDonald's (2021) use of securitization theory, relatedly, offers comparative analysis of the ways in which exceptional responses to COVID-19 were justified in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (see also Hoffman 2020). Kaunert et al. (2022) do similar, with a focus on the World Health Organization as a security norm entrepreneur. At a more "mi-

cro" level of analysis, css also has considerable potential for thinking through the plurality of "everyday" or "vernacular" experiences and encounters with the virus and government policies introduced for its arrest (see Kurylo 2022; Stevens et al. 2024). Such work speaks to normative concerns with the exclusionary consequences of pandemic management in which COVID-19 was used to "justify, in the name of protection and safety, migrant deterrence and confinement practice" (Tazzioli and Stierl 2021, 77; see also Pacciardi 2023).

Taken collectively, this work demonstrates the considerable potential css commands for helping us to understand the security politics of COVID-19. With a small number of outliers—such as Newman's (2022) argument that the pandemic demonstrated the inadequacy of more traditional security paradigms with their narrow, militaristic conceptions of security (see also Newman 2010)—this work has tended to apply insight *from* css *to* COVID-19 and government responses. In so doing, it brings into focus hitherto obscured or neglected dimensions of the pandemic, problematizing the ontological, epistemological, and ethical assumptions around which it was governed and managed. As detailed in the article's introduction, our focus, in contrast, is not to contribute to this discussion by again asking "what can css tell us about COVID-19?" Rather, we set out to reverse this analytical gaze to ask: "what can COVID-19 tell us about css?" In order to do this—and to explore how COVID-19 exposed pre-existing limitations within critical security theory (see also Davies et al. 2022, xv)—we turn now to our first moment/theory pairing: "COVID-secure" spaces and securitization theory.

Covid-Secure Spaces and Securitization Theory

By May 2020, the UK government was preparing for the end of lockdown and the return of (some) employees to their usual workplaces. Central to this strategy was the creation of what were termed "covid secure" spaces to designate workplaces, shops, entertainment venues, and so forth that had introduced particular security measures. The UK government published guides in multiple languages to assist with the meeting of these—ultimately legally binding—guidelines (Barr 2020), producing a mandatory certificate for display once the organization in question deemed its compliance with these new requirements adequate. These measures included sufficient handwashing facilities and/or access to hand gel dispensers, and changes to the physical layout and use of spaces such as the provision of adjacent rather than face-to-face seating or the installation of (partial) screens and barriers to separate people. It quickly became common in the United Kingdom to see taped floor markings detailing a distance of 2 m (6 foot) between staff and customers, with patrons of shared spaces such as shops navigating complex one-way systems designed to prevent face-to-face interaction.

The focus at this stage of the pandemic remained firmly on fomite transmission through droplets, usually on hands and surfaces, transmitted to faces. Despite the fact that fomite transmission accounted for less than one-fifth of cases, a greater focus on ventilation, led by figures such as Cath Noakes, only came later as understanding of the virus' aerosolization and airborne transmission developed (Morawksa et al. 2020).[1] Those living in the United Kingdom were left with the now discredited idea that security from COVID-19 could be achieved in designated spaces because of the angle at which humans interacted, or through the following of designated routes. And staff, of course, were urged or effectively compelled to return to workplaces, placing their confidence in small screens that might offset the risks of sitting 2 metres apart for several hours. The surrealism of the United Kingdom's approach arguably peaked somewhere between the hygiene theater of the Prime Minister urging citizens to sing "Happy Birthday" twice while handwashing (Johnson 2020a), and the then Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, urging citizens to "eat out, to help out," with government-funded discounts at participating restaurants, cafes, pubs, and so forth (HMRC 2022). Such initiatives dovetailed with the discursive construction of "frontline" or "key" workers in the early stages of the pandemic and the United Kingdom's positioning of specific professions—in health care, education, public utilities, and some retail sectors, for example—as essential to the continuation of British life (De Camargo and Whiley 2020). This positioning, as critics have noted (e.g., O'Connor 2020), legitimized the exposure of specific workers—often in low-income employment—to health and even mortality risks. It also, importantly, opened space to encourage or mandate the subsequent return of a wide range of other workers to "covid secure" workplaces and commute patterns.

1 A preoccupation with fomites over airborne transmission was reflected in the late adoption (and early rejection) of masks, during the continued underemphasis of ventilation's importance.

Norm/Exception Inversions

The emergence and governance of "covid-secure spaces" in the United Kingdom is noteworthy, for our purposes, because it constituted something of an inversion of the dynamics typically taken to constitute successful securitization. Notwithstanding significant recent developments in securitization theory (e.g., Balzacq 2011; Floyd 2019), the standard model of securitization remains one in which an authoritative figure attempts to persuade relevant audiences that a particular political issue has become so important that it now constitutes an existential threat to something of value (Buzan et al. 1998). Where an audience accepts such a "move," space is opened for an interruption to "normal" political life, and the introduction of "exceptional" measures befitting the threat's seriousness (Buzan et al. 1998). In this sense, securitization is attributed a grammar of security organized around a "plot that includes existential threat, point of no return, and a possible way out" (Buzan et al. 1998, 33), the severity of which generates an "urgency of emergency" (Salter 2011, 116) with potentially profound implications for liberal democratic life (see Aradau 2004).

In the United Kingdom's experience of COVID-19 during the Spring and Summer 2020, in contrast, we encountered a situation in which a security risk was already widely acknowledged and well understood by a relevant audience—much of the public—which was also, in significant part, amenable to *additional* and even *enhanced* security measures (Kirk and McDonald 2021; Coates 2020). Such acquiescence was evident in measures of public opinion, for instance, with significant reluctance to return to public spaces such as entertainment venues after the first lockdown (Ipsos 2020b). It was apparent, too, in the public embrace of measures aiming at increased personal security beyond those mandated by the United Kingdom's central government. The purchasing of facemasks for individual use, for instance, burgeoned amidst growing public fear (Kettell and Kerr 2022, 16) despite repeated (and subsequently retracted) government skepticism toward their value for ostensibly healthy individuals (see Edmonds 2020 for a timeline).[2] The individualized stockpiling or "panic buying" of essential groceries and household products—another potential indicator of public anxiety—was prominent too. Thus, although the period continued to witness anti-lockdown protests, and the emergence of a small, if vocal, constituency of "COVID sceptics" (Shackle 2021), acquiescence was widespread in the pandemic's early months, with one June 2020 study documenting over 97 percent good compliance with the rules (Fancourt 2021).

We have then what looks to be something of a temporal reversal here in securitization's traditional logic, such that the audience's embrace of security politics appears to have not only *exceeded*, but also *preceded*, significant executive moves, disrupting the traditional before/after emphasis on securitizing speech acts (Jensen and Stepputat 2013, 214). And with the creation of "covid-secure spaces," this temporal inversion was accompanied by a *spatial* one in which designated, bounded places stood as ostensibly safe exceptions to a more generalized external environment of external insecurity. This designation, of course, had only precarious relationship to their actual existence as such: such spaces, epidemiologically, were often little more than a room, in a pandemic, filled with potential exhalants of an ill-understood, sometimes fatal, virus. The point, though, is that insecurity no longer constituted the exception and de-securitization no longer the normative goal. Rather, security was now artificially confined within small pockets of everyday existence surrounded by a more general ontology of omnipresent risk. Read thus, such designations pose profound challenge to the formative foundations of one of the major planks of contemporary critical security theory.

As this suggests, the "covid-secure" terminology was one that witnessed security's existence "announced" into being. Security's possibility, here, relies upon the invention and acceptance of that terminology, despite subsequent reasons for questioning the veracity of this designation's premises. COVID-secure—as the promise of security *from* COVID-19—was an obvious but vital fiction, enabling economic activity and anticipating lawsuits. While, traditionally, critical security theory has tended to focus upon articulations of threat and danger (e.g., Campbell 1992), the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the inverse importance of the ability to construct spatial and temporal pockets or windows of security against a backdrop of seemingly unprecedented risk. This inversion was evident in other emergency measures, too. Government guidance that some 2.2 million individuals with compromised immune systems should "self-shield" at home for 12 weeks to avoid infection at the start of the pandemic (UK Parliament 2021) gestured similarly at differentiating secure-inside from insecure-outside. So, too, did the creation of "Covid support bubbles" in which particular family units were granted permission to interact in spite of wider restrictions on social mixing (Hill 2020).

2 Recent research indicates that facemasks became less effective in preventing transmission by the United Kingdom's first "Omicron" wave of COVID-19 around December 2021 (Hunter and Brainard 2024).

By calling security into existence through shields, stickers, floor taping, hand gel, and their accompanying rhetorical mantras such as "hands, face, space," Boris Johnson's UK government sought to balance multiple, and potentially competing, imperatives. The need to defend public health in light of this ill-understood pandemic co-existed with the desire to protect psychological well-being in light of social isolation and loneliness, the importance of educational and social continuities for younger demographics, and—for a center-right, populist government—the political imperatives of maintaining free economic activity and promoting cultural values supposedly associated with Britain (Finlayson et al. 2023, 340). Such priorities, of course, might have equally been, but rarely were, articulated around a language of security: as a potentially greater risk, for many, than that posed by the virus itself. Instead, the particular spatialization of security in COVID-19's early period saw its co-option by epidemiologically questionable performances of security within. This extended from the pandemic's early stages, with the establishment of "covid-secure" spaces, through to later requirements, such as mask-wearing requirements for restaurant diners leaving their tables to visit the restroom.

Further Challenges for Securitization Theory

The pandemic's inversion of securitization's traditional ontology—with the exception now rendering the norm—was not COVID-19's only challenge to this theoretical framework. First, to return to temporality, as the pandemic continued, the sequential constraints of a purely speech act-premised theoretical framework became increasingly apparent. As other authors have argued (e.g., Huysmans 2011), securitization is best understood within its social and discursive contexts, often as a continuous process rather than decisive moment witnessing the articulation of threat (see also Floyd 2016, 681–3). At various points, as rates of infection and media scrutiny waxed and waned, government officials within the United Kingdom sought either to impress upon the public the urgency of the threat *or* to reassure and encourage citizens back to work and leisure activities.[3] This, as Kettell and Kerr (2022, 15–6) note, "forced ministers into a frantic attempt to pass responsibility between a number of actors using a range of narratives designed to steer a delicate line between receiving credit for their emergency measures and distancing themselves from blame for a growing number of failures."

3 Covid's variegated impact on the UK population was later reflected in policy responses such as demographic and geographic risk categorization.

Kettell and Kerr's (2022, 15) analysis of the UK government's communication strategy in response to COVID-19 is important for traditional political science literature because it demonstrates how the depoliticization of issues such as pandemics is incremental, ongoing, contextual, reliant on changing circumstances, and incomplete. Our suggestion, here, is that approaches to securitization would benefit, similarly, from greater recognition of security's fluctuations and the role of context and audience, as well as actor and act in the production thereof (see also Salter 2008; Jarvis and Legrand 2017). Turning the tap of security on and off in the governance of COVID-19 made for a security politics in which risk was increasingly omnipresent, even while threat levels fluctuated across time, space, and for particular individuals or groups. Such nuances remain poorly accounted for within critical security theories premised upon the existential and exceptional (see Lister 2019; Neal 2019). To put it succinctly, as weeks dragged into months, COVID-19 and its mitigations became the (widely publicized) "new normal."

Second, the attempted establishment of "covid-secure spaces" also sheds dramatic light on the interaction of language and materiality in security politics, not least in the performance of hygiene theater. Security is a speech act but it is so much more than this: It is discursive. That is to say, security is formed at the intersection of the material and ideational. It can be brought into being through language and the extra-linguistic, but it is made sense of—and made meaningful—where words meet things. Securitization theory was pushed to its limits by the security work done through the material and visual designation of such spaces (through COVID signage, floor tape, masks, and so forth). And such designations communicated, of course, with wider visualizations of the pandemic such as in social media photographs of lateral flow tests, televisual images of COVID wards, or the sharing of PowerPoint slides by official experts. The United Kingdom's problematic messaging, obsessed as it was with hygiene theater such as handwashing and "hands, face, space" slogans, also paid testament to the material reality of a threat that interacted with the spaces and bodies of everyday (co-habited) life. As Richard Jackson (2005)and many others have pointed out, how threat and its implications are understood depends on the framings and narratives that give it meaning, and the security dimension of COVID-19 was, to significant extent, extra-linguistic (see Williams 2003).

Third, the pandemic also served to reverse the assumed background ontology of securitization theory—a Kantian peace—posing significant normative implications for the theory. The Copenhagen School has an

established normative preference for de-securitization (Buzan et al. 1998, 29; Roe 2004, 282–4)—the moving of an issue out of the exceptional realm of security and back into the contestations of politics-as-normal—not least because this enables slower and more deliberative policy formation, where contestations and accountability (sometimes, problematically, framed as "normal politics") are afforded time to play out (Roe 2012, 251–2). In the Global North that normative preference often makes sense. Panicking about refugees—securitized as existential threat—can lead to harmful and unethical policy decisions, for example. But the COVID-19 pandemic upended that logic to highlight the plight of very many inside and outside of Europe who experience daily insecurities in myriad forms. Suddenly, with COVID-19 bearing down on all—including wealthy, white, and ostensibly secure citizens—there emerged a strong and widespread normative appetite for securitization not de-securitization among elites and "ordinary" citizens alike. Rule-flaunting, especially among young people, was met with derision, outrage, and calls for exceptional punishment befitting this new state of emergency, including the (widely ridiculed) threat of 10 years imprisonment announced by Health Secretary Matthew Hancock in February 2021 (see Elgot and Weaver 2021). Such outrage, of course, only intensified with subsequent revelations of rule-flouting by those at the center of the UK government's response from the Prime Minister's Chief Advisor's visit to Barnard Castle during lockdown to "test his eyesight" (Weaver 2020), through the Health Secretary's own extra-marital breach of social distancing rules (Walker 2021), to the "Partygate" revelations of revelry at the heart of government that generated over fifty Fixed Penalty Notice fines, including for the Prime Minister and his successor/then Chancellor (Hancock 2022).

The normative preference for "more" rather than "less" security generated—or, perhaps, revealed—by the pandemic, is one that may be felt, and claimed, by people in real existential conditions such as those living on the frontlines of climate change, or struggling to feed their families, or living in inadequately heated accommodation. Securitization theory's assumed, reified, ontology is so peculiar to a particular place and lived experience that it has helped to establish a normative "preference" (see Aradau 2004, 393) of at least questionable relevance for those not fortunate enough to have the time and space to develop their own critical security theory. As recent postcolonial, decolonial, and related work has forcefully argued (e.g., Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2020; Coleman 2021), the framework's apparent universalism camouflages an underpinning parochialism with limited utility beyond its European heartland—or, even, applicability to a particular European demographic. The silences of securitization theory, here, are gendered and racialized (Bertrand 2018; Gomes and Marques 2021); the normative preference for de-securitization is the ethical hangover of its formative context—a geo-security imagination premised upon the idea of a Kantian European peace (see also Nyman 2023, 676–7). This backdrop, and the silences it generates, is neither specific nor unique to securitization theory (Vitalis 2018). And yet—and to pre-empt themes returned to below—the theory's ontological framework and normative privileging of desecuritization, clearly, risks rendering invisible a whole range of systemic inequalities and insecurities (Peterson 2021). The pandemic's importance for critical security theory, then, was in its bringing this to the foreground, including through demonstration of the untrustworthiness of de-securitizing moves for those living lives marked by health and other insecurities. The alternative, here, was to end up sat—in a "covid-secure" space—with others potentially exhaling a deadly virus.

To summarize, briefly, the omnipresence of threat—and potentially existential danger—of COVID-19 called into question important underpinning metatheoretical and normative assumptions of securitization theory. For many people in states like the United Kingdom, everyday activity was layered with new—or newly experienced—forms of risk and uncertainty. Escaping from a securitized normality to behave in a way previously considered "normal" required a paradoxically de-securitizing move that brought into being ostensibly "covid-secure" spaces void of risk to their inhabitants. What we saw was a government—augmented by the epistemic authority of scientific and other experts (Kettell and Kerr 2022)—securitizing an issue through vocalizing existential threat to valued referents, while simultaneously constructing risk-free spaces through normalizing certain practices and precautions: handwashing, social distancing, lateral-flow tests, mask-wearing, 2-week isolation periods, and so forth. Such precautions may have been absent or impossible in practice (such as, for instance, the prospects of social distancing in cramped offices), yet their articulation permitted employers to return essential and later non-essential staff to their workspaces, and their children to schools. The theoretical upshot of this is the pandemic's demonstration that securitization is not only lacking beyond the Eurocentric context in which it emerged. It is lacking, too, *within it*. As a theory—irrespective of its proponents' intentions (see Hobson 2022, 15–7)—securitization risks neglecting the perpetual and often inescapable conditions and experiences of

insecurity that define the everyday in much of the world, including inhabitants of European states who do not occupy privileged social positions. Too often, theirs was a lived experience of insecurity long before COVID arrived. The pandemic therefore highlights—and indeed often exacerbated the inequities of—the privileged context of securitization's development, wherein danger exists, normally, somewhere else, sometime else, and primarily for somebody else.

Self-Isolation and Security Cosmopolitanism: Condemning the Insecure?

Given the light shed on some of securitization theory's shortcomings by COVID-19, we might turn to alternative critical security literatures for assistance in making sense of events in this period of heightened insecurity. An obvious point of comparison here (given their centrality within css) are approaches that draw upon overtly cosmopolitan ethics—associated with attempts to create a better, fairer, and more peaceful world for all—to reconceptualize the politics and possibilities of security.

Cosmopolitan thinking has various incarnations within critical security research. Academic and foreign policy formulations of "human security" emphasize the moral importance of all humans' well-being, including that of non-citizens (Gilmore 2014, 713), positioning security "not as a limited state concern but as an ambitious global concern" (Gibson 2011, 87). The "Welsh" or "Aberystwyth" school associated, in particular, with the writings of Ken Booth (1991, 2005, 2007) mobilizes a similarly universalist logic with its account of security's inseparability from emancipation. Drawing explicitly on cosmopolitan thought (e.g., Booth 2007, 258–9), it is the "freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do" (Booth 1991, 319) that opens space for people to pursue their own paths to self-realization or human becoming (Booth 2007, 257). Although this work nods toward security's derivative status and multiple legitimate interpretations (Booth 2005), efforts to frame its actualization highlight the approach's unapologetic universalism through arguing for the delegitimization of violence as an instrument of politics; the promotion of respect for democracy; the promotion of respect for domestic and international law; and, greater consistency on human rights (Booth 2007).

Notwithstanding the importance of the above, cosmopolitan security thinking has, perhaps, received its most explicit formulation in the writings of Anthony Burke (e.g., Burke 2013, 2015; Burke et al. 2014).[4] The principal theoretical move in this work is to shift the referent object of security to the global level (away from states and people) in order to develop an ethical framework guiding action toward the greater good. For an action to be ethical, one must consider its replication across all people, everywhere, both now and in the future: everything, everywhere, all at once, if you will (Burke 2013, 20). Such a starting point forces us to recognize the interconnected character of human insecurities (Linklater 2011), while rendering visible the sorts of ethical consideration and obligations that lie beneath human decisions and activities (see Jabri 2012, 632). In Burke's (2013, 22) framing, "the responsibility of all states and security actors is to create deep and enduring security for all human beings in a form that harmonises human social, economic, cultural and political activity with the integrity of global ecosystems." Thus, notwithstanding the specific responsibilities of particularly powerful institutions (Burke 2015, 198), "in a common and networked existence. . .at a basic level, everyone is responsible" (Burke 2015, 198) for systemic violences and structural harms.

This appeal to collective and shared responsibility—the limits of which need not end at the limits of our species (Burke 2023)—in an interconnected, insecure world is an especially powerful one. Climate change is an excellent illustrative example here, with security cosmopolitism positing an ethical guide for moral calculations of how to behave—as security actors—in a manner beneficial for all, with a focus on the biosphere. Globalizing your actions, and extending their consequences forward in time, renders self-interested state behavior, or the externalization of pollution's costs by multinational corporations, for example, profoundly unethical behaviors that increase collective insecurity at the global level. As Burke et al. (2016, 502) powerfully argued in their "Planet Politics" manifesto:

> We cannot survive without accepting the cosmopolitan and enmeshed nature of this world. We are an array of bodies connected and interconnected in complex ways that have little to do with nationality. States will wither in the coming heat, freeze in the prolonged winters, and be lost under the rising oceans. We will not survive without the biggest and most complex system we know: the biosphere.

4 While Burke and other prominent cosmopolitan security theorists work in Australia, the principal philosophical anchorage and theoretical traditions underpinning the framework derive, foremost, from Europe.

There is, as this suggests, an obvious value to an ethical security framework that assists actors to evaluate the morality of their actions and that disincentivizes behaviors that are unjust when globalized or extended into the future. This is useful, too, for thinking about mundane acts—perhaps purchasing a cheap flight to an international conference in an era of climate change—which forces reflection upon, and perhaps assists in the navigation of, complex moral nuances that accompany everyday security acts.

At the same time, even if unintentionally, such an ethical framework and the socially dispersed "practices of responsibility" (Robinson 2015, 173) it suggests—with its spatial and temporal universalizations —risks condemning those whose prioritization of proximal or immediate concerns fail to accord with the greater good. This risk, we argue, has moral shortcomings at the same time as it reveals—once again—the privileged position of its development, because a context in which such calculations are possible is not one that is shared by most of the world's (or even most of Europe's) people. The capacity to think security decisions or acts in seemingly timeless, universal terms is, fundamentally, a privilege of those who are freed from more immediate or communitarian worries. Such worries—powerfully articulated in other broadly cosmopolitan projects (e.g., UNDP 1994)—include feeding a family, working to pay rising heating costs, or the insecurity of precarious, under- or un-employment. These concerns, while traditionally seen to reside "elsewhere" from a vantage point of European privilege, became very apparent—and rendered highly visible—within the United Kingdom's pandemic experience.

The UK government introduced self-isolation and quarantine policies on March 12, 2020. "Self-isolation" is the policy of separating persons infected with COVID, or those exposed to the infected, from others with the ambition of curtailing the virus' spread through driving down its reproduction number or "R value." Even though self-isolation was a legal requirement for much of the United Kingdom's response to the pandemic, adherence was often low (at circa 42 percent, see Smith 2022). The severity of COVID-19 in the first UK wave was such that self-isolation was rapidly extended from those with confirmed cases, to symptomatic persons, to those who may have been exposed to somebody infected yet asymptomatic. This extension—and the risk of spending 2 weeks self-isolated, seemingly due to the behavior of others—exacerbated already heated and widespread condemnation of citizens seen to be flouting the rules or failing to self-isolate. The "linguistic harvest" (Halliday 2010) of the pandemic included new nomenclature for those who did not abide by the rules. The term "covidiots" was foremost among derogatory labels for citizens seen to be flouting the regulations, whether by gathering in groups that were too large or proximal, or failing to self-isolate. Consider, for example, the derision expressed toward East London "rule-breakers" at a reasonably busy open-air market:

> They can put the flowers on their parents' and grandparents' graves, and maybe send some to the families of the health workers they kill;
>
> These people are basically biological terrorists. It's criminally insane;
>
> People are being so stupid. They are being so selfish;
>
> You're kidding?! Covidiots …. (see responses to Sofos 2020, as cited in Cooper et al. 2023)

Despite a compliance rate of 42 percent, 70 percent of the population intended to self-isolate when required, presenting "a crucial gap between people's intentions and behaviours" (Smith 2022). As reports in *The Guardian* newspaper noted, "the denial"—of scientific reality and basic morality—"implicit in covidiocy is not confined to the lunatic fringes" (Moore 2020). Yet, stigmatization of those "covididiots" who flouted the rules went beyond ridicule to include de-humanization and a willingness to punish that included support for denial of care (Kasper et al. 2022). Such condemnation was arguably fueled by widely reported instances of transgression and popular pleas for adherence. On the former, the death of Belly Mujinga—a "frontline," essential worker—in April 2020 received extensive coverage, after she was allegedly spat on while working at Victoria railway station, by a man claiming to have the virus. On the latter, a widely shared video recorded Dawn Bilborough, an intensive care nurse, unable to purchase supermarket essentials after completing a 48-h work shift (see Wilson 2020), highlighting the precarity of "essential workers" exacerbated by ("covidiotic") behaviors that were not conducted with the "greater good" in mind.

Adherence to self-isolation, then, varied dramatically, with several factors offering significant predictive value for compliance, such as ability to isolate, trust in government, and policy fatigue (e.g., Eraso and Hills 2021). Some predictors of non-compliance, such as being male, are clearly ripe for gender-premised critique. Others, such as being young, may reflect rational, self-interested behavior, given that COVID-19's risk doubled for every additional seven years of age. However, key predictors also, importantly, included residence in deprived socioeconomic areas and having dependent children (Eraso and Hills 2021; also Smith 2022). Test and Trace Sup-

port Payments were insufficient to offset the fact that economic vulnerability and having economic dependents significantly decreased compliance with the UK self-isolation policy. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, those least able to self-isolate were those already living the most vulnerable lives, in challenging circumstances, with dependents for whom to provide through unreliable, highly contingent incomes. Put simply, for many of those without full paid sick leave in permanent positions, failing to attend work was no option at all.

A significant demographic in such a position was the United Kingdom's growing number of workers in the flexible and unpredictable "gig economy"—the section of the labor market heavily reliant upon short-term and part-time contracts, taken on by independent freelancers. As Aidan Harper (2020) argues, "self-isolation is a luxury that gig economy workers can ill afford." "Gig workers" often already faced a lived reality of "insecurity" (Harper 2020), within which multiple forms of risk had to be calculated and weighed. In a manner that would be familiar to security cosmopolitanism, Harper (2020) acknowledges that self-isolation and the pandemic generally were a challenge to the myriad systems that structure UK life. "Forgoing wages to protect others from disease" (Harper 2020) was simply not a realistic choice for those who relied on zero-hour, minimum-wage jobs. As one newspaper described it, this was "the untenable luxury of self-isolation" (Various 2020). Those weighing such complexities are not constrained to a small section of UK society: nearly 5 million workers were part of the gig economy in March 2020, with one in six employed in low-paid and insecure jobs (Harper 2020). For employees facing no pay, or limited pay if on sick leave, the option to risk spreading the virus could readily outweigh the need to protect others. Such a calculation is easy to imagine when the need to feed and look after loved ones is part of the equation.

Critical approaches within security studies such as security cosmopolitanism can usefully be applied to the structures of insecurity that govern the lives of those in insecure jobs. Nunes (2020), for example, explicitly connects COVID-19, neoliberal economics, and critical security theory:

> Another relevant aspect of vulnerability is the fact that it is not uniform. COVID-19, as a global social fact (facilitated by the circulation of information via social networks), can lead us to believe in an equality of conditions. One of global health's most popular narratives is precisely the notion that we are "united by the contagion". But let us not fool ourselves. This is not one single pandemic, but various experiences of the pandemic. We are not "all in this together". As a white man, comfortably staying at home while receiving my salary, I cannot compare my experience to that of a person with precarious work or prevented from working and earning, or even living on the street. Vulnerability is an unequal political relationship by which certain groups—defined in terms of gender identification, race, sexual orientation, and age, among others, as well as in their various intersections—are systematically exposed to impoverishment, illness, and death.

Security cosmopolitanism, of course, is well aware of the "interactive and systemic nature of contemporary insecurity processes" (Burke 2015, 191). At the same time, the theory "self-consciously sets out global normative standards and ethico-political ends based on a diagnosis of the common crisis we face," demanding "political and normative change that draws on prescriptive theory" (Burke 2015, 193). This, in significant part, is a response to "heightened. . . insecurity globalisation" (Burke 2015, 193). But insecurity is not globalized evenly. A prioritization of "long-range processes . . . across planetary space-time," not only downplays more mundane and localized everyday insecurities, but also risks condemning individual, familial, and communitarian security actions as self-regarding parochialism, in violation of the greater good. Evidence of such a logic in action emerged, we argue, with the UK Health Secretary's September 2020 urging of all residents to report their neighbors for breaking self-isolation rules during the pandemic (Wood 2020).

Given the unpalatability of such condemnation of the most insecure, security cosmopolitanism might nuance the implicit moral implications of an unashamedly universal ethics. When, how, and why might the demand to think and act as a "citizen of the world" outstrip the need to survive and thrive in context? A useful cosmopolitan moral framework can surely be developed, compelling the development of jobs that pay a living wage, the removal of flexible contracts, or the extension of robust welfare policies (e.g., Burke 2015). There are, however, reasons to treat cautiously a moral framework that risks condemning decisions and behaviors motivated by complex moral judgments, but which prioritize, out of necessity, the proximal, the immediate, and the familial. The unspoken assumption of security cosmopolitanism is not just ethical and normative, it is ontological—the naturalization of background conditions, the taking for granted of a reality that is peculiar and not ubiquitous. We seek, therefore, to "make strange" the ontological assumptions of cosmopolitanism—that actors *could* consider and act according to the globalized consequences of

their actions—such that it might better account for contexts that are unfamiliar to its foundations.

Conclusion

If theory is for somebody and for some purpose (e.g., Cox 2012), it is so, in part, because it develops in some time and some space. The contexts in which thinking and writing are done are specific, not universal. As, of course, are the contexts in which (in)security is lived and experienced. The coronavirus pandemic transformed Europe, and the United Kingdom within it, into a space and time of variegated but widespread insecurity. The health crises, seemingly omnipresent risk, cost-benefit calculations, and everyday security concerns it generated were unfamiliar to a geo-security imagination founded upon (the assumptions of) Europe's Kantian peace. They are not so unusual in other parts of the world, or for more marginalized and insecure groups within Europe. Health insecurities, fragile economies, complex ethical navigations of social and familial relationships, and widespread conditions of risk are not foreign to all people. These conditions—experienced in heterogeneous but very real and widespread ways in even the most affluent parts of Europe in 2020—can help us to think through the limits of critical theories developed "here," in different times, by a select few. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on critical security theory, we argue, is therefore to highlight the peculiar and specific geo-security imaginaries formative to its context and which, necessarily, limit the universal applicability of analytical and normative frameworks.

Our two chosen theoretical vehicles for assessing the pandemic's lessons on theory's context—securitization theory and security cosmopolitanism—are both extremely important bodies of work, associated with prominent security theorists, whose research we admire and benefit from in our own teaching and research. It is therefore important to note, explicitly, that the aim here is not to dismiss them but, rather, to help uncover (or recover) their foundations and, by so doing, to think through limitations or biases that arise. We hope, in this sense, to further their utility by infusing greater reflexivity in their use. By highlighting the blind spots, perhaps their spotlights can shine even brighter, illuminating contemporary security challenges and potential solutions. We seek improvement, not abandonment; revision, not revolution—that is our aim, rather than something more destructive. And, in so doing, we recognize that critiquing theoretical or ethical visions for their failure to anticipate (perhaps exceptional) events—or for their inability to resolve complex, perhaps intractable, ethical dilemmas—implies a high, and perhaps unattainable, standard against which to evaluate contemporary security scholarship.[5]

Our efforts, then, are an attempt to contribute to contemporary efforts at updating the landscape of critical security theory (e.g., Neal 2019). We believe these tools, in turn, can be part of building a better world, but only if the world from which they came—inclusive of its privilege—is not forgotten. This, then, is an act of remembering—of times, spaces, and people—with the aim of working toward the imagining and realization of a better future. This act of remembering is important because failing to act can be consequential. Sampson (2002), in a poignant yet often forgotten article, framed "the way we imagine international politics" as "tropical anarchy"; this being, the idea that the "rest of the world" is a fundamentally dangerous space. A Kantian peace is the necessary antithesis of tropical anarchy; the primitive space of "out there," juxtaposed to the civilized space of "home." As Sampson (2002) put it, much of the discipline relies not upon a Waltzian imagining of anarchy, but rather, of a bifurcated view of inside and outside, civilized and barbaric, with Europe or the West at the core of what needs protecting. Our reminder for critical security theory is that the Kantian peace is imagined (not objective), peculiar (not universal), productive (in its homogenizing of space), and relational (defined through the assumed and projected alterity of other spaces). Building critical security theory—uncritically—upon a reified Kantian peace not only exceptionalizes the insecurities faced by a majority of the world. It also serves to homogenize its formative contexts, invisibilizing the struggles of many in Europe and a broader "West" to live secure lives.

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5 Our thanks to one anonymous reviewer for encouraging us explicitly to reflect on this.

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