“And now we’re facing that reality too”: Brexit, ontological security, and intergenerational anxiety in the Irish border region

Rosher, B. (2022). “And now we’re facing that reality too”: Brexit, ontological security, and intergenerational anxiety in the Irish border region. *European Security*, *31*(1), 21-38.
https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2021.1949297

Published in:
European Security

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal

Publisher rights
© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way

General rights
Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

Open Access
This research has been made openly available by Queen's academics and its Open Research team. We would love to hear how access to this research benefits you. – Share your feedback with us: http://go.qub.ac.uk/oa-feedback

Download date:10. Jul. 2024

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

European Security

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/feus20

“And now we’re facing that reality too”: Brexit, ontological security, and intergenerational anxiety in the Irish border region

Ben Rosher

To cite this article: Ben Rosher (2021): “And now we’re facing that reality too”: Brexit, ontological security, and intergenerational anxiety in the Irish border region, European Security, DOI: 10.1080/09662839.2021.1949297

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2021.1949297

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 18 Jul 2021.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=feus20

EUROPEAN SECURITY
https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2021.1949297

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

"And now we're facing that reality too": Brexit, ontological security, and intergenerational anxiety in the Irish border region

Ben Rosher

School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, UK

ABSTRACT

Though conspicuous by its absence in debates among the British political and media establishments during the EU referendum campaign, the Irish border has been the central feature of Brexit as the implications and complications of trying to "take back control of borders" have become apparent. Drawing on focus group data gathered between 2017 and 2019 I employ ontological security theory to investigate the impact that Brexit is having on residents and communities living in the central Irish border region. In particular, I draw on the work of David Carr to explore the social role of memory and narrative in ontological (in)security and how this has manifested in the border region throughout the Brexit process. I find that the uncertainties generated by Brexit have caused border residents to draw on anxiety-filled memories and narratives from the securitised border of the pre-Good Friday Agreement era which they then project *onto* and vicariously *through* the next generation who, in turn, embody these anxieties, creating *intergenerational ontological insecurity*. Brexit has reintroduced, if not the physical border, the psychological borders of the past.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 8 February 2021
Accepted 25 June 2021

KEYWORDS
Ontological security; borders; Brexit; memory; anxiety; Northern Ireland

Introduction

Before calling the referendum which would ultimately lead to the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, then Prime Minister David Cameron said "[it] could unleash demons of which ye know not" (Shipman 2016, p. 5). Sure enough, though largely conspicuous by its absence in the referendum debates among the British political and media establishments (Carr 2017, Connelly 2017, Gormley-Heenan and Aughey 2017), the Irish border became the central feature of Brexit as the logical implications and complications of trying to "take back control of borders" (Conservative Party 2020) became apparent. The centrality of the Irish border introduced an intractable tension to the Brexit project. Namely, Brexit was to simultaneously fundamentally alter the relationship between the UK and the EU while keeping the Irish border – the only point at which the UK and the EU now meet – as frictionless and as invisible as it has been since the signing

CONTACT Ben Rosher brosher01@qub.ac.uk

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) over 20 years ago. These mutually incompatible positions have been well summarised by Daniel Kelemen's series of trilemmas (2018, 2019, 2020).

As the UK government has wrestled with (and more frequently tried to avoid making) these difficult choices, border communities have lived with high levels of uncertainty around what their future will look like and whether Brexit could precipitate a return to the securitised border of the past. In other words, Brexit has tapped into fundamental and emotionally invested aspects of identity – confirming or disrupting the way people see themselves, their world, and their place in it – Brexit has been a source of existential anxiety and ontological insecurity (Browning 2018a, 2019).

Ontological security theory is concerned with self-identity (Steele 2008) – the internalised sense of self we construct to situate us, spatially, relationally, and temporally in our social worlds – and the security of that *self*. This security is generated through the routines and relationships we cling to and the narratives and biographies we develop to "bracket out" existential questions and anxieties in order to be able to function in daily life with a sense of (frequently misplaced) certainty about our identity, agency, and place in the world (Giddens 1991, p. 37). On the flip side, ontological *in*security considers how we react when an event exposes our *self* as a fiction and its foundations as contingent – forcing us to confront the existential questions from which this constructed *self* is specifically designed to protect us.

Both Brexit (Browning 2018a, 2019) and the Irish border (Kay 2012, Cash 2017) have been analysed through the prism of ontological security theory. Yet, the border in the *context* of Brexit, though acknowledged, remains largely unexplored from an ontological security perspective. As Cash (2017, p. 407) observes, "the Brexit process has thrust the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland into the spotlight for non-traditional reasons, as this border will also become the land border between the UK and the EU". This puts the ontological security of the border region "on trial again, further disturbing and complicating an already wickedly complex situation" (Cash 2017, p. 389). Similarly Kay (2012, p. 243) asserts that Northern Ireland is an important case study in ontological security due to its almost inbuilt anxiety about the past, present, and future. Particularly the fear of "what could happen" and not just "what is". As such, at stake in this paper is the social role of memory and narrative in ontological (in)security. To develop this dimension I draw on the narrative theory of David Carr (1991 [1986]), particularly his concepts of the "retentional-protentional grasp" and the "*we*-subject", to understand how anxieties of the past and uncertainties about the future are being passed across generations as a result of the disruption caused by Brexit.

The paper proceeds as follows: I first provide an overview of ontological security theory that underpins this research, making a particular focus on the relational-temporal role of memory in ontological (in)security and proposing how Carr's (1991) narrative theory of experience can help us better understand how ontological (in)security can be projected and experienced across generations. I then detail my methodology and describe the focus group data used in my analysis. The final section contains the core of my analysis in which I demonstrate that the uncertainties and disruption posed by Brexit have caused border residents to draw on memories and narratives, particularly of the securitised pre-GFA border, which are then projected *onto* and embodied *by* younger generations, potentially resulting in *intergenerational ontological insecurity*. In bringing together these empirical

and theoretical threads I conclude that Brexit has been a source of ontological insecurity which has reintroduced, if not the physical border, the psychological borders of the past.

Securing the self: conceptualising ontological security

Ontological security concerns self-identity and the security of that self.[1] It is the security we feel in *knowing* who we are as an internalised sense of self, how we fit within our socio-material world, and the confidence we have in the stability and reliability of these forms of existence. We *need* this security because we, as humans, are (usually non-consciously) aware that life is arbitrary, its foundations contingent, and our level of control over events is, at best, limited (Giddens 1991, Browning 2018a, Mitzen 2018a). Were we forever having to confront this existential fact we would likely become overwhelmed by anxiety and melancholia (Giddens 1991, Browning 2018a). And so, to overcome (or more specifically avoid confronting) these existential questions we engage in ontological security seeking practices, primarily using routines, memories, and narratives. These practices, when successful, reify our identity and bracket out existential questions.

Routines – the repetition of behaviours, physical, and social practices – are necessarily spatially situated within our familiar environments and frequently associated with the notion of "home" (Mitzen 2018b). Home is broadly understood as a spatially defined location which is emotionally invested with a sense of familiarity, continuity, and belonging which provides us the context within which we have the confidence and security to *be* (Mitzen 2018b). From this understanding of home as a place of familiarity it becomes apparent that these routines are not only spatial but also temporal. Routines are developed *over* time and are conducted *through* time. They are formed *by* and form part *of* the individual and collective memories from which we draw to situate our constructed sense of self within the present and project it towards the future (Mälksoo 2015, Rumelili 2018, Subotic 2018, 2019, Steele and Homolar 2019). The inclusion of memory into routinisation opens up space for the role of narrative – the ability to sustain and communicate a continuous biography about the self as a reflexive yet stabilising act – in maintaining our ontological security (Giddens 1991, Kay 2012, Della Sala 2018, Ejdus 2018, Mitzen 2018a, Browning 2018b, Hom and Steele 2020). In other words, to maintain our ontological security we physically and discursively perform our existence in the world in a manner which provides us with a sense of stability and continuity in that constructed self.

To be effective in obscuring the arbitrariness and ever-present potential for chaos which underpins existence, these security seeking practices occur within our "practical consciousness" (Giddens 1991, Mitzen 2006, 2018a, Cash 2017) – at the emotional rather than cognitive level. By conducting these practices at the level of practical consciousness it is possible to embed them within the everyday so that they are performed uncritically and "taken for granted" (Mitzen 2006, p. 347), thus providing us with a sense of confidence that our future will be *broadly* consistent with our expectations, however unlikely the reality of that may be. Were we to be cognitively aware of the reasons for which we engage in these practices, they would cease to be effective as their very function is to obscure their purpose and underlying necessity.

While Giddens primarily conceptualises ontological security at the individual level, he explicitly recognises that it rests on a shared "framework of reality" (Giddens 1991, p. 36) – that our social worlds are co-constructed *among* actors. Ontological security, therefore, is

a relational security which requires a form of "basic trust" (Giddens 1991, p. 38) to be effective: we must be able to understand and trust in the nature of our "salient relationships", those which are integral to supporting our sense of self (Mitzen 2006, 2018, Browning 2018b, 2019). Basic trust does not *necessarily* have to be trust in a *good* relationship, merely that the nature of the relationship (good or bad) is *known, consistent,* and *reliable* (Mitzen 2006, Cash 2017, Browning 2018b). Such trust, when combined with our spatial-temporal security seeking practices, forms a "protective cocoon" (Giddens 1991, p. 40) which brackets out existential questions.

Ripping open the cocoon: conceptualising ontological insecurity

Occasionally, however, events occur that rip open this cocoon. These "critical events" disrupt our security seeking practices (Giddens 1991, Ejdus 2018, Subotic 2018, Browning 2018a, Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020) – exposing them for the fictions that they are, reintroducing uncomfortable questions about our understanding of our identity and place in the world, and laying bare the contingent foundations of life and reality that they are designed to bracket. This places us at risk of becoming overwhelmed by existential anxiety and ontological insecurity. It is important to acknowledge that critical events do not necessarily have to be *objectively* important when viewed from a neutral position, but to be *felt* as important by those affected (Steele 2008, p. 12, Subotic 2018, p. 298). Ejdus (2018) proposes that critical events call into question four dimensions of our ontological security: existence, finitude, relations, and autobiography.

Brexit is just such a critical event (Browning 2018a, 2019). It is an unavoidably disruptive endeavour, and one which the majority of people in the border region did not support – while the UK *as a whole* voted to leave the EU, 56% of voters in Northern Ireland voted to remain (BBC News 2016). Within the border region this increased to 65% of voters (Carr 2017, p. 75). The impact of Brexit in the border region is also uniquely complicated by the fact that many, who have and will continue to be directly affected, had no franchise in the referendum. Border residents living in the Republic of Ireland, who have, for the last two decades, been able to travel into the north unimpeded, have had to live with the threat of substantial disruption to their lives and livelihoods absent any voice in decisions being made in Westminster. These impacts of Brexit on ontological security pertain to "existence" and "relations" in Ejdus' (2018) framework; respectively the stability of our routines in the context of our external social world, and the consistency of our relationships with our salient others. However, it is the role of memory and narrative in ontological (in)security that interests us here, what Ejdus classifies under autobiography. Specifically, how a critical event, such as Brexit, challenges *social* narratives and memories which operate through and across generations, and the impact this has on the ontological security of border communities.

Memory and narrative in ontological (in)security

Our memories provide the material we draw on to narrate our biographies and dictate the psychological parameters within which we can conduct our routines, making memory central to constructing our ontological security. However, individuals do not create their own narratives, memories, and routines in a vacuum, rather they are constrained

and informed by the societies, structures, and histories in which they operate (Mitzen 2006, 2018a, Skey 2010) and when post-conflict societies are confronted with a critical event, memories can exacerbate disruption to ontological security as the subject is only able to recall a negative alternative to the present in the face of an uncertain future (Kay 2012, Cash 2017).

To better understand the social role of memory and narrative in ontological (in)security we can turn to the work of David Carr (1991 [1986]), whose narrative theory of experience has initially been introduced into ontological security studies by Hom and Steele (2020). Carr (1991, p. 73) contends that narrative structure is "the organising principle not only of experiences and actions but of the *self* who experiences and acts" (my emphasis). From this we can see narration and biography as central to ontological security in that a disruption to our narrative is a disruption to our sense of self. In other words, we *experience* life as a story we tell ourselves about ourself and, as such, are able to situate ourselves, at more or less any point in space and time, in terms of where we have come from and where we anticipate we are going. This situatedness is what Carr refers to as the "retentional-protentional grasp"; retention is a form of practical memory in the Giddensian sense (and can be perhaps considered as a cognitive version of Bourdieu's embodied habitus) in that it is a class of memory that does not need to be actively called to mind but exists within the self as something tacitly *known*. Similarly, the protentional gaze is not forward looking in the sense in which one might plan a holiday, but rather an anticipation in which one might pre-empt what is likely to happen next in relation to where they are and what has gone before (Carr 1991, p. 60). The disruption of our retentional-protentional grasp is what is at stake in our ontological (in)security – critical events disrupt our grasp and leave us adrift, unable to situate where we are in light of where we were or to anticipate where we are likely to go next. As Carr (1991, p. 40) observes, "protention encloses the envisaged future and unites it with present and past". This unity between past, present, and future provides us with confidence in our internalised sense of self, but "stands vulnerable to the real future which can intrude in the rudest way". Once border residents recognise that the future *cannot* look like the present, given Brexit is an explicit will to change, they risk becoming stuck; they either have to see the future as an echo of the past or cannot see the future, it becomes uncertain and obscured, leaving them ontologically insecure in the present.

The concept of the retentional-protentional grasp has illuminating potential for ontological security theory at an individual level, but what is of particular interest to us here is that Carr extends his investigation up and out into the level of the collective community. By shifting his analysis from the *I*-subject to the *we*-subject Carr (1991, p. 17) seeks to understand the "social dimension of narrative"; how individuals draw on a retentional-protentional grasp as part of a social community that extends far beyond their immediate lived experience, and how "an individual's concrete sense of self is essentially linked up with the social past" (Carr 1991, p. 115). Here it is worth quoting Carr at length (1991, p. 113)

> my social existence not only puts me in contact with my co-existing contemporaries; it connects me with a peculiar form of temporal continuity, which runs from predecessors to successors. This sequence extends beyond the boundaries of my life, both into the past before my birth and into the future after my death.

Carr goes on (1991, pp. 133–134),

> an individual will say that *we* experienced certain events, even though he or she as an individual had no such experience directly. Furthermore, the *we* with whose experience the individual identifies can both pre-date and survive the individuals that make it up. (emphasis in original)

Carr's recognition of our *narrative*-self as part of a *we*-subject extending out and beyond our *lived*-self as an *I*-subject gives an indication as to how intergenerational ontological insecurity can take hold and informs the core of my analysis into the impact of Brexit on the ontological security of border communities.

It is important to recognise that groups appropriate to the *we*-subject do not exist by external classification alone but are intersubjective, consisting of those that recognise themselves, and each other, as belonging to a group (Carr 1991, pp. 147–151). To that end, it helps us to consider the Irish border region as a unique homespace in which a distinct *we*-subject is formed.

Home and the Irish border identity

People living in the Irish border region were faced with "extraordinary circumstances" when Ireland was partitioned (Leary 2016, p. 30). Geographically, the border was almost perfectly, if accidentally, crafted to foster ontological anxiety. It followed county lines drawn in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which, by the twentieth, cut across economic centres, villages, farms, and even individual homes and businesses (Leary 2016) causing border residents a "profound shock, upsetting their sense of place in the world" (Carr 2017, p. 127). However, Carr (2017, p. 185) suggests that partition did not divide Ireland into two, but into three "the north, the south, and the borderland" where a supraordinate border identity often asserts itself. Indeed, the Irish border is somewhat unique in terms of (territorial) borders in that it defies the inside/outside logic of borders as a line demarcating two states; The Ireland Act 1949 declared that the Irish people were not considered as foreign to the UK (Connelly 2017, Hayward 2018b). As such, many of those in the border subscribe to an identity not of north or south but as a "semi-state of their own, never classing themselves as northerners or really wanting to be southerners either" (Pilkington cited in Ferriter 2019, p. 100). They are "members of another state, in their wallets are both pounds and euros" (Carr 2017, p. 159). As Carr observes, "there is no black line showing the way of the border, you need local knowledge" and the term "border people" gives a name to "an identity, a culture even" (Carr 2017, p. 24, 75).

The border identity is further explored by Kate Nolan in her contribution to the "reframing the border" project in which she perceived of the border residents not in limbo, but rather an identity unto themselves (Nolan 2015, Ferriter 2019, p. 126). This identity work allows the communities which are often divided elsewhere, particularly in Northern Ireland, to bracket out binary identities often thrust on them from outside, creating an identity that is uniquely *borderland* (Carr 2017). There are instructive, inspiring, and frequently amusing examples of this borderland identity in action. In the early days of partition, policemen in Northern Ireland would still cross the border to socialise with their southern counterparts and children would still cross the border to go to school,

demonstrating that routines and relationships are resilient to even the most profound change (Leary 2016, p. 15). Carr (2017, p. 130) notes that boxer Barry Mcguigan made the most out of the in-between and both-ness of the border identity, boxing for both Northern Ireland and Ireland. While Nolan (cited in Ferriter 2019, p. 126) recalls the man who bought a takeaway van and parked it on a bridge crossing the border so that it existed neither in the north nor the south and, as such, did not have to pay taxes in either.

However, it cannot be avoided that the border identity is conceived in no small part in relation to the Troubles which ravaged Northern Ireland for 30 years. The conflict generated ontological as well as physical insecurity as "watchfulness, fearfulness, and a lack of trust" gripped the border region (Ferriter 2019, p. 112). For many "it was like torture, helicopters flying low over our house day and night … soldiers crossing the garden while you're having breakfast" (Carr 2017, p. 49) while crossing the border was complicated by the designation of "approved routes" (Leary 2016, Carr 2017, Daly 2017, Ferriter 2019). At the time of partition 180 roads crossed the border between the North and South. During the Troubles only 16 were designated as "approved" (Leary 2016, p. 172) with many of the unapproved routes spiked and cratered by the British security services, forcing border residents to submit to anxiety inducing border checks. Carr (2017, p. 69) recalls the "state of suspension" that his father entered when subject to military checkpoints while crossing the border.

Though the EU is given little explicit mention in the GFA, common membership of the UK and Ireland to the EU provided the context within which the GFA was able to be negotiated and the Troubles ended (Phinnemore and Hayward 2017). The UK leaving the EU is giving rise to anxieties among border communities that the region could see a return to that conflicted past. Carr (2017, p. 75) quotes the border petrol station attendant "some in Northern Ireland want to leave [the EU]. But not border people, not us".

Having developed the centrality of memory and narrative to ontological security and the uniqueness of the border identity, in the next section I detail my methodology and describe the data used in my analysis.

Diagnosing ontological insecurity in the border region

To investigate the impact that Brexit has had on the ontological security of the people and communities of the border region I conduct a theoretically informed thematic analysis Braun and Clarke (2006) and Clarke and Braun (2017).

The data employed for my analysis consist of nine focus groups, each lasting approximately one hour. The focus groups were conducted over a three-year period between 2017 and 2019 by Katy Hayward as part of her series of reports examining the impact of Brexit on the Irish border region from the perspective of border residents whose voices were frequently overlooked in Brexit processes and policy (Hayward 2017, 2018a, Hayward and Komarova 2019). While the data gathered by Hayward were not collected with an investigation into ontological security in mind, the frequent references to "anxiety" within the reports suggest that the data are well suited to a more focussed investigation into ontological (in)security.

Three of the focus groups were conducted in 2017 (Monaghan and Enniskillen x2), four in 2018 (Armagh, Ballyshannon, Enniskillen, and Monaghan), and two in 2019 (Caledon

and Glenfarne). The majority of the focus groups were composed of adults from the general public who live within the Central Border Region which consists of the council areas of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; Fermanagh and Omagh; Mid Ulster and the counties of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo (Irish Central Border Area Network n.d.). One focus group in Enniskillen in 2017 was made up solely of local councillors, and one in Monaghan in 2018 was conducted exclusively with 16-year-old participants (these compositions were both by design rather than chance).

There are, on average, five clearly distinct participants per group and over 40 in total. While the project across all years was "determinedly non-political and non-partisan" (Hayward 2017, 2018a, Hayward and Komarova 2019), because of the self-selected nature of the participants (who expressed interest in taking part in focus groups after completing a survey as part of the same project) the sample cannot be considered to be representative of the broader border population. Perhaps most pertinent to the current research, the majority of focus group participants identified as Remainers.[2] Therefore, the following analysis cannot and should not be considered to be generalisable to the broader border population, but rather to give an insight into some of the experiences and anxieties that Brexit has given rise to in the border region.

It is important to be cognisant of the timing of the focus groups given the moveable feast that is Brexit and the centrality of temporality to ontological security. The first round of focus groups were conducted in July 2017 when the shape of Brexit was still largely unclear – a year on from the referendum, five months after the collapse of Stormont, four months after Article 50 was triggered by the then Prime Minister Theresa May, and only a month after the 2017 UK general election which resulted in the Conservative government being supported by Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in a controversial "confidence and supply arrangement" (HMG 2020). However, the Irish border had already been identified as one of the core issues for negotiations along with citizens' rights and financial settlements (Hayward 2017) and the aim of avoiding a hard border was affirmed by the European Council in its negotiating guidelines adopted in April 2017 (European Council 2017). The second round of focus groups were conducted between March and May 2018. This period followed the publication of the EU-UK joint report (EU Commission 2017) and the Draft Withdrawal Agreement (EU Commission 2018) both of which reaffirmed the commitment of both the UK and EU to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. The Draft Withdrawal Agreement also introduced the now infamous "backstop" whereby, in the absence of any other agreed solutions, the UK would "maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South cooperation, the all island economy and the protection of the 1998 Agreement" (EU Commission 2018, p. 98). Furthermore, the time at which the 2018 focus groups were conducted was a year before the expected exit date of the UK from the EU (Hayward 2018a) and after a full year without MLAs sitting at Stormont. The third round of focus groups were conducted in October 2019; Stormont was still not sitting following its collapse in January 2017 and the original Brexit deadline had passed. This was a period of high Brexit related uncertainty following the rejection by the UK Parliament of Theresa May's Withdrawal Agreement on three occasions, resulting in May herself leaving office. Boris Johnson succeeded May as Prime Minister and renegotiated the Withdrawal Agreement and the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland which moved the majority of trade regulation and

customs checks away from the land border between Northern Ireland and Ireland and to the Irish Sea between Northern Ireland and Great Britain (HMG 2019a, 2019b). The 2019 round of focus groups took place in the brief window between the new Withdrawal Agreement being announced in October and Johnson calling the 2019 general election later that month. These contexts obviously inform the content of the focus groups across the years.

In employing a theoretically informed thematic analysis analytically relevant quotes are taken from the transcripts and analysed to provide a "more detailed account of a group of themes within the data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 83) – those that pertain to factors within the framework of ontological security. This resulted in 87 questions asked by facilitators and 305 individual response quotes by participants. The analysis proceeded in an iterative process whereby each quote was individually coded, recording the features within each quote relevant to ontological security as experienced and communicated by the speaker – those which speak to disruption, anxiety, (in)security, and (in)stability among others. The coded quotes have been compared across the dataset and considered in light of one another to develop themes which speak to the core ontological security pillars of routines, home, memory, narrative/biography, and relationships/trust at both the individual and structural-relational levels. Given my particular focus in this paper in exploring the role of memory and narrative in affecting ontological security, a recursive process, a further round of coding, was conducted to better identify how these themes appeared across categories in the focus groups. Here it became apparent that anxiety was being both drawn from the past and projected into the future, while the present was seen as a period of ontological security, and so "memory", "future", and "present" have been designated as themes which speak to temporally significant (in)securities with the attendant subthemes of "the everyday", "the extraordinary", and "intergenerational".

The next section explores the results of my thematic analysis and demonstrates how the social role of memory and narrative has been central to the border experience of Brexit, examining its specific impact on the ontological security of border residents and communities.

"You'd worry it would go back to that": remembering and projecting border anxieties

> Mentally, it has had a huge bearing on the identity of the people … mental warfare, mental wearing you down as well as the physical danger (Male: 19:26, Monaghan 2017).

I have detailed in my overview of ontological security theory the double-edged sword of memory. Our memories inform how we construct our biographies in the *present*, how we develop our routines and relationships, and how we imagine ourselves in the *future* (Ejdus 2018, Rumelili 2018, Subotic 2018, 2019, Steele and Homolar 2019), this is what Carr (1991) refers to as the "retentional-protentional grasp" and is integral to our ability to construct our ontological *security*. However, memories, especially in post-conflict societies, can disturb recently (and often barely) settled anxieties thereby further exacerbating ontological *insecurities* when confronted by critical events in the present. Drawing on Carr (1991), I have argued that the memories and narratives integral to our ontological security

are drawn not only from the *lived* experience of the individual, but also from the broader *narrative* experience of the social community to which the individual belongs – the *we*-subject of which the *I*-subject is a part. In this section I explore these ideas, firstly by examining the memories that older focus group participants have drawn on when attempting to navigate the existential questions posed by Brexit. From there I explore how these anxious memories of the past have been projected into potential futures *through* the next generation and demonstrate how younger border residents are showing signs of embodying the memories being projected onto them, despite having no direct lived experience of the events which the memories recall. I suggest that this projection and inheritance of memory is symptomatic of *intergenerational ontological insecurity* which, while brought on by Brexit, may pose a longer-term issue depending on how it becomes internalised into the broader social narrative of the border region.

Anxious memories

Discussions from all focus groups across all years provide compelling examples of how memory has been used by participants to navigate the existential questions posed by Brexit and how that memory work is, in turn, further exacerbating their ontological insecurity.

> There's farmers who've lands on both sides of the border, when the Troubles was there, they would have to take 30 miles around and back to the field and that is in the back of everyone's head (Male: 32:56, Monaghan 2017)

> It would be an awful shame to see all of those roads that were resurfaced and reopened after the Good Friday Agreement be closed again. (Female: 09:15, Enniskillen 2017)

The thought of extending the daily commute and of impending roadworks are, while frustrating for many of us, a minor disruption rather than a source of potential existential dread. What drives the unease in the quotes here, then? Why would road closures be "awful"? And a 30-mile commute for work be invoked with such trepidation? Recall that critical events do not have to be seen as important by external observers, but to be felt as such by those who experience them (Steele 2008, Subotic 2018). These memories speak to both the unique circumstances of the border region in light of its conflicted history, and the importance of memory for ontological security.

These memories of the pre-GFA border weave almost seamlessly between the quotidian and the extraordinary as border residents segue from bemoaning the state of the roads and the frustration at diversions into recalling experiences of crossing the highly militarised and securitised border, and the trauma caused by violent republican and loyalist groups.

> yeah, it's no big deal to cross it now since the peace process. It used to be check points – you could be hauled in for an hour in your car just to get a mile down the road – that's all gone now but you'd worry it would go back to that (Female: 05:39, Monaghan 2017)

> Those of us who have memories going back to the 60s and 70s and while we can't go back to that again, it's absolutely critical, and there are some of us around the table who can remember what it's like going through checkpoints manned by either British soldiers or Irish soldiers, UDR and RUC and the rest of it (interjection "and guns pointed at you") and we've known

> people and neighbours who've been killed and people who've been involved and all the rest of it. And if people think there isn't a risk that people of badness would use this as an opportunity, then they certainly will, that's the reality of life. (Male: 19:50, Ballyshannon 2018)

> We have to acknowledge, whether we like it or not, that there are micro-groups, and I believe there are some elements they're rubbing their hands with glee, looking forward to anything resembling, be it technological, any sense of a border being re-established in any kind of palpable manifestation, even technological, it's all it's going to take to evoke a bitterness and an enmity as to what has been in the past. 99% of the population are thankfully of the one mindset regarding the peace process, but there is that one percent and I just think it'll be just a slippery slope. (Male: 44:09, Armagh 2018)

For border residents', roadworks mean cratered roads and cars dumped in rivers as makeshift bridges. Having to take a detour to work or for the weekly shop is because the army want to know where you are going and why. Travel disruption was caused by men wearing army fatigues or balaclavas rather than men in fluorescent vests. The quote by the Armagh participants makes clear the sense that, while paramilitary activity is certainly less now than it was, some "micro-groups" and "people of badness" are looking for opportunities arising from Brexit to be able to resume their previous activities. What we also begin to see here is evidence of Carr's (1991) *we*-subject; the historical ubiquity of disruption and violence and the unquestioned assumption that everyone present will have lost someone close to them "we've known neighbours who've been killed" speaks to the uniqueness of the experiences of border communities and their collective memory. More broadly, as Carr (1991, p. 114) argues

> the social past may be called up explicitly as part of a larger picture into which present concerns and activities can be placed, and in terms of which they are understood in the larger context which includes present and future

and we see across the above contributions the anxiety that Brexit may precipitate a return to the past. The exclamations by participants that "it'll just be a slippery slope", "you'd worry it would go back to that", and "we can't go back to that again, it's absolutely critical" speak to memories of broken communities which were cut off from each other materially, economically, and socially, and an anxiety that that such a break could occur again. In other words, Brexit is a critical event that has been a cause of ontological insecurity in the border region which has been exacerbated as border residents have been forced to grapple with memories of their troubled pasts in the present as they attempt to navigate an uncertain and unknowable future.

Intergenerational insecurities

A particularly interesting phenomenon occurs throughout all focus groups as these anxieties of a potential return to the past are projected onto future generations. The discussions in the focus groups provide compelling examples of how border memories are communicated within and across border communities and how older participants with children and grandchildren risk burdening future generations with ontological insecurity by projecting their memory-driven anxieties about the future border *onto* and vicariously *through* their children, by discursive turns writing their biographies ahead of them.

> As a parent and from that perspective I don't want to see any hardening of the border, I don't want to see anything come back up and my children having to go through what we went through. We thought that day was over and this is going to put it all back into the realms of possibility again. (Female: 14:54, Armagh 2018)

> My children have been reared in peace times. I remember crossing the border where I lived and the difficulties that that brought and I suppose the connotations are very rural, isolated, paranoid areas is something we really don't want to see coming back. (Female: 07:01, Enniskillen 2018)

> I have three children and that's my concern, they've grown up here with no question of the border because there isn't one in their head. Just the idea of any structures or checks, for them to go back up there. I've sat down and tried to explain to them how the six counties are different and they just have not got a clue, which is the way I like it. But it's also the benefits of the EU that will be taken away from them, the Erasmus, the freedom of travel and work. 10 miles down the road they would have friends that would have that and then across the road they wouldn't. That's my big concern apart from obviously, anything going up on the border again. I think it's very unfair that children are going to have to live with this future and they had no say in it and that's what gets me really really angry about it. (Female: 08:30, Glenfarne 2019)

> What are the decisions that are made now going to affect my boy who's 22 months now? I'd hope that it'd be a nice place for him to grow up. I grew up in Fermanagh and it was great growing up but it was even better when they took the borders away, it was brilliant, and that's given us the sense of enjoyment of the place, you don't live in fear of this that and the other, whether you're going to get stopped going across the border and things like that. That's all stuff I can remember growing up with but now you don't have that, we can come and go as we please. (Male: 08:34, Ballyshannon 2018)

We can see in these contributions that, when parents consider potential futures of the border and how they may impact border communities, they are doing so almost exclusively from their role *as* parent. From this place of parenthood they draw on their own memories of childhood and, either tacitly or explicitly, contextualise these memories as belonging to the pre-GFA period, back when the border was "hard" and beset with "difficulties". We see participants recall "crossing the border where I lived and the difficulties that that brought" when the border region was an "isolated, paranoid area" and where you "lived in fear". Parents then project these memories and their associated anxieties onto and through their own children – the pre-GFA border is "something we really don't want to see coming back" and participants "don't want my children having to go through what we went through". We can see evidence that even positive memories from childhood are caveated with the anxiety that they would not want their children to have these same experiences "it was great growing up but it was even better when they took the borders away". These anxious memories risk foreclosing the imagining of *better* future border regions for their children. In essence, given that Brexit is denying border communities a future which looks like the ontologically secure post-GFA present, the only possible futures participants can conceive of for themselves and their children look like the conflicted pre-GFA past; their retentional-protentional grasp has been disrupted and as a result they lack confidence in their situated sense of self both as individuals and as a broader community. This kind of memory work and narrative disruption, especially when projected onto future generations, can lead to *intergenerational*

ontological insecurity as historical anxieties become permeated, embedded, and reproduced within and across social narratives and collective social memories.

At the other end of this cross-generational interaction we can see how the phenomenon of the narrative *we*-subject manifests among the young people in the focus groups, particularly the 16-year-old participants from Monaghan in 2018. These young participants, who have little to no direct memory or experience of the pre-GFA border, speak of how their parents and grandparents talk about the border of the past. The anxieties associated to these memories then belong not just to those who have direct experience of them, but of those too young to know. The young participants take ownership of these intergenerational or *inherited* memories as they are passed down and embody the anxieties of previous generations.

> We used to learn about them in primary school, I remember there was some elderly people in my community came in a spoke to us about what it used to be like, and now we're facing that reality too (Female: 01:11, Monaghan (16 y/o), 2018)

> Regardless of what they want to say, we are the future if you want to put it that way, we're gonna be the ones that'll still be around in 50 years suffering the consequences. (Female: 11:00, Monaghan (16 y/o), 2018)

> Our friend's mother used to live up in the North and she remembers going through the customs coming to the south and not understanding why, when she goes into a shop, the people aren't immediately checking what's in her bag. And that's just not a way for a country to function at all. (Female: 14:06, Monaghan (16 y/o), 2018)

> I think the segregation thing will happen again, we'll just be closed off from each other, everything that happened during the Troubles is just gonna start again. (Female: 08:33, Monaghan (16 y/o), 2018)

> We worked so hard to get to this point, where there's no hard borders and there's peace and now we're literally taking all the steps backwards, and that doesn't just affect border counties that affects the whole island (Female: 12:00, Monaghan (16 y/o), 2018)

> Will our kids be able to cross the border when we're old? What's it gonna be like then? (Female: 26:02, Monaghan (16 y/o), 2018)

There is an interesting disjuncture becoming apparent here between what the older generation *think* the younger generation knows of the pre-GFA border and its contested and conflicted history and what they *actually* know. The older generation, as we have seen, think the youngsters have "no question of the border because there isn't one in their head" because they "have been reared in peace times" and are trying to protect them from the burden of history. Yet what we are seeing in practice is that young people are highly exposed to border memories as they are passed down from generation to generation in all aspects of their social life: in the home and in the school and in the community. It is evident that younger border residents can already sense the psychological impact of a border of which they have no direct lived experience through their being part of the *we*-subject – "*we'll* be closed off", "*we're* taking all the steps backward".

These intergenerational memories profoundly influence how young border residents relate to and talk of a past border of which they have no direct lived experience, and much like their parents, potentially foreclose their ability to conceive of better future borders. We can even see instances where the young generation already projecting

their anxieties of the Brexit border onto future generations yet to be born "Will our kids be able to cross the border when we're old? What's it gonna be like then?". As we have seen, Carr recognises that the *we*-subject extends beyond the birth and death of the *I*-subject, observing "the life-span of the community in many cases exceeds that of any of its members, and their membership and participation implicates them in a *we*-relationship with other who are in principle not accessible to them" (Carr 1991, p. 167). What is clear is that the younger generation fear that they will be "suffering the consequences" of Brexit without being able to see any possible positive future arising from it and that they will be "facing that reality" – the reality that their parents have lived – and that the past is "not a way for a country to function at all", despite having never *lived* that reality. I would like to leave a sliver of light here and suggest that the situation is not entirely hopeless. We can see that, although the younger generation are embodying the memories and anxieties of history, through their being part of the *we*-subject of a border community they are also taking ownership responsibility for developing and protecting the peace "*we* worked so hard to get to this point". That the younger generation, those that are part of or followed shortly after what Lyra McKee referred to as "the Ceasefire Babies" (McKee 2016), feel personally invested in the progress made through being part of the *we*-subject gives hope that, even when confronted by Brexit and its attendant disruptions, they will continue to work to maintain and build on the progress of the last 20 years.

Conclusion: Brexit and ontological insecurity in the Irish border region

While largely conspicuous by its absence in the referendum debates among the British political and media establishments, the Irish border became the central feature of Brexit as the implications and complications of trying to "take back control of borders" became apparent. This left border communities living with high levels of uncertainty as to what their future lives would look like. In other words, Brexit has been a source of existential anxiety and ontological insecurity.

Ontological security theory is concerned with self-identity and how we seek the security our *self* – spatially, temporally, and relationally – through the performance of routines, the narration of biographies, the embodiment of memories, and the trust we place in, and support we receive from, our significant relationships. When successful these practices allow us to engage with everyday life secure in our sense of being and without being forever confronted by the contingent existence of that being. Occasionally, however, *critical events* occur which throw into doubt the stability of our identities and challenge our ability to maintain our security.

Brexit is just such a critical event. Common membership of both Ireland and the UK to the EU has been the integral if (until Brexit) understated backdrop within which the GFA was able to be negotiated and the frictionless and invisible border has been possible. The UK leaving the EU means removing that backdrop which, in turn, necessitates a reimagining of the supporting structures that underpin much of cross-border life, threatening unknown and unknowable disruption to established identities, relationships, and routines. Such uncertainty and disruption has given rise to existential anxieties among border communities.

Drawing on focus group data gathered over the course of three years (2017–19) I have used ontological security theory and the narrative theory of David Carr to explore the

social role of memory and narrative in ontological (in)security. Our memories provide the material we draw on to narrate our biographies and dictate the psychological parameters within which we can conduct our routines, making them central to constructing our ontological security. However, such uses of memory are potentially problematic, particularly in post-conflict societies where memories can exacerbate the ontological insecurity that accompanies a critical event as the subject is only able to recall a negative alternative to the present in the face of an uncertain future. Throughout the focus groups we see evidence of this as participants are constantly confronted with memories of the historically securitised and militarised border from their past when attempting to navigate the challenges posed by Brexit in the present.

These insecurities are then being projected *onto* and vicariously *through* the next generation. These young people, too young to have lived experience of the pre-GFA border, are showing signs of inheriting and embodying these memories and narratives as they are passed from their parents and grandparents as part of a broader *we*-subject, and we can see that they are already feeling the burden of carrying them. This practice risks producing *intergenerational ontological insecurity* as the disruption of the collective retentional-protentional grasp pre-emptively undermines the ability to conceive of an ontologically secure future. Specifically, by denying border residents a future that looks like their present, Brexit is causing border residents to draw on memories and narratives which lead them to imagine a future that looks unsettlingly like the region's conflicted history. Brexit has reintroduced, if not the physical border, the psychological borders of the past.

Notes

1. Ontological security was originally conceptualised in psychoanalytic theory by R.D. Laing (2010 [1960]) and further developed by sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991). It is primarily (though not exclusively) the Giddensian version that has been used and developed within the fields of sociology, IPS, and particularly IR. For some key texts on the development of contemporary ontological security theory and empirical application within and across these disciplines, see Browning (2018a, 2018b, 2019), Cash (2017, 2020), Ejdus (2018); Kay (2012), Mitzen (2006, 2018a, 2018b), Rumelili (2018, 2020), Skey (2010); Steele (2008); Steele and Homolar (2019), Subotic (2018, 2019), Subotic and Steele (2018); Whittaker (2017).
2. For the present analysis that label is applied to residents of the border region living in the Republic of Ireland who did not have a vote in the referendum but exhibited a preference for the UK remaining within the EU during the focus groups.

Acknowledgements

For comments on earlier drafts my thanks go to Katy Hayward, Brent Steele, Andrew Hom, the participants of the PSAI postgraduate panel on the Impacts of Referenda, and two anonymous reviewers for European Security. This paper has been much improved by their engagement and encouragement.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by NINE DTP scholarship.

References

BBC News, 2016. EU referendum results. Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results [Accessed 25 June 2020].

Braun, V., and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3 (2), 77–101.

Browning, C.S., 2018a. Brexit, existential anxiety and ontological (in)security. *European security*, 27 (3), 336–355.

Browning, C.S., 2018b. Geostrategies, geopolitics and ontological security in the Eastern neighbourhood: the European Union and the 'new Cold War'. *Political geography*, 62, 106–115.

Browning, C.S., 2019. Brexit populism and fantasies of fulfilment. *Cambridge review of international affairs*, 32 (3), 222–244.

Carr, D., 1991 [1986]. *Time, narrative, and history*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Carr, G., 2017. *The rule of the land: walking Ireland's border*. London: Faber & Faber.

Cash, J., 2017. The dilemmas of ontological insecurity in a postcolonising Northern Ireland. *Postcolonial studies*, 20 (3), 387–410.

Cash, J., 2020. Psychoanalysis, cultures of anarchy, and ontological insecurity. *International theory*, 12 (2), 306–321.

Clarke, V., and Braun, V., 2017. Thematic analysis. *The journal of positive psychology*, 12 (3), 297–298.

Connelly, T., 2017. *Brexit and Ireland: the dangers, the opportunities, and the inside story of the Irish response*. Dublin: Penguin Ireland.

Conservative Party, 2020. Taking back control of our borders. Available from: https://www.conservatives.com/our-commitments/taking-back-control-of-our-borders [Accessed 22 September 2020].

Daly, M.E., 2017. Brexit and the Irish border: historical context: a royal Irish academy – British academy Brexit briefing [Accessed 1 October 2018].

Della Sala, V., 2018. Narrating Europe: the EU's ontological security dilemma. *European security*, 27 (3), 266–279.

Ejdus, F., 2018. Critical situations, fundamental questions and ontological insecurity in world politics. *Journal of international relations and development*, 21 (4), 883–908.

EU Commission, 2017. UK/EU joint report 2017 [Accessed 31 July 2019].

EU Commission, 2018. Draft withdrawal agreement [Accessed 25 June 2021].

European Council, 2017. (Art. 50) guidelines for Brexit negotiations. Available from: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/04/29/euco-brexit-guidelines/ [Accessed 9 September 2020].

Ferriter, D., 2019. *The border: the legacy of a century of Anglo-Irish politics*. London: Profile Books.

Giddens, A., 1991. *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*.

Gormley-Heenan, C., and Aughey, A., 2017. Northern Ireland and Brexit: three effects on 'the border in the mind'. *The British journal of politics and international relations*, 19 (3), 497–511.

Hayward, K., 2017. *Bordering on Brexit: views from local communities in the central border region of Ireland/Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Centre for International Borders Research, Queens University.

Hayward, K., 2018a. *Brexit at the border*. Belfast: Centre for International Borders Research, Queens University.

Hayward, K., 2018b. The pivotal position of the Irish border in the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. *Space and polity*, 10 (4), 1–17.

Hayward, K., and Komarova, M., 2019. *The border into Brexit: perspectives from local communities in the central border region of Ireland/Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Centre for International Borders Research, Queens University.

HMG, 2019a. Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European atomic energy community. Available from:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840655/Agreement_on_the_withdrawal_of_the_United_Kingdom_of_Great_Britain_and_Northern_Ireland_from_the_European_Union_and_the_European_Atomic_Energy_Community.pdf [Accessed 26 June 2020].

HMG, 2019b. Revised protocol to the withdrawal agreement. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840230/Revised_Protocol_to_the_Withdrawal_Agreement.pdf [Accessed 26 June 2020].

HMG, 2020. Conservative and DUP agreement and UK government financial support for Northern Ireland. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conservative-and-dup-agreement-and-uk-government-financial-support-for-northern-ireland [Accessed 9 September 2020].

Hom, A.R., and Steele, B.J., 2020. Anxiety, time, and ontological security's third-image potential. *International theory*, 12 (2), 322–336.

Irish Central Border Area Network (n.d.), Cross border group for the central border region of Ireland/Northern Ireland. Available from: http://icban.com/about-icban/ [Accessed 21 August 2020].

Kay, S., 2012. Ontological security and peace-building in Northern Ireland. *Contemporary security policy*, 33 (2), 236–263.

Kelemen, R.D., 2018. Brexit trilemma. Available from: https://twitter.com/rdanielkelemen/status/992044307904389120 [Accessed 26 June 2020].

Kelemen, R.D., 2019. Brexit trilemma. Available from: https://twitter.com/rdanielkelemen/status/1156535664902643713 [Accessed 26 June 2020].

Kelemen, R.D., 2020. *Brexit trilemma*. Available from: https://twitter.com/rdanielkelemen/status/1308301263507865601?s=20 [Accessed 14 December 2020].

Kinnvall, C., and Mitzen, J., 2020. Anxiety, fear, and ontological security in world politics: thinking with and beyond giddens. *International theory*, 12 (2), 240–256.

Laing, R.D., 2010 [1960]. *The divided self: an existential study in sanity and madness*. London: Penguin.

Leary, P., 2016. *Unapproved routes: histories of the Irish border, 1922–1972*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mälksoo, M., 2015. 'Memory must be defended': beyond the politics of mnemonical security. *Security dialogue*, 46 (3), 221–237.

McKee, L., 2016. Suicide of the ceasefire babies. Available from: https://mosaicscience.com/story/conflict-suicide-northern-ireland/ [Accessed 4 February 2021].

Mitzen, J., 2006. Ontological security in world politics: state identity and the security dilemma. *European journal of international relations*, 12 (3), 341–370.

Mitzen, J., 2018a. Anxious community: EU as (in)security community. *European security*, 27 (3), 393–413.

Mitzen, J., 2018b. Feeling at home in Europe: migration, ontological security, and the political psychology of EU bordering. *Political psychology*, 39 (6), 1373–1387.

Nolan, K., 2015. Lacuna. Available from: https://www.katenolan.ie/info [Accessed 25 June 2021].

Phinnemore, D., and Hayward, K., 2017. *UK withdrawal ('Brexit') and the Good Friday agreement*.

Rumelili, B., 2018. Breaking with Europe's pasts: memory, reconciliation, and ontological (In)security. *European security*, 27 (3), 280–295.

Rumelili, B., 2020. Integrating anxiety into international relations theory: hobbes, existentialism, and ontological security. *International theory*, 12 (2), 257–272.

Shipman, T., 2016. *All out war: Brexit and the sinking of Britain's political class*. London: William Collins.

Skey, M., 2010. 'A sense of where you belong in the world': national belonging, ontological security and the status of the ethnic majority in England. *Nations and nationalism*, 16 (4), 715–733.

Steele, B.J., 2008. *Ontological security in international relations: self-identity and the IR state*. London: Routledge.

Steele, B.J., and Homolar, A., 2019. Ontological insecurities and the politics of contemporary populism. *Cambridge review of international affairs*, 32 (3), 214–221.

Subotic, J., 2018. Political memory, ontological security, and holocaust remembrance in post-communist Europe. *European security*, 27 (3), 296–313.

Subotic, J., 2019. *Yellow star, red star: holocaust remembrance after communism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Subotic, J., and Steele, B.J., 2018. Moral injury in international relations. *Journal of global security studies*, 3 (4), 387–401.

Whittaker, N., 2017. The island race: ontological security and critical geopolitics in British parliamentary discourse. *Geopolitics*, 23 (4), 954–985.