In 2006, Jennifer Mitzen famously argued that states do not only seek physical security but also ontological security, or security of the self.[1] Drawing on elements from psychology and psychoanalysis, she proposed a novel approach to the study of security that focuses on the relationship between anxiety and identity.[2] Since then, the concept of ontological security has been increasingly used in the study of international relations as it offers alternative explanations, for example, to the reproduction of security dilemmas through states’ attachment to routinized social relations.[3] The most widely referenced authors in this field are Mitzen, Steele and more recently Rumelili.

Another school of security studies that similarly tries to integrate other disciplines in the study of security and conflict is the Paris School, with Didier Bigo as its most prominent representative.[4] The Paris School aims to analyse security issues by using conceptual and operational tools from the realms of IR, sociology, and criminology.[5] Recognizing the work of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, the Paris School’s main contribution is by adding to the analysis of securitization processes based on speech acts and on the significance of security practices, while building on the sociological approaches of Bourdieu and Foucault.[6]

This essay does not deny the fact that the two concepts of security originate from very different intellectual fields. Furthermore, Mitzen’s work is criticized of being affiliated with traditional and neo-realist approaches to security rather than critical security studies.[7] Mitzen herself admits that by assuming that individuals as well as states act rationally, she wants to engage realist IR theory.[8] However, Mitzen’s core argument is that state identity is socially constructed and that sources of conflict are not exogenous to interaction but located in between states. This is very different to realist theory which assumes that a state’s type is self-organized and not dependent on other states. Likewise, Steele emphasizes that a state’s interest is a product of identity construction, which is very similar to constructivist and critical constructivist analyses.[9] With regards to the Paris School, which mainly builds on Bourdieu’s work, one should note that the latter understands its own work as positioned in ‘constructivist structuralism’ or ‘structuralist constructivism’, aiming to link agency and structure in a comprehensive conception of practice.[10]

Considering that both the Paris School and the ontological security approach can be understood as part of a broad range of constructivist perspectives in IR theory, this essay seeks to compare the two approaches by asking if they are ultimately more similar or different? In the context of a broader attempt to reconcile critical and ontological security approaches, this essay aims to highlight the potential for common ground between the scholars linked to Bigo’s research and the ones related to Mitzen’s understanding of security. Comparing the similarities between the concept of identity proposed by Anthony Giddens and the concept of habitus by Pierre Bourdieu, it will first be argued that they both are perceived as having a similar impact on the securitization process. Furthermore, it will be shown that Bigo and Mitzen not only share the analytical focus on insecurity but also the affiliation with the theory of practices. Finally, it will be argued that they also empirically share a common understanding of EU migration governance.

Identity and Habitus
The ontological security perspective’s focus on the actors’ need to feel as if they have stable identities is inspired by the psychoanalysis of Ronald Laing in ‘Self and Others’ (Laing 1960) and the sociology of Anthony Giddens in ‘Modernity and Self-Identity’ (Giddens 1991).[11] By conflating self with identity, the concept of ontological security-seeking is often reduced to concerns of identity preservation, arguing that “individuals need to feel secure in who they are, as identities or selves.”[12] According to Mitzen, the ability to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time is crucial in order to realize a sense of agency.[13] In fact, it is important that individuals have confidence expectations about the means-ends relationships to know how to act because they know what to expect in return.[14] In short, identity is both sustained by action and crucial for action. An important component for identity stability is what Giddens has called a “basic trust system.”[15] Basic trust is considered as crucial for ontological security since it refers to a certain sense of confidence in the nature of the world and thereby also to one’s own actions. What is important to note here, is that this basic trust system as well as the individual’s sense of its capacity for agency happens outside the level of conscious choice.[16]

In contrast, adopting a Bourdieusian approach, the Paris School argues that agency is influenced by an individual’s “habitus”. However, similar to the identity and basic trust element of the ontological security approach, the habitus refers to a semi-conscious orientation that individuals have to the world, which forms a basis for practice.[17] Moreover, as Bourdieu describes it himself, the habitus is “a system of durable, transposable dispositions, which integrates past experiences and functions at every moment as a matrix of perception, appreciation, and action [...].”[18] Dispositions may include bodily orientations, for example ways of standing or speaking but also a set of ethical precepts or behavioural dispositions. Bourdieu often refers to it as a “feel for the game,” that someone “just knows” what to do in a certain kind of situation.

As will be shown, there are several overlaps between the concept of the habitus and the concept of identity. Both Mitzen and the Paris School respectively highlight the relational character of identity and habitus. The dispositions of the habitus are embodied traces of intersubjective interactions.[20] Mitzen also points out the importance of recognition for identity and ontological security. According to her, identity-building is always an intersubjective process. As such, identity is formed and sustained through relationships.[21] Interestingly, Giddens and Bourdieu also both consider early childhood experiences as crucial for identity and habitus. Giddens argues that basic trust is “fostered through the emergence of habit and routines in the relationships between the infant and its caregivers, with such routines becoming a crucial bulwark against threatening anxieties.”[22] For Bourdieu, dispositions similarly become ‘second nature’ through early processes of training and learning.[23]

Although Bourdieu never explicitly elaborated on the concept of identity, Schäfer proposes in his study on the field of identity politics that identity can be defined as one of the dispositions of the habitus.[24] Bourdieu himself argues that action is not only shaped by someone’s habitus but also by its cultural capital.[25] Cultural capital implies the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, clothing etc. In that sense, sharing similar forms of cultural capital with other people creates a sense of collective identity. Considering the link between Giddens’ identity and Bourdieu’s habitus, one can argue that the ontological security perspective and the Paris School could be reconciled on the fact that identity is associated with Bourdieu’s habitus.

The Role of the State

Respectively applying the concepts of identity and habitus to the state’s level, the Paris School and the ontological security approaches both consider identity and habitus as crucial for securitization processes. While Mitzen adopts a rather exogenous approach, pointing out how states, similarly to individuals, are concerned with maintaining a consistent notion of their self-identity to enhance their ontological security in relations with other states, Steele is known for his intra-subjective or endogenous understanding of ontological security, by emphasising the role of the state as a provider of ontological security for its citizens.[26] Nevertheless, both agree on the fact that states are ontological security-seekers, either in relation with other states or for their own citizens. Furthermore, Steele and Mitzen also agree that actions to secure the self-identity of a state may compromise their physical security.[27]

In contrast to that, the Paris School has a slightly different understanding of the role of the state, arguing that nowadays the state does not have the same authority as before. The Paris School argues that this is due to the ‘de-
differentiation’ of internal and external realms of security that has led to a general tendency towards close cooperation between internal and external security agencies, resulting in the emergence of a transnational network of security professionals.[28] Bigo identifies a field of (in)securitization processes that is dominated by professionals or experts of security.[29] He claims that this field follows specific “rules of the game,” that presuppose a particular mode of socialization or habitus on the parts of these professionals. The habitus, similar to Giddens’ identity, also plays a central role in shaping securitization processes but is not strongly defined along the lines of national borders.

However, Bigo admits that the realm of security professionals is dominated by professionals from public institutions, such as police and the military.[30] It would therefore be wrong to claim that the Paris School does not attribute any role to the state in their concept of security. Bigo might argue that it is no longer tenable to maintain the classical notion of the state because of the transnationalization of police and military bureaucracies, however, by adopting a Foucauldian approach of governmentality, the Paris School still highlights the power of the state and the top-down process of securitization that is similar to the top-down process of Mitzen’s and Steele’s ontological security-seeking of the state. Furthermore, in one of Bigo’s earlier texts published in *Culture & Conflit*, he recognized the role that state identity has played for the American policy response to 9/11 and international terrorism more generally.[31] He stated that in that context, the self-representation of the United States as a model of democracy has not only played a crucial role in the construction of the enemy after 9/11 but also in their security strategy after the attacks, as well as in their search for allies in the fight against terrorism.

The concern about the role of identity can also be observed in the Paris School’s concern about the meshing of the habitus of the security professionals with new transnational fields of security. Considering, for example, the professional habitus of a police officer who is used to treat every person as a potential criminal.[32] According to Bigo, the increasing international ambitions of Ministries of Interior and Justice signifies that this habitus of the police officer is now merging with the field of the monitoring of the border-crossing of ‘normal’ people, in contrast to potential criminals that the police officer is normally concerned with. At this point, one could argue that his self-identification as a police officer as well as his ‘policing habitus’ can potentially shape its actions and therefore more generally the process of (in)securitization.

On this account, one could argue that despite a different understanding of the notion of the state, the Paris School is, similarly to the ontological security approach, concerned with how identity as well as the habitus can both shape securitization processes.

**Anxiety and Unease in World Politics**

Apart from the overlap with regards to the impact of identity and habitus on securitization processes, the two approaches to security show another similarity which concerns their focus on insecurity as well as their assumption of a general feeling of anxiety and unease in world politics.

Mitzen and Bigo’s world of anxiety and unease is not the first formulation of the need to think security in terms of insecurity and/or uncertainty. Reviewing the monographs of Mary Kaldor, Mark Duffield and Frank Furedi from 2007,[33] Chandler observes a theoretic shift of the security problematic from security – “the inter-state threat of war” – to insecurity “the permanent risk of instability.[34]” At the same time, Oliver Kessler and Christopher Daase note that there has been a semantic shift after the end of the Cold War of the kind of danger that security policy addresses. It is not more about the avoidance of threats, but the management of risks that dominate the security agenda.[35] This in turn contributes to a prior, multidisciplinary debate on ‘risk society’ that first emerged in the field of sociology in the late 1980s with Ulrich Beck as a prominent representative of the concept. Beck claimed that we now live in a “risk society, a society in which there are uncontrollable and unpredictable dangers against which insurance is impossible.[36]”

Even though Beck’s concept of ‘risk society’ has been contested by several intellectual fields, it has been used by many authors in the field of security studies to describe the nature of the contemporary international system. This includes Bigo who adopted the concept of ‘risk society’ and linked it to the politics of unease.[37] Furthermore, representatives of the Paris School claim that the label ‘security’ in fact works as a slogan or a method through which
certain groups are able to justify and impose a political program by assessing what can be designated as an object of fear or risk. They argue that thereby any attempt to obtain maximum security always provokes maximum insecurity.[38] Bigo demonstrates this with the example of the rise in number of policemen in a street:[39] This may diminish the risk of aggression, but not the fear of the persons in the street. On the contrary, noticing the many policemen in the street, people may become aware that something goes wrong and may feel even more insecure. Claiming that security is always also insecurity, the Paris School prefers using the terminology of (in)securitization.

With regards to the ontological security approach, Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen also acknowledge the contribution of the work of Ulrich Beck together with Anthony Giddens in the 1980s and 1990s by linking the concepts of ontological security with the study of risk society.[40] The underlying assumption of the concept of ontological security is a general fear of uncertainty, which is perceived as a threat to identity.[41] Mitzen also refers to it as “existential anxiety.” Uncertainty makes it difficult to act, which impedes the action-identity dynamic and makes it difficult to sustain self-conception.[42] Applying this argument to the state level, from an ontological security perspective, states’ intentions are often hard to know and easily misperceived. In that sense, states, similar to people, are also expected to experience existential anxiety in a world of uncertainty.

Finally, the ontological security approach adopts the (in)security terminology like the Paris School, although this can only be found in more recent works on the European Union (EU).[43] Additionally, Browning and Joenniemi state that authors like Mitzen as well as Rumellli have always empirically focussed on ontological insecurity rather than ontological security by first and foremost analysing cases where actors leak a healthy sense of basic trust.[44] One can therefore conclude that both schools are analytically focussing on the question, “What does insecurity do?”, in contrast to, “What is security?” Furthermore, both Giddens and Mitzen, as well as Bourdieu and the Paris School, acknowledge the importance of stability for an individual as well as for states in a more and more insecure world.

The Management of Anxiety and Unease through Routinized Practices

According to the Paris School as well as from an ontological security perspective, the above-mentioned situation of uncertainty in world politics results in the emergence of a certain kind of ‘management of anxiety’ as Mitzen would call it or a ‘management of unease’ in Bigo’s terms. Although both concepts highlight the power of narratives, thereby recognizing the work of the Copenhagen School, securitization for Mitzen and Bigo takes place first and foremost through non-discursive routinized practices.

Again, Mitzen and Bigo are not the first to analytically focus on practices. Vincent Pouliot states that there has been a broader call in IR theory for a so called “practice turn”, based on insights from philosophy, psychology, and sociology.[45] This practice turn attempts to overcome what Pouliot calls the “representational bias”[46] in sociological theorizing. According to him, this representational bias stems from the three logics of social action that have been most used in contemporary IR theory: the logics of consequences, of appropriateness, and of arguing.[47] All three logics emphasize representations and reflexive knowledge in social action. However, Pouliot argues that “in social and political life, many practices do not primarily derive from instrumental rationality (logic of consequence), norm-following (logic of appropriateness), or communicative action (logic of arguing).[48]” On the contrary, “practices are the result of inarticulate, practical knowledge that makes what is to be done appear ‘self-evident’ or commonsensical.[49]” Psychologists have found evidence from everyday life that action often derives from an “automatic, intuitive mode of information processing,[50]” that distinguishes itself from a rational mode of action. The key argument put forward by representatives of the practical turn is that social action stems from practical logics that are fundamentally non-representational.[51]

This assumption of practical, non-representational logics is the basis of Bourdieu’s habitus and Giddens’ ontological security-seeking. Mitzen’s and Bigo’s focus on unconscious routines and practices can therefore be understood as part of this theory of practice in social science. According to Mitzen, the mechanism generating basic trust and thereby ontological security is routinization based on social interactions, which makes social life and the self knowable and reduces uncertainty.[52] Routines have generally two functions: first, a cognitive function, which is providing individuals with knowledge of the world and of how to act and second, an emotional function which is saving individuals from feeling deep fear of chaos.[53] Because routines provide certainty, individuals can get
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attached to them. Applied to the state level, Mitzen argues that states can become attached to certain routines which might perpetuate physical insecurity but sustain identity and thereby provide ontological security.[54] In such a situation, it is difficult to solve the security dilemma because of states’ attachment to sometimes very dangerous routines. Moreover, for the ontological security approach, routines are often unconsciously drawn from the cultural field that individuals inhabit.[55] This in turn corresponds with the assumption of the Paris School, that individuals generally seek to perpetuate certain practices that are part of their habitus.

Methodologically, the Paris School also insists on the fact that security and insecurity have to be analysed as a process of (in)securitization based on security practices. These practices are forms of social interactions that are "derived from objective relations, rules of the game, which are neither directly visible nor conscious.[56]" The Paris School claims that practices are framed by an individual’s habitus, which can be compared to how routines are framed by identity according to the ontological security approach. Contrary to the often mentioned argument that securitized activities are exceptional measures, the Paris School argues that more often than not, security practices are already something normalized that has been routinized.[57] The Paris School claims that it is therefore important to study security practices and especially the routinization of security practices, because they assume that they differentiate from other social practices so that one could, through identifying security practices, also identify securitization processes more generally.

Sharing the analytical focus on routines and practices, Bigo and Mitzen are both conceptualizing security and insecurity in terms of unconscious, non-representational processes. As a consequence of the central role of routines in securitization processes, both schools see the difficulties of desecuritisation in the strong attachment of the actors to routines, either because it provides ontological security or just because it is part of their habitus. The unconscious nature of these routines makes it even more difficult first to identify them and then to suppress them.[58]

EU Migration Governance as Management of Anxiety and Unease

Finally, this last section now aims to demonstrate that Mitzen and the Paris School can be best reconciled with regards to the case of the securitization of migration in the EU, sharing a similar understanding of EU migration governance as a case of management of anxiety and unease which results in a specific form of governmentality based on narratives and routines.

Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen state that the greatest security challenges that people across Europe nowadays face are for example the ones related to sovereign debt and fiscal austerity, the rise of populist far-right parties across Europe, uncertainty about a possible disintegration of the EU as a result of Brexit, and refugees coming from different conflictual areas such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. In fact, what is behind these challenges are deeper insecurities about economic prospects, social well-being and a widespread fear that the EU will not be able to find solutions to these contemporary challenges in world politics.[59] Similarly, Bigo and Guild observe that the professionals of security are more and more perceiving the world as a global insecurity system.[60]

According to Mitzen, current challenges to the EU do not strictly threaten the EU’s security in that they do not lead to intra-European war. However, they do challenge EU cohesion in terms of identity which is why Mitzen uses the term “anxious community” when speaking of the EU.[61] Focussing on the migration policy of the Visegrad Four, Alkopher argues that immigration “challenges their collective identity as ‘sovereign’, ‘national’, and ‘European’, which had once served as an anxiety-controlling mechanism reinforcing their sense of trust, predictability, and control in the world, leading to uncertainty and ontological insecurity.[62]" Similarly, Bigo’s and Guild’s notion of “policing in the name of freedom” is an allusion to the securitization of EU values where especially the freedom of movement is considered as being essential for the building of a European identity.[63] Furthermore, Huysmans argues that migration is perceived as a destabilizing factor to European integration and in particular to the European internal market which also includes the free movement of people.[64] Considering the European internal market as an important element of a broader European identity, the management of migration is therefore about identity control.

In a special issue of European security focusing on ontological (in)security in the EU, Mitzen states that the EU anxiety management with regards to migration consists of two major strategies which are narratives and routines.[65]
Similarly, Bigo analyses how the rhetoric of freedom of movement as an integral part of European identity plays a crucial role in the narratives on migration as a security problem.[66] Huysmans also notes that the securitization of migration often builds on narratives that connect migration to other security-related problems such as crime and riots in cities, domestic instability, transnational crime and welfare fraud.[67]

Even though both recognize the power of narratives, the Paris School as well as the ontological security approach attribute an even more important role to routines and practices for the securitization of migration. Mitzen argues that “EU member states seek ontological security through routinising relations with their primary strategic partners.”[68] In fact, European identity is constituted by a certain consultation reflex and intra-European routines of multilateral security cooperation. The Paris School is analysing these routines at the level of the security professionals. According to Bigo, Bonditti and Olsson, routines of control and surveillance of individuals, as well as of exchange of know-how and mass-data between and within EU member states is at the core of the management of unease with regards to migration.[69]

Finally, Bigo and Mitzen both agree on the fact that these security practices of the EU result in a certain type of governmentality which is characterised by otherness and exceptionalism. Following specific narratives that differentiate between the self and the other, Mitzen observes that these narratives of otherness are also applied in practice. For example, EU border control is becoming targeted at specific groups only.[70] Based on status or identity, people crossing EU borders are differentiated between “one of us” or “one of them.” Bigo refers to this practice of control and surveillance as a “ban-opticon”, which is a mechanism of governmentality that excludes categories and only monitors specific populations.[71] Furthermore, both, Mitzen and Bigo claim that the fact that these security practices are routinized on a higher level than the state, it is not only difficult to interrupt them and thereby desecuritise migration but it has also become more and more difficult to contain basic democratic principles of power and resistance as well as oversight mechanisms in the international sphere.

Conclusion

With the aim to reconcile the Paris School as an example of critical security thinking with a rather psychological based approach to security, introducing the concept of ontological security, this essay has argued that the two understandings of security are ultimately more similar than different. It has been shown that there is a considerable link between the concept of identity and the concept of habitus that are both understood as having the power to frame the process of securitization. Furthermore, focussing on the notion of ‘insecurity’, both schools of thought acknowledge the importance of stability for the identity of a state in a world of anxiety and unease. In such a world, stability is created through often unconsciously pursued routines. Both approaches to security therefore see the difficulties of desecuritisation in the strong attachment of the managers of anxiety and unease to security routines. Considering the overlap between the role of routines for either identity or habitus, this essay suggests that the two approaches to security would best complement each other on that aspect, meaning that acknowledging the importance of routines for ontological security at the same time as considering them as part of the habitus of an actor would represent a valuable asset to research in the field of security.

Although, the broader aim of this essay was to give a first insight into the overlaps of the two approaches to security, this essay also acknowledges that there are aspects in their conceptualization of security that would make it rather difficult to reconcile them. This concerns, for example, the strong focus of the Paris School on the notion of the transnational field of security professionals as well as on Foucault’s governmentality and the use of technologies, whereas the ontological security approach is rather focussing on the emotional and psychological implications of threats to identity. However, Mitzen herself admits that much work remains to be done on the concept of ontological security, for instance on the operationalisation of the modes of routinization.[72] This essay therefore suggests that this would be a reason to consider the work of Bigo and other scholars of the Paris School, who already conducted substantial research on the operationalisation of security practices.

Finally, this essay finds that several critical approaches to the concept of security have not yet succeeded in integrating multiple disciplinary analyses. It is therefore considered crucial for future research of critical security studies to open up more to other disciplines by considering the important value of the combination of sociology and
psychology to the understanding of security practices.

Notes


[2] More recent studies have tried to open up the understanding of ontological security to other questions as the one related to identity (see for example Browning, C.S.; Joenniemi, P. ‘Ontological security, self-articulation and the securitization of identity’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52 (2017), pp. 31-47). However, since the question of identity-related stability still dominates the debates on ontological security, this essay will first and foremost build on this understanding of ontological security.


[4] Others are inter alia Thierry Balzacq and Jef Huysmans.


[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., p. 345.


[16] Ibid.


[19] Ibid., p. 275
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[20] Ibid., p. 274.


[30] Ibid.


[40] Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen, Introduction to 2018 special issue, p. 251.

[42] Ibid.


[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., p. 258.

[48] Ibid., p. 257.

[49] Ibid., p. 258.

[50] Ibid., p. 267.

[51] Ibid., p. 269.


[53] Ibid., p. 347.

[54] Ibid., p. 354.


[63] Bigo and Guild, Policing.


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[67] Huysmans, Securitization of Migration, p. 770.


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