Chapter 3:

Theorizing a Contentious Politics of Emotion and Security

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Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that much of IR theory is wedded to a reductionist image of fear as an instrument of political mobilization. This image of fear-as-mobilization suffers from a series of problems including an inattentiveness to the limits of power, narrow empirics, and a tendency to freeze emotions in place. How then, can we design a theory sensitive to the mobilization of fear as a potent source of empowerment in field of security, while at the same time capable of capturing how the politics of fear can buckle under the stress and strain of political opposition, counter-mobilizations, and even more mundane cases of actor incompetence?

This chapter answers this question by theorizing a contentious politics of emotion and security. Such a theory would recast the political mobilization of fear as a contingent project — one open to failure — and less an inevitable fact. In doing so it would afford the conceptual and theoretical resources to more critically evaluate the cases in the following chapters. But before outlining this chapter’s central arguments it’s instructive to reflect on the specific words I use to describe this theory: contention, politics, emotion, and security. Each of these words points to a significant departure from the approaches discussed in the previous chapter.

While we don’t hear of the word ‘contention’ very frequently in IR, it enjoys a healthy usage in studies on social movements and state formation (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). I use it in this chapter as a direct rejoinder to popular instrumentalist accounts of elites emotionally manipulating audiences to build support for security policies. My point is not to reject this reasoning wholesale — sociologists have long seen successful and “charismatic” political leaders as keen managers of emotional energy in groups (Collins, 2004:146). Instead, my interest is shedding light on how the mobilization of fear is open to failure, unintended consequences, contestation, and even outright incompetence.

Likewise, threading ‘contention’ and ‘politics of emotion’ together is a departure from how IR thinks of emotions simply as a source for conflict, as sometimes suggested in realist readings of human nature, to viewing emotions as a site of conflict. Viewing emotions as contested means viewing them as open to change, which in turn means rejecting the view of emotions as biologically hardwired. The consequence is that this chapter advances a self-consciously constructivist account of emotions; an account where emotions are open to contestation and struggle precisely because their form, range, and intensity can be constructed in a variety of different ways. This diversity is the prerequisite for the different emotional dynamics which can work to frustrate and constrain security practices, rather than simply enabling them.

Finally, ‘security’ represents the empirical-political domain that is the focus of this theory. In the last chapter I discussed a range of different approaches to studying security because it was important to demonstrate how the fear-as-mobilization thesis is a recurring feature IR theory. This chapter departs from broad surveys and narrows the engagement to securitization theory. This is a pragmatic wager which, while believing the forgoing arguments have broad appeal, recognizes that trying to speak to everyone easily muddies the waters of the discussion. Narrowing the engagement to securitization theory helps demonstrate the incisiveness of my argument by using it to challenge one of the most successful and vibrant areas of research in security studies since in the end of the Cold War. Properly understood then, this chapter elaborates a theory of the contentious politics of emotion and securitization.

The theory is elaborated in four parts. The first section is a ground clearing exercise. In order to better understand the role of emotion in social life I begin by revitalizing the problem of uncertainty in constructivist theory. Constructivists typically dismiss the problem of uncertainty, arguing that socialized agents view the world through a constellation of social facts (i.e. norms and identities) which guide decision-making going forward. Yet this argument has never have provided a compelling answer
to which social facts matter, and thus how agents navigate situations where multiple interpretations of events are possible. Marshalling arguments connecting emotions to the navigation of complex social environments, I suggest that constructivism’s vision of confident actorhood can only be preserved if we think about emotions as a source of certainty in social action. By treating emotions as a means to manage uncertainty we’re afforded an entry point into where emotion ‘fits’ into the topography of constructivist theory.

The second and third sections build on this entry point to theorize a contentious politics of emotion anchored around two concepts: embodied judgement and entrainment. Embodied judgments are how I conceptualize emotions. As embodied judgements, emotions are human response to uncertainty by indexing significant events and objects to bodily experience. These judgements are processes which focus our attention on certain events, dispose us to act and interpret the world in specific ways, and exist in social relations between actors and the world.

To account for how emotions are formed and shared in social settings I turn to the concept of entrainment, or the alignment of embodied experience. Like others working in IR’s emotion turn, I view entrainment as a deeper form of socialization. The twist added here is by recasting entrainment as a contentious process. Entrainment is not harmonious, and the different emotions surrounding diverse issues from migrants, to torture, to globalization signal different identities, interests, values, and visions of political order. To flesh out the argument further I outline three empirical areas where I believe processes of entrainment are especially evident: popular culture, memory and trauma, and public rituals.

In the final section I return to securitization theory and reformulate it through the lens of a contentious politics of emotion. I argue audiences to securitizing moves are presented with a challenge over which security claims matter. In order to cut through the confusion of security debates, audiences are forced to interpret claims through the lens of embodied judgments. While some embodied judgments facilitate the audience’s acceptance of security claims, others can precipitate rejection and even hostility towards the speaker. The effect of these dynamics is to produce a bounded domain — a security imaginary — representing a limited space of plausible and legitimate security interpretations. Constrained by the emotional boundaries of this imaginary, agents, whether they be political elites, security professionals, or some other political actor, are limited in what they can, and cannot, securitize.

1.0 The Blooming, Buzzing Confusion of the Social World

What do emotions do? This section lays the groundwork for theorizing a contentious politics of emotion by exploring how emotions aid actors in navigating the social world. At its core is a simple proposition: emotions help actors manage uncertainty. By indexing the significance of different events and situations to our bodies, emotions can bring a striking clarity to what we desire, what we should avoid, and what we deem simply unimportant.

This is not the only entry point into theorizing emotion in IR. Others have built theories around emotion and communication (Hall, 2016), community (Koschut, 2014), social practice (Bially Mattern, 2011), and beyond. I stake this attempt to uncertainty because I believe it offers an elegant and practical path to understanding how emotions shape political life. It also primes the discussion for the critique of securitization I make below concerning how audiences face uncertainty over which security claims should be accepted and which should be rejected. Uncertainty however, is a stranger to constructivist IR theory. In this section I show how uncertainty is a distinctive problem for constructivism, how contemporary responses to this problem are come up short, and how this leads us to consider emotion’s role in navigating uncertainty.
1.1 – The Constructivist Problem of Uncertainty

One does not often see discussions of uncertainty in constructivist IR. Instead, constructivist-talk orbits around now familiar claims over the social construction of world politics and typically involves viewing the principal structures and processes of international relations as ideational or discursive (Wendt, 1995, 1999). At a deeper level of sophistication, this entails some form of commitment to reflexivity or the human capacity for self-reflection which enables actors to contemplate how their ideas work to produce social realities (Guzzini, 2000; Hamati-Ataya, 2012).

Contrary to rationalist models of actorhood where desire + belief = action (Fearon & Wendt, 2002; Pouliot, 2008), constructivists stress the *learned* nature of the social world. Actors are continuously socialized into constellations of ‘social facts’ representing distinct social structures, which form particular moments in history.\(^1\) Here the cumulative weight of historical interactions furnishes actors with the necessary identities, norms, and practices to meaningfully act upon an indeterminate world (Berenskoetter, 2011:649-652). As Wendt notes, “When a student gives me his paper to grade I know it is time to be a Professor and the fact that I am a US citizen does not figure in our interaction” (1999:230).

Wendt’s confident Professor is a fitting parable for the constructivist view of actorhood: sure of who they are, what the situation is, what the relevant norms are, as well as how others will act, there is little to be uncertain about in this scenario. This confidence is striking precisely because of how sharply it contrasts with competing realist theories where actors are wracked by uncertainty in an anarchic world. Pointing to the difficulty in ascertaining the intentions and capabilities of others, realists like Copeland (2000)\(^2\) argue that constructivism theorizes away the challenge of uncertainty from social action.

The problem in parsing Copeland’s claim however, is that it’s not clear that uncertainty means the same thing for constructivists and realists. Consider the case of intentions. The prevailing realist view holds that while knowing the truth of other actors’ intentions is difficult — because of misperception, poor signaling, deception, etc. — intentions are, in principle, objectively knowable. A state is either benign and security-seeking, or it is not, and while distinguishing between the two is practically challenging, it is possible (e.g. Glaser, 2010).\(^3\)

Intentions are also important for constructivists, but they appear differently through a lens focused on shared, or intersubjective, knowledge. In this view the benign intention of security seeking is not an “intrinsic” property of a state that we can uncover if we just peel back so many layers of obfuscation; it depends on the “social recognition” of other states. A state that views itself as peaceful but is consistently aggressive cannot be sensibly understood as being benign because “[s]tates do not have the final say in whether they are security-seekers” (Mitzen, 2006:355-359; see also Sucharov, 2005).\(^4\) As a result the realist concern with uncertainty loses significance as intentions are seen as something less to be objectively discovered and more as something to be interpreted and recognized in a particular historical context. To the constructivist sensibility, the realist view of uncertainty appears radically incomplete: one could have all the data in the world, but without interpretation it would be meaningless. It is therefore no surprise constructivists rarely engage with the realist problem of uncertainty.

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\(^1\) Hence Pouliot’s claim that the “essence” of constructivism is questioning “how are social facts socially constructed, and how do they affect global politics?” (Pouliot, 2004:320).

\(^2\) See also Jervis (1978).

\(^3\) Drawing on the work of Frank Knight, some IR Scholars call this the ‘risk’ model of uncertainty (Best, 2008:358-359; Mitzen & Schweller, 2011:23). For a very different view on uncertainty and realism see Mearsheimer (2001).

\(^4\) Classical realists would agree, adding that states often construe parochial interests through the prism of a benign and universal morality (Carr, 2001[1981]).
uncertainty; it’s only a ‘problem’ if one smuggles in certain epistemological assumptions about the possibility of purely objective knowledge, assumptions which constructivists have never found compelling.

Yet just because the realist understanding of uncertainty has little purchase for constructivism doesn’t mean the issue of uncertainty recedes from social action. Copeland hints at an alternative form of uncertainty when he suggests that the social interactions described by Wendt “must be interpreted, and ‘many interpretations are possible’” (Copeland, 2000:201). Brian Rathbun (2007) calls this type of uncertainty indeterminacy. Rather than focusing on the scarcity of objective knowledge, indeterminacy points to the inherent instability of meaning surrounding language and practice, and how this leaves events open to multiple interpretations. The problem is not a lack of information which leaves actors unable to form an interpretation of an event; the problem is that the same information is open to multiple interpretations.

From this perspective the crucial ‘interpretive moment’ typically foregrounded by constructivists (Pouliot, 2007; Price & Reus-Smit, 1998) becomes something of an interpretive problem. History, that important source of meaning turned to in guiding social action, “does not issue clear guidelines as experiences are ambiguous and indeterminate and so what we take from them—those ominous lessons—is a creative act of interpretation” (Berenskoetter, 2011:661). As Schindler and Wille argue, “There is uncertainty about the time practitioners live in, about how the past continues into the present. And there is, crucially, no evidence that one interpretation of the past, or one consequence that is drawn from it for present practice, clearly dominates” (2015:350). Absent a clear interpretive guide from history, actors are left with an “ambiguity issue that leaves decision-makers indecisive and consequently renders international relations less deterministic and more variegated” (Rathbun, 2007:545).

Likewise, while communication is commonly understood as a promising pathway to a “common lifeworld” of mutual intelligibility (Risse, 2000), is just as likely to obfuscate. All discourses are marked by an “openness to multiple and even subversive interpretations”, many of which “can pose a significant problem for government” (Best, 2008:356). This is because rather than being “univocal”, communicative practices are characterized by “polysemy” meaning events are open to “inherent ambiguities and instabilities” (Duvall & Chowdhury, 2011:337, 349). Much like the uncertainty of neorealism, this indeterminacy emerges from a Hobbesian anarchy, but this is first and foremost an epistemic anarchy which is absent any unifying authority of interpretation (Williams, 1996:219-220).

Indeterminacy is more than an abstract problem. Consider, for example, Nikita Khrushchev’s now (in)famous incident of banging his shoe on the table during a UN session in 1960. While Western members dismissed this as part of Soviet theatrics, others, including Khrushchev himself, saw this act as form of protest over a failure to adequately address the U2 spy plane incident (Duvall & Chowdhury, 2011:342). In similar vein, Schindler and Wille point to how diplomats in the NATO-Russia Council fundamentally disagreed over the status of the Cold War. From whether the war was truly over, to who really won, as well as what lessons could be drawn into the present, it was “evident that multiple versions of history are present without any one clearly dominating” (Schindler & Wille, 2015:351).

Collectively, these tensions pose a serious challenge to the constructivist account of social action. While we may live in a world of our making (Onuf, 1989), this is undoubtedly a very complex and multifaceted world. We don’t just have a norm or a practice or a single identity to guide us, we have several.\footnote{The way some scholars use “subjectivity” as a term for an “encompassing sense of the Self” (Bially Mattern, 2005a:96) means actors have multiple and overlapping identities and any of these offer an equally compelling or ‘appropriate’ course of action in a given situation.} The pertinent question then becomes how do we sort the blooming, buzzing confusion of the social world? If the world is made up social facts, which social facts matter?
Here it is worth recalling that constructivists scholars are keen and careful students of social behavior. Immediately following Wendt’s sketch of the confident Professor, he notes “many situations call up several identities that may point in different directions, leaving us unsure how to act” (1999:230). While consistently downplayed, the challenge of sorting the social world is hardly absent from this literature. Scholars have formulated a variety of responses and we can group these under three broad headings: hierarchy, socialization, and anchoring. While each of these responses elaborates on the constructivist account of social action in different and intriguing ways, none provides a wholly compelling response to the problem of uncertainty.

1.2 – Hierarchies, Socialization, and Anchoring

One of the most common responses to uncertainty is to view the social world as organized in some form of hierarchy. Thus, for Wendt “the solution to identity conflicts within an actor will reflect the relative ‘salience’ or hierarchy of identity commitments in the Self,” (1999:230). I may have multiple identities, but some are clearly subordinate to others. Arguing along parallel lines, those inspired by the English School often make a similar distinction between “primary” and “secondary” institutions (Buzan, 2004), or between enduring “fundamental” institutions and more tentative “issue specific regimes” (Reus-Smit, 1997). In reflecting on which institutions matter, actors will rely on those that are most “durable” (Buzan, 2004:167) or persistent (Reus-Smit, 1997:556). The same hierarchic ordering is at play whenever constructivists talk about the ‘depth’ of social structures. Wherever there is talk of “deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and practices” (Acharya, 2004:248), or that identities “can grow deep roots” (Legro, 2009:47), or that “social structures become deeply embedded” (Steele, 2007b:36), what we are really hearing is an argument about how actors are guided by a hierarchy of social facts.

The hierarchical organization of social life appears deeply intuitive. National identity, for example, is commonly seen as simply ‘outranking’ more cosmopolitan allegiances. But if hierarchies are organized by some differentiating principle, what then organizes this ranking? What makes one identity more salient than another or why do some norms become deeply embedded and not others? The hierarchy between small and great powers in international politics, for example, is held in place by the fact that latter control inordinately more military force than the former. What force is elevating some social facts into a position of dominance, while subordinating others?

Socialization processes offer one potential answer. As the “process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community” (Checkel, 2005:804), socialization works to “induce norm breakers to become norm followers” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998:902). Socialization cuts through the uncertainty of the world by carving it into communities an actor is, and is not, part of. This effectively limits the baseline set of interpretations an actor can bring to bear in a situation; the only norms, identities, and practices that matter are those of the communities an actor belongs to.

But what happens when we belong to multiple communities which offer conflicting guidance? What happens when the United States acts in a manner that puts a strain on its NATO allies’ commitment to international law? In the socialization literature, conflicts are typically narrowly framed as something that happens between the socialized community and the non-socialized outsider (i.e. liberal democratic states versus the ‘other’). Only rarely do we hear of identity conflicts within a community. But this absence of internal identity conflicts is particularly odd given how domestic studies in comparative politics routinely see identity as politically contentious (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilley, 2009). What the socialization literature IR leaves us with then is a distorted picture of the

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6 For a broader discussion of hierarchy in IR see Bially Mattern and Zarakol (forthcoming)
7 Though exceptions exist, see especially Sucharov (2005) and (Lupovici, 2012).
'harmony of socialization', a view in which the multiple social structures we are situated in, and the various modes of interpretation they offer, exist in some underlying harmony which points to one unambiguous and self-apparent choice forward.

In fact, rather than reducing or eliminating uncertainty, we may even see socialization as obscuring the indeterminate nature of the world. Consider the thin set of criteria for socialization: as soon as an actor voluntarily complies with a norm they’re considered ‘socialized’ (Checkel, 2001:557; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998:898). At this point the norm is considered internalized and it’s taken for granted that the actor shares a common set of intersubjective beliefs and values with the community. But saying a norm has become ‘internalized’ or ‘learned’ tell us precious little about whether that norm is related to as an object of disgust, pride, anger, shame, joy, or simply apathy. You and I may be socialized to the same norm, but I may relate to that norm as a source of pride, for you it may be a source of stigma (cf. Zarakol, 2014), and while we may both have ‘learned’ that norm — in this thin sense of the term — it makes us feel differently and therefore we may be predisposed to act differently. In short, we cannot be certain from simple appearance of compliance that we have internalized the same norm in the same way.

Finally, constructivists have engaged with the question how social actors manage uncertainty through series of what can be best described as ‘anchoring’ arguments. These explanations begin by widening the ontology of constructivism beyond the usual focus on norms, identity, or culture to include habits (Hopf, 2010), routines (Mitzen, 2006), and embodied knowledge or ‘habitus’ (Pouliot, 2008). Each of these concepts is taken to be representative of some second order form of social structure; something that fastens in place — anchors — the intersubjective beliefs and values that are the foci in more typical studies. This anchoring is made possible by how each of these concepts refer to processes which suppress reflexivity. In Hopf’s view the “unexamined and predisposing structure of habits strongly anchors actors’ perceptions, attitudes, and practices” (2010:545). Habitus — as distinct from habits — represents a practical and unreflexive knowledge over the “socially constituted ‘sense of the game’” (Pouliot, 2008:275). Likewise, “routines are not chosen in any meaningful sense, but taken-for-granted; reflection is suppressed” (Mitzen, 2006:347).

Anchoring gives a sophisticated response to the uncertainty problem by stressing the social facts which matter most are those which are held in place habit, routine, and habitus. This combines arguments from hierarchies — because routinized norms weigh rank higher in priority of action than eccentric norms — as well as socialization — because things like habitus still need to be learned, even if through “tacit experience and an embodied history of social relations” (Pouliot, 2008:279). And while anchoring-type arguments are surely an advancement in constructivist theory, they are not without weaknesses.

First, while habits and routines represent powerful orienting mechanisms towards the world they suffer from the same weakness of socialization-type arguments. What happens when they conflict? Here we can offer a minor amendment to the NATO example above. What happens when the United States acts in in a manner that forces its NATO allies’ to choose between their routine support of the US, and their routine support international law? Routines and habits only suppress uncertainty

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8 This is a twist on Carr’s critique of liberals ‘harmony of interests’ (2001[1981]:42-45) where the diverse preferences actors are invariably seen to align, at some level, into a broader and more universal interest.

9 This may include covert efforts to undermine the norm.

10 Structural realists would respond that states pursue their material interest in this situation. The constructivist reply is that the material self-interest of states is not self-apparent but a product of interpretation. Some states may interpret unqualified support for the United States as in their self-interest, others would not (e.g. Germany and Canada during the invasion of Iraq). My argument is that states can be uncertain about which interpretation best fits the situation.
when they run in the same direction. As soon as habits and routines begin to conflict uncertainty re-emerges.

The problem with habitus is more tricky. Habitus stands apart from routine or habit by virtue of being more encompassing. Instead of attaching itself to a single norm or identity, habitus represents a more general “system of durable, transposable dispositions, which integrates past experiences and functions at every moment as a matrix of perception, appreciation, and action” (quoted in Pouliot, 2008:272). This ‘sense of game’, as it is so often summarized, “functions like the materialization of collective memory”, equipping actors with the knowledge of how to act in complex interactions (Guzzini, 2000:166; Schindler & Wille, 2015:332). Yet as Schindler and Wille (2015) have argued, studies of memory and trauma have shown that practices of memory can be intensely politicized and contested. Conflicts over how traumatic events should be memorialized (Edkins, 2003; Resende & Budryte, 2014) severely complicate the image of habitus being informed by one single and homogenous vision of the past. Rather than being informed by a single coherent reservoir of memory, the habitus of actors typically incorporates diverse and conflicting memories. The result is the production of a habitus which “contains conflicting dispositions, dispositions that contradict each other” (Schindler & Wille, 2015:347). Once confronted with conflicting dispositions, uncertainty re-emerges.

1.3 – Emotions and the Uncertainty Problem

Collectively, the limits of hierarchy, socialization, and anchoring-type arguments point to a central tension in constructivist theory. On the hand, constructivist scholarship has become deeply wedded to a vision of confident actors who remain unfettered by the uncertain nature of the world. Early iterations of this argument looked to demonstrate how realism’s view of uncertainty as a contaminant afflicting all social life is a poor fit with practical experience. It is simply incredulous to suggest that beneath the amity and trust between the United States and Canada, there are officials who are constantly fearing betrayal and defection (Wendt, 1999:106). And yet more recent works have pressed the argument even further by claiming that not only can uncertainty be minimized, but that it can be “eliminated” altogether (Hopf, 2010:554).

But on the other hand, even the most sophisticated accounts of where this confidence comes from fall apart under pressure. In pushing uncertainty to the margins of social interactions, but without given a sustainable account of why, constructivists risk neglecting how “uncertainty is a core feature of the human condition” (Berenskoetter, 2011:648). How do we reconcile these two positions?

One clue on how to move forward lies in the anchoring-type arguments discussed above. What’s intriguing about the discussions of habit, routine, and habitus is that they all intersect with emotion. As Hopf suggests:

“Habits and emotions are close associates; they are both automatic, not reflective. As Rose McDermott summarizes, ‘The brain’s structural makeup requires that emotional information exert an influence before, and sometimes instead of, higher-level cognitive functioning’ (McDermott, 2004: 692; see also Mercer, 2005: 92–99).” (2010:541)

For Mitzen routines are significant precisely because they serve an “important emotional function of ‘inoculating’ individuals against the paralytic, deep fear of chaos” (2006:347). To be clear, emotion is hardly a central focus of these discussions. A connection between uncertainty and emotion is posited, but never fully explored.

This connection is intriguing because it mirrors one of the most significant arguments about emotions and decision making in neuroscience: the somatic marker hypothesis. Developed by Antonio

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11 Another way of putting this is that habitus attaches itself to social ‘fields’, rather than discrete practices.
12 Though in more recent work it has moved to the foreground (Mitzen & Schweller, 2011).
Damasio and his colleagues (Bechara, Damasio, & Damasio, 2000; Damasio, 1994), the hypothesis focuses on how humans make choices by anticipating future scenarios. In typical models of rational choice the range of possible scenarios is sorted and assigned an expected utility based on their desirability. This process will be complex and time consuming: the universe of outcomes can be very large, defining the utility of each outcome is challenging, and the weighted utility of an outcome can be unevenly distributed over time (i.e. some scenarios may include upfront costs followed by a slower stream of benefits). Invariably, the limits of concentration and attention are reached and the decision making process becomes muddled (Damasio, 1994:172).

The somatic marker hypothesis makes a subtle but significant alteration to this model. Like the rational choice model, it begins with the anticipation of future scenarios. Yet not all of these scenarios receive equal consideration as some become indexed (‘marked’) by the body (the ‘soma’) in the form of emotions. In some cases, a future scenario becomes marked with positive feelings making it actively desirable, whereas in other cases scenarios become marked with negative feelings making them something to actively avoid. Somatic markers — emotions — drastically reduce uncertainty by drawing attention towards those scenarios we have feelings for, while dispensing with those which, while still objectively possible, we feel nothing for. Emotions radically narrow range of possible options while at the same presenting the remaining alternatives in high-fidelity (e.g. ‘we must avoid this, at all costs’).

The somatic marker hypothesis’ link between uncertainty and emotion has yet to influence sociological theories in IR like constructivism. It was originally aimed at critiquing models of rational choice from economics (Bechara & Damasio, 2005), and its use in IR has echoed this path (e.g. McDermott, 2004; Mercer, 2005). This rationalist lens has likely led many sociologically-minded scholars to pass over the hypothesis and its putative link between uncertainty and emotion. This is a mistake. The clinical patients who populate Damasio’s research narrative — those with trauma to the emotional centers of the brain — are not simply poor decision makers, they become hampered in their ability to function as social human beings. They lose their jobs, their marriages, become estranged from their communities, they make “a succession of mistakes, a perpetual violation of what would be considered socially appropriate and personally advantageous” (my emphasis, Damasio, 1994:xii). Social movement theorists have seized on this kind of interpretation to suggest emotions shape protesters’ commitment “by altering the salience hierarchy of personal identities and preferences” (Kim, 2002:159, 161). Likewise, Randall Collins has argued that interactions saturated with a high level of emotional energy will see actors with a high level of certainty (2004:180). Emotions suffuse certainty.

Constructivists should not cede the problem of uncertainty to realism. But neither should they entirely abandon their image of confident actors certain in their knowledge of the social world. An alternative would be to theorize emotions as a means through which actors manage uncertainty by reducing the range of available interpretations of the world. One doesn’t have to agree with the specificities of the somatic marker hypothesis to see this way of viewing emotion as a fruitful line of inquiry moving forward. Indeed, my reading of Damasio’s work sees little in terms of resources for the sociological kind of inquiry called for by constructivists. Yet it’s still possible to see the emotion-uncertainty nexus his work represents as carving out a space on the conceptual topography of

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13 Damasio’s argument is not that the somatic marker model replaces rational choice, but rather the preferences presupposed by rational choice theory are impossible without somatic markers. Rational choice behavior presumes desires, and desires presume emotion.

14 Ross (2006) has drawn on Damasio’s work to critique the Cartesian mind/body separation that is integral constructivist ontology, but emotion’s relationship with uncertainty is not part of this discussion. See also the brief reference by Holland and Soloman (2014:265).

15 And given how it is tooled towards a rejoinder to rational choice theory one should not expect a deeper sociological examination.
constructivism for thinking about what emotions ‘do’ in social life. What can fill this space, I argue, is a theoretical framework centered around the concept of ‘embodied judgements’.

2.0 – Emotions as Embodied Judgements

With a space for thinking about emotion in social theory carved out, this section populates that space with a specific concept: embodied judgements. In a nutshell the argument is that embodied judgements are human responses to the uncertainty over which social structures matter for social life by imprinting them on our most important matter: our bodies. Our bodies suppress uncertainty by fostering a series emotional attachments towards our environment, effectively sharpening our view of the social world. We go from seeing a flattened and undifferentiated mass of ideas and relations, to seeing the world rendered in a high fidelity of peaks and valleys.

In making this argument I begin by discussing how it reflects a compromise between the NeoJamesian and Appraisal traditions of emotions theorizing. From the former I take the idea of emotions as embodied, and from the latter I take the idea of emotions as judgments. I then develop this view by situating it in a series of debates in the literature involving emotions’ status as processes, dispositions, and social relations.

Before proceeding one important objection needs to be considered. To say that emotions reduce uncertainty may be intuitive up until the point where we encounter emotions which appear to affirm uncertainty. Fear, for example, might be understood as uncertainty over whether one might feel pain in the future. Indeed, this is exactly what Rathbun (2007) suggests when arguing that realism views uncertainty as fear. In an anarchic world where predation is always possible, fear and uncertainty appear two sides of the same coin. Does this pose a problem for my argument?

I argue no. A closer look reveals that the fearful states described by realism in fact enjoy a wealth of certitude. They are certain other states are self-interested actors and cannot be trusted. They are certain diplomatic overtures like signaling are often a waste of time (Rathbun, 2007:536). They are certain that the appropriate strategy is maximizing security (for defensive realists) or maximizing power (for offensive realists). And they are certain intentions are subject to change. It turns out fear of predation has made these states certain of a great deal, leaving little room for reflection or interpretation. Huysmans (1998) outlines the underlying logic. In his view what’s notable about political realism is that it offers a “concrete” fear: a fear of enemies. Tangible fears like these are desirable insofar as they displace a much deeper “epistemological fear”, a fear of not knowing (Huysmans, 1998:237, 245). A fear of a specific enemy affords certainty over who is threatening, how we might be harmed, and what countermeasures might be taken to alleviate the danger. A fear of not knowing leaves us powerless and unable to act because we don’t even know who is friend and who is an foe.

2.1 – Embodied Judgement: Where NeoJamesian and Appraisal theories meet

The world has no shortage of theories of emotion. This isn’t just the case for psychology; it holds true for philosophy, sociology, and beyond. I view embodied judgments as a compromise between two major traditions of emotion theorizing: NeoJamesian and Appraisal approaches. This move emulates, in form if not in substance, Prinz’s (2004) call for a reconciliation between these two traditions. My take however, is far less sophisticated and intended for an IR audience.

NeoJamesian theories stem from work of William James who in the nineteenth century criticized a growing propensity to reduce emotions to discrete cognitive states. The argument revolves around

16 Psychoanalysts operating in the tradition of Lacan would call these “affective investments” (T. Solomon, 2012)
17 I am grateful for Jennifer Mitzen for pointing this out to me.
two claims. First, by reducing emotions to cognitive or mental states — what constructivists in IR might call ideas or representations — we gloss over the single most defining feature of emotion: *embodied experience*. James’ classic argument was to ask his readers to give an account of experiencing an emotion, and then to progressively subtract its features until it became unrecognizable. If you remove the sensation of bodily change, then only “a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains” (quoted in Prinz, 2004:56). Second, if we accept that emotion is embodied, then we need to acknowledge that the body is capable of an extraordinary range of experience. From this perspective cognitive psychology’s obsession with an endless taxonomy of discrete emotions — fear, anger, joy, etc. — misses the incomprehensively rich range of emotional experience of which humans are capable. In the strongest form of this argument what we call ‘emotions’ are just labels we retroactively paste on much richer embodied experiences.

As the prefix of ‘neo’ suggests, James’ views are enjoying a renaissance. This is in no small part due to the work of neuroscientists, like Damasio discussed above, who see their experiments as offering evidence for James’ insights. In the discipline of IR Ross’s (2006, 2014) work is a clear exemplar of a NeoJamesian theory, but the influence is also evident in Mercer’s (2006, 2010, 2014) work as well. When I use the term *embodied* to describe emotion, I use it as shorthand for the NeoJamesian approach.

Embodied approaches are typically viewed in contrast to Appraisal theories. These theories portray emotions as evaluations or judgements of the significance of the world around us and emphasize the role of cognition in mediating emotional experience. By making cognition central to appraisal, this approach foregrounds the role of knowledge, meaning, and interpretation in emotion episodes (Lazarus, 1991a:353-354). This also explains emotional variance: I fear and avoid the neighborhood dog but you do not because we’ve construed (appraised) the significance of the dog differently. Emotion may be a detection system that highlights significant events, but it’s a system that’s calibrated to our identities, interests, and past experiences.

Absent a rallying figure like James, influences in Appraisal theories are more eclectic. Philosophers of emotion like Robert Solomon has argued that understanding emotions as judgements can help to challenge modernity’s image of them as irrational errors. Far from occupying the “‘lower’ realms of involuntary, unintelligent response”, emotional judgements help us navigate through what would otherwise be an unbearable morass of everyday decisions (Solomon, 2003:94). Similarly, Martha Nussbaum views emotions as “suffused with intelligence” and “an awareness of value or importance” (2001:1). Their importance comes from how they “are appraisals or value judgements, which ascribe to things and persons outside the person’s own control great importance for that person’s own flourishing” (Nussbaum, 2001:4).

Research by psychologists Magda Arnold (1960) and Richard Lazarus (1966) made the term appraisal a “household word in emotions research” (Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013:119). Parsed in a more clinical vocabulary, “Appraisal is a process that detects and processes the significance of the environment for well-being” (Moors et al., 2013:120). I read the appraisal literature as being about *variance*. Contra behavioral psychology’s view of emotions as undifferentiated arousal, appraisal theorists stressed that emotional reactions differed significantly across individuals and places because people appraise the significance of situation differently (Roseman & Smith, 2001:3-4). This variation was to explained by the different ways individuals related to events — in terms of things like ‘goal congruency’, ‘coping potential’, and ‘agency’ — as well as by the way the appraisal process threaded together different emotion components including physiological changes, subjective feelings, action tendencies. The way these ingredients combined would account for the variance in different “emotional episodes” (Ellsworth, 2013).

Social psychologists and sociologists take this focus on variance one step further by situating appraisals in social context. Departing from psychology’s ‘in-the-head-ness’, these scholars argue
Emotions research needs to confront the fact “the large majority of our emotions occur in the contexts of social interactions and relationships” (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014:298). Here the term “social appraisal” captures the “social embeddedness of the appraisal process” which “contributes to the alignment or ‘calibration’ of emotions within collectivities” (von Scheve & Ismer, 2013:409). The fact different members of a community share similar ways of soliciting, experiencing, and expressing emotions is taken as evidence of a shared appraisal process which contributes to the underlying social structure of a community.

While such appraisal-type arguments are increasingly popular in IR (e.g. Crawford, 2000; Fierke, 2013; Graham, 2014; Jeffery, 2011; Sasley, 2011), we often only see fragmented and partial accounts of their origins. I depart from the clinical sounding jargon of appraisal, but when I use the term judgement I use it as a shorthand for the Appraisal approach.

The term embodied judgment represents a reconciliation of these two traditions. This will be seen as odd by some, especially given how these traditions are often seen as conflicting. Mercer (2010) and Ross (2006), for example, critique Appraisal theories for placing too much emphasis on cognition, as well as ignoring the embodied and non-conscious dimensions of emotion. Some of this criticism, I believe, is overblown and leads to a caricature of Appraisal approaches (Van Rythoven, 2015:464-465). But instead of descending into interpretive disputes I look to make a more positive argument: emotions are both embodied and judgements and that one depends on the other. Emotions are surely embodied and this entails some diffuse bodily sensation. Damasio (1994:155-156) makes this argument easier to accept by suggesting that repeated emotional experiences develop an “as-if loop” where the mind comes to interpret a situation “as if” the body were experiencing a physiological change.

Yet reducing emotions to bodily sensations would be a grave mistake. These embodied experiences signal what’s important to us in the world. They help us detect insufferable loss and triumphant gain. They guide us through a morass of social complexity and uncertainty. They help us judge the world. Without this wider lens then, these physiological sensations are nothing more than bodily impulse. And without embodiment, these judgements are nothing more than cold and neutral perceptions. In Prinz’s pithy phrasing, “emotions are gut reactions; they use our bodies to tell us how we are faring in the world” (2004:69).

Emotions then, are embodied judgements. When these judgements become consciously recognized I refer to them as feelings but, like Mercer (2010:3), I often view emotions and feelings as synonymous. At some points embodied judgements will take the form of relatively discrete and recognizable categories of experience, what we call in everyday usage fear, anger, joy, and so on. In other cases these judgements will take the form of much more diffuse and nebulous affects. While both affect and emotion detect what’s happening in the world the difference is a degree of precision. Affect is strictly rudimentary and basic, at best evincing a sense of whether a situation is negative or positive for us (Sasley, 2010:689). Emotions afford us clearer sense of what’s going on in the world by moving beyond a sense of whether a situation is positive or negative and engaging more refined structures of embodied experience such as joy, anger, or sadness.

I return to the distinction between emotion categories and affects in the next chapter as it entails important implications for research methodology. For now however, it’s important flesh out this idea by situating it in some of the key debates in the emotion literature (both within IR and beyond). I do this by clarifying three key characteristics of embodied judgements: processes, dispositions, and social relations.

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18 One might ask whether this is the conventional view of these terms in psychology. Yet this presume a consensus in psychology that is a fiction. Emotion and feeling have historically been contested concepts in psychology and continue to be so (Gendron & Feldman Barrett, 2009).
2.2 – Embodied Judgements as Processes

In the previous chapter I stressed a critique of IR’s tendency to view emotions as stable and fixed substances (e.g. ‘ancient hatreds’). My view of embodied judgement departs from this by stressing the role of process in emotions. For Collins this distinction resembles the difference between developmental Freudian views on emotion, which easily become a “model of a wind-up doll, programmed early in life, which ever after walks through the pattern once laid down”, versus a model where emotions are understood as “changing intensities heated up or cooled down by the pressure-cooker” of interaction (2004:44-45, 6). For psychologists this dynamic character is rooted in the “almost incessant predictive activity of the brain” (Frijda, 2013:169). This means we should appreciate “emotional experience as an ever-changing process, like a river, rather than a collection of separate pools” (Ellsworth, 2013:125). These shifts don’t have to be rapid. Drawing on Norbert Elias’s idea of the “civilizing process”, Linklater (2014) discusses how shifting European attitudes towards the role of anger in public life emerged over a period of centuries.

Stressing the importance of process here seems banal; our everyday experience confirms that emotions fluctuate. Nowhere is this more evident than world politics: feelings of amity between the United States and Canada wax and wane, fear and hatred for migrants’ ebbs and flows with the global economy, and international disasters see compassion spike and sometimes disappear soon after. And yet IR’s historical fusing of emotion and human nature all too easily contaminates our thinking about emotions with a rigidity that is neither empirically nor theoretically justified. This doesn’t mean we need to ignore the stability or recurrence of certain emotions. Instead we can recognize that the “phenomenon of inertia we call order is itself produced through social processes” (Mitzen, 2006:364), and that both continuity and change cannot be seen apart from one another (Wight, 2001).

When we do talk about variance and emotion however, two key dimensions of fluctuation need to be highlighted: intensity and consciousness. In discussing “high-intensity affective reactions”, Hall and Ross point to emotion episodes which can “flood our consciousness with feeling” and “temporarily hijack our thoughts, desires, attention, and energies” (2015:3). Yet low intensity emotions are still important because they may “nudge our choices and steer attention as biases we do not consciously register” (Hall & Ross, 2015:7). These arguments build longstanding claims that emotions exert powerful influences over our attention, sometimes overtly capturing it, and at others subtly impinging upon it (Prinz, 2004:8).\footnote{Indeed, in a rational choice framework}

Ultimately, a sensitivity to process is essential for understanding emotions because it’s what makes them historical as opposed to invariant, biological impulses. Without this sensitivity to historical process we would be unable to appreciate how emotions come to be managed (Hochschild, 1983), vary in intensity (Collins, 2004), become institutionalized (Crawford, 2014), are circulated (Ross, 2014), transformed (Linklater, 2014), or, in the idiom of this particular project, how emotions come to be politically contentious.

2.2 – Embodied Judgements as Dispositions

Emotions in IR have traditionally been understood as superfluous or epiphenomenal to political behavior (Mercer, 2006). As irrational residues, emotions are seen as shaping or influencing little. Yet this fits poorly with our practical experience of emotions as powerful engines for social and political action. Indeed for proponents of IR’s emotion turn, the very reason we should take emotions in world politics seriously is because they appear to have powerful and wide ranging effects on social and political order. Here Hutchison and Bleiker are worth quoting at length:
“[Emotions] frame what is and is not possible in politics. They reveal and conceal, enable and disable. They do so in ways that are inaudible and seemingly apolitical, which is precisely how they become political in the most profound and enduring manner: links between emotions and power shape the contours and content of world politics all while erasing the traces of doing so.” (2014:508)

In the same discussion however, they note that emotions research is only beginning to engage with questions of power. In my view one of the most productive ways of grasping the power of emotions is their capacity to form dispositions — unreflective affinities in viewing the world and acting towards it in certain ways. In this view the ‘judgement’ of embodied judgements is always forward looking, readying us to act from one interaction to the next.

Multiple arguments converge on this idea. For appraisal theorists in psychology these take the form “action tendencies”, behaviors and inclinations that are coupled to emotional evaluations of situations (Moors, 2014). In IR, emotional dispositional are typically interpreted through the prism of state-actorhood. Employing a slightly different vocabulary, Eznack (2013) discusses “affective dispositions” shaping states’ reactions to international crises. Long term in nature, these dispositions represent the positive or negative feelings and sentiments an actor holds towards others (2013:556).

For example, the positive affective disposition held by the United States towards Britain serves to explain why the United States had a far more muted and restrained reaction to the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956, especially when compared to the United States’ hostile reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1981. For Hall and Ross affective dispositions reflect “latent propensities for certain stimuli to trigger particular affective responses... For example, one can have the disposition to feel extreme dislike, even hatred toward something, as Churchill reportedly did toward communism” (2015:8). In the context of 9/11, affective dispositions in the form of fear and anger after the attack are what accounts for the outpouring of public and elite support for the Global War on Terror (Hall & Ross, 2015:20-21).

Dispositions are not normally part of IR’s repertoire of ways of thinking about power. They are a poor fit for the material resources we associate with hard power, such as tanks. But neither do dispositions fit with so-called ‘soft power’. It would seem strangely patronizing to suggest a group disposed towards fearing terrorism in the wake of a traumatic attack is experiencing a ‘soft’ form of power.20 Instead of stretching these conventional categories beyond recognition, we may better served to follow Guzzini’s (2016) lead and think about dispositional power as a form of social-causal mechanism.

Drawing on work by Peter Morriss, Guzzini “defines power neither as a resource or vehicle, nor as an event or its exercise (as behaviouralists would do), but as a capacity/ability to effect an action” (2016:11). Dispositions in this sense maintain “the possibility of effecting outputs”, but this is distinctly different from the unidirectional relationship of ‘if A, then B’ assumed by efficient causality. The difference resides in the fact that “Dispositions can stay latent when not mobilized”, much like how “The ability to read can exist even if one is not actively doing it” (Guzzini, 2016:11).

When we uncouple dispositional power from efficient causality we open up a range of new opportunities for analyzing power relations. A disposition could be latent but not activated. A disposition thought to be dormant (or extinct) could be revitalized through some new mobilizing practice. Two (or more) dispositions could come into contention, or a creative bricolage of behavior. A disposition, once potent and active, could fade away and be discarded. Alternatively, the same political outcome could be the produced by different causal pathways, each generated through different dispositional powers. In sum, dispositions can be thought of as causal mechanisms in that they effect

20 On the questionable ‘softness’ of soft power see Bially Mattern (2005b). On understanding soft power as a form of “affective investment” see T. Solomon (2014).
outcomes — they generate change. Yet we need to view these causal mechanisms through a lens sensitive to the “openness” and “indeterminacy” through which dispositions operate (Guzzini, 2016:14). 21 Doing this, in Guzzini’s view, requires the close appreciation of the social relations and context which is typical of constructivist work.

To be clear, Guzzini is not talking about emotions. But it takes little effort to see how his framework for power analysis applies. A savvy diplomat may look to avoid activating latent anger over historical grievances by treading carefully — diplomatically — around a sensitive subject. Nationalist sentiments long thought pacified by EU integration may be reignited by a global economic downturn. A tense political impasse over whether a military intervention should proceed may follow from two countervailing dispositions: a humanitarian desire to prevent atrocities, and an anxiety over being drawn into an intractable conflict. 22 In sum, by coupling embodied judgements to a form of dispositional power analysis we can offer a clearer picture of how emotions are powerful forces in shaping world politics.

2.3 – Embodied Judgements as Social Relations

Saying embodied judgments are social constructed appears banal. Even those in political science who stress the primacy of the physical experience of emotion agree it has “historical and cultural influences” (McDermott, 2014:558). 23 But what exactly does the word ‘social’ mean in this context? If we appended a silent prefix of ‘social’ to ‘embodied judgment’, what exactly would this achieve?

Crawford (2000:129) points to a number of important effects. 24 One effect is to emphasize high levels of cross-cultural and historical variation in emotion a way that points to a social critique over claims of biological determinism. In this context the word is a rejoinder, which, while appearing anachronistic to other fields, is still necessary in IR because the discipline remains encumbered by deterministic ideas about ‘human nature’ (Bell, 2015). Another effect is to point to the cultural origins of emotions, a move which emphasizes their social learning through interactions with one’s community. This usage is evident in most constructivist work, and is concerned with elaborating different pathways for diffusing and sharing of emotion, including collective identity (Mercer, 2014; Sasley, 2011), institutions (Crawford, 2014), popular culture (Ross, 2014), public representations (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008; Hutchison, 2016), and collective memory (Fattah & Fierke, 2009). A third effect is to point the social functions of emotions, such as in the functional role empathy plays in promoting trust, or in how shame can be a form of social sanction (Steele, 2007a). We can also see this in Durkheim-inspired accounts of “feeling rules” in security communities (Koschut, 2014) and functional-type arguments over the role of rituals in transnational trauma (Hall & Ross, 2015:19). My earlier claim that emotions reduce uncertainty is clearly a functional argument. The concept of embodied judgements is ‘social’ in all three

21 Following John Elster, Guzzini “defines social mechanisms as ‘frequently occurring and easily recognisable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences’” (Guzzini, 2016:12-13).

22 It’s worth noting that none of these examples requires ceding the idea of ‘cause’ or ‘causal mechanism’ to behavioural forms of power analysis. Indeed, Guzzini’s work is only one piece of a growing chorus of voices suggesting that constructivists’ dismissal of causal theorizing in favour of constitutive arguments may have obscured more than it clarified (Jackson, 2011; Kurki, 2008). Exploring these debates, including the role of constitutive theorizing in IR’s emotion turn, is beyond the scope of the discussion here.

23 Some scholars even look to reject reductionists arguments of any kind (social, biological, or cognitive), instead opting for ‘emergent’ conceptions of emotion which view it as a phenomena irreducible to its constituent parts (Bially Mattern, 2011; Mercer, 2014).

24 Crawford is drawing these arguments from the work of Claire Armon-Jones.
senses: as a critique of biological determinism, as a pathway for learning, and as having a functional purpose in social encounters.

But there is a fourth sense in which Crawford identifies emotions as social: as “context-sensitive shared expectations prescribed by social groups for specific social situations” (2000:129). Fierke points to similar dynamic in noting that emotions “do not stand alone but are attached to further entailments by which various objects and acts have meaning” (2013:92). The common thread here is that emotions are embedded in social context in ways that structure our relations to different events and actors. This argument isn’t about a critique, or learning, or functionalism; it’s about signaling a distinctive ontology, the type of ‘stuff’ we think comprises emotion. Understanding what a social relational ontology means, and how it differs from an individualist ontology, is important because they each offer fundamentally different forms of analysis.

This matter because most scholars in IR adopt an individualist ontology, and this carries over into work on emotions (cf. Fierke, 2013:55). As Mercer notes, “Because emotion happens in biological bodies, not in the space between them, it is hard to imagine emotion existing at anything other than the individual level of analysis” (Mercer, 2014:516). To be fair to Mercer he’s framing this a conceptual challenge that needs to be overcome by theorizing the links between identity and emotion. But his framing captures a popular view: there is an interiority to our emotions, they exist inside our bodies. Wong’s (2015) discussion of emotional diplomacy offers a case in point. While acknowledging that emotions are subject to culturally influenced “display rules”, Wong argues that the “underlying appraisal ‘themes’ [of emotions] are innate and universal” (2015:147). Bracketing problems with Wong’s claims of emotional universality,\(^\text{25}\) his position captures a common ‘minimalist’ commitment to the social construction of emotion. Yes, there may be a cultural influence in expressive display rules, but emotion is ultimately made up of the genetic heritage we carry inside our individual bodies.

By contrast a social-relational view doesn’t see emotions as inside our bodies, but as existing between our bodies and the world. As psychologist Magda Arnold notes, “We are afraid of something, we rejoice over something, we love someone, we are angry at something or someone. Emotion seems to have an object just as sense perception does” (quoted in Reisenzein, 2006:928). Likewise, Lazarus argues “emotions are always about person-environment relationships” (1991b:819). Sociologists since Durkheim have stressed this point the most, often arguing religious rituals are high on emotional energy precisely because they occur in the context of a close encounter to “sacred” objects and individuals (Collins, 2004:60-61). If viewed from the perspective of isolated bodies, religious emotions like reverence or devotion would suddenly become inexplicable.

To sharpen the argument further it’s helpful to draw a parable to another form of relational analysis in IR. In the 1990s one of the most significant developments in studying power was a call for a relational analysis (Baldwin, 2012; Guzzini, 1993, 2016). The central argument was that power “cannot be assessed by sole reference to the power holder” (Guzzini, 1993:452). We may think of an actor with a nuclear weapon as powerful, but this kind of resource offers little purchase when negotiating a free trade agreement, deliberating the mandate of UNESCO, or breaking up domestic protests. Abstracting power from its contextual relations seemed to skew its analysis. It led to thinking the same form of power (e.g. coercive force) carried across contexts, while at the same time ignoring contexts where power manifested differently.

When scholars try and explain emotions without a sensitivity to local context we see the same error. Anger over the foreign policy of an ally is not the same thing as anger over the foreign policy of an enemy (Eznack, 2013), as the former is the anger over betrayal and the latter an anger of righteous indignation. Context matters. And it matters because social relations are social structures; shared

\(^{25}\) It’s highly questionable whether the consensus Wong posits in psychology over basic emotions really exists. See Lindquist (2013) as well as Gendron and Feldman Barrett (2009) for an alternate view.
dispositions give rise to “common expectations” (Ross, 2014:22) over how to act in specific emotional contexts. Just as we don’t expect the parishioner to swear in the sacred space of the church, we don’t expect the defection of a longstanding and amicable ally (Koschut, 2014). As social structure, emotions enable and constrain the possibility of political action thereby setting the boundaries for effective (and acceptable) forms of political mobilization.

To say then that embodied judgements represent a ‘social’ theory of emotion has a number of effects. It signals a still important critique of biological determinism. It’s a reminder that communities represent crucial sites for learning emotional meanings and expression. It’s an acknowledgement that emotions have political effect by performing certain functions. And above all, its recognition that emotions are embedded in the relations between our bodies and the world.

3.0 – Entrainment: Explaining the Origins of Embodied Judgements

While embodied judgment offers a productive way to conceptualize emotion, it stops short of explaining its origins. The question of where emotions come from, how they are formed, and how this process is politically contentious needs to be addressed in its own right. Some sociologists look to achieve this through a more encompassing model of socialization, one which includes social exposure to emotion-inducing stimulus (e.g. Von Scheve, 2012; Von Scheve & Von Luede, 2005). In IR however, the term socialization has accrued a much narrower meaning focused on cognitively cold norms and identities. To signal a different view of socialization, I use the term entainment to refer to the processes where embodied judgments are formed and shared. In particular, I build on the model of entrainment developed by Ross (2014) and Collins (2004).

For Collins entrainment occurs when bodies meet, attention is shared, boundaries to outsiders are established, and commons moods and emotional experiences are brought into focus. When these ritual ingredients are embedded in shared actions — cheering at a hockey game, singing the national anthem, a moment of silence for the departed — collective effervescence is achieved, and the ritual produces group solidarity, emotional energy, valued symbols, and a sense of morality (Collins, 2004:47-49). Collins describes this as “heightened intersubjectivity” (Collins, 2004:35). We go from simply sharing similar ideas to aligning how we feel about those ideas.

Ross (2014) represents the first attempt to bring Collins’s ideas on entrainment into IR. Offering a streamlined view, Ross frames the process of “rhythmic entrainment” as an aligning of the emotional orientations among a group:

“As coparticipants become focused on a common object, they develop common expectations, conscious or unconscious, of which emotions others are likely express. In an attempt—again, conscious or not—to ‘coordinate’ with those expectations individuals enact similar responses within themselves.” (2014:22)

Thus, “Diplomatic meetings, legal trials, religious rituals, commemorative events, protests, rallies, and political speeches—all are social interactions with the potential to expose participants to emotion-inducing stories, symbols and practices” (2014:21).

As much as these accounts converge there are also significant differences. First, Collins places a premium on bodily co-presence. Emotionally intense rituals like weddings and funerals, he argues, would not be the same without physical intimacy of co-presence (Collins, 2004:54-55). Ross relaxes this requirement, arguing “communications technologies distribute social interactions to spatially dispersed audiences” (2014:16). Global audiences to recurring clips of the 9/11 attacks may not have been at Ground Zero, but may still have interacted with the footage emotionally.

26 Socialization has also accrued a specific meaning Waltzian realism (1979:74-77).
27 See Mutlu’s (2013) discussion of the now infamous images of the ‘Falling Man’.
Second, because Collins sees interaction rituals as having so many requirements — co-presence, barriers to outsiders, focused attention — they often are prone to failure. In some cases failed rituals, such as a political speech which falls flat, may even drain emotional energy (Collins, 2004:52-53). Ross however, backs away from this competency-centric model. Because “actors emulate a socially circulating emotion without consciously deciding to do so” (Ross, 2014:24), we may be circulating and receiving emotions far before any intentional action. We may offend without trying, console without thinking, or foment fear without knowing. Taking the potential for emotions to be rapidly transmitted seriously means we need to think about how affect can be socially “contagious” (Ross, 2014:27-29).

I agree with Ross on relaxing the requirements for bodily co-presence. Firsthand witnesses of violent conflict will often take extraordinary risks to capture events on social media because they know venues like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are potent conduits for circulating emotions. But on the issue of ritual competency and emotional contagion, I depart from both Collins and Ross. What’s missing from these accounts is how entrainment can be politically contentious.

For Collins the locus of failure in interaction rituals is internal: it’s a product of ritual complexity and incompetence. Rituals may be sites of conflict, but these are largely about internal power jostling over leadership (Collins, 2004:121-124). While these internal dynamics are important, I view these kinds of interactions as operating in a broader social field where outside challengers can work to disrupt and subvert rituals. The wearing of the red poppies, for example, is part of a thick repertoire of rituals surrounding Remembrance Day ceremonies in Commonwealth countries. The poppy symbolizes remembrance of a country’s war dead and works to inculcate feelings of pride in national military institutions. Yet this ritual is contested by those who wear white poppies, a symbol rooted a history of pacifism. Whether by circulating anxieties over military nationalism or by working to build confidence in a peaceful dispute resolution, this ritual looks to induce a different range of affects. In other words, these are two different processes of entrainment which are in contention over how groups should feel when remembering a country’s war dead.

Likewise, there is much agree with in Ross’ model of emotional contagion. I agree there can be periods of rapid and intense emotional sharing — what he would later call “affective waves” (Hall & Ross, 2015:13) — which have the potential to produce major transformations in political order. But there are important limits to this argument. In certain cases, the ‘affective waves’ Ross describes may be incapable in overturning emotions entrained by years, or even decades, of social interaction. Consider the the image of Aylan Kurdi’s dead body in 2015, the Syrian toddler who drowned while his family was attempting to escape to Europe. The image became a powerful focal point for anger over international intransigence in aiding Syrian refugees. In some countries, like Canada, it had a major impact and led to refugee policy becoming a surprise feature of a national election. But for other countries migration controls tightened even further, including a temporarily closure of the borders of Croatia, Macedonia, and Slovenia in 2016. Whether the status quo can resist an affective wave is an empirical question.

Equally problematic is that Ross’ model largely focuses on a single pattern of contagion at a time. But what about when multiple patterns of contagion come into conflict? The aftermath of Brexit, for example, saw international surging of jubilation and confidence for nationalist movements, while at the same time witnessing anger and despair across communities of integrationists. Emotional contagion is certainly a crucial feature of international politics, but it may not be harmonious.

Entrainment then, is a contentious process. Like Ross and other Neojameians, I understand popular discourses as saturated with diverse admixtures of emotional experience. But unlike these thinkers I do not believe this diversity can be traced solely to the body’s capacity for a wide range of affective experience. It’s a function of politics. Mixed emotions signal competing processes of entrainment, which in turn signal different groups, interests, and identities, all of which are embedded in different political projects and visions of order. To help bring this argument into sharper focus it’s
useful to outline some of the empirical domains where entrainment takes place. I point to three mutually reinforcing arenas: popular culture, memory and trauma, and public rituals. This list is by no means exhaustive. Instead, its purpose is to show how processes of entrainment are dispersed and thus resistant to being captured by any one single group in society.

3.1 – Popular Culture

Connecting popular culture to emotional entrainment extends a thread in IR research which has long seen television, film, the internet and other mass mediums as exercising a potent influence on political behavior. As Nexon and Neuman argue, representations and practices of popular culture “are not merely passive mirrors; they also play a crucial role in constituting the social and political world” (Nexon & Neuman, 2006:6). While valuable as ‘data’ representing prevailing ideas and attitudes, popular culture also helps constitute the world because it furnishes actors with a ready-made reservoir of metaphors and analogies for making sense of events (Holland, 2009). Narrowing one’s analysis of politics to formal bodies such as parliaments and government departments is bound to gloss over the power relations implicated in popular culture (Grayson, Davies, & Philpott, 2009).

While connections drawn between popular culture and emotion are rare in IR, they are by no means absent. Ross (2014) has traced how radio broadcasts were integral to inciting the Rwandan genocide, while Zalewski (2015) has used the fictional drama Homeland to explore the relationship between gendered emotions and security. Like these authors, my reading stresses the saturating effects of popular culture. By virtue of its sheer volume it exposes broad communities to emotion inducing symbols, tropes, stereotypes, characters, metaphors, and narratives which circulate among both elites and broader publics. These emotional intensities, and the fictional objects they become attached to, come to weigh upon public discourse in the form of emotional dispositions. This is akin to what cultural theorist Raymond Williams has referred to as literature’s capacity to reflect the “structure of feeling” in a society at a given time (Bourne Taylor, 1996). The term to refers to how generational conventions, sensibilities, and feelings become crystallized in the form of particular character tropes and stories. Standard plot devices and clichés become exemplars of prevailing emotions of a particular group and historical period.

Where my approach differs from previous work is in emphasizing popular culture is as an arena for contentious politics of emotion. Consider the case of torture. In the wake of the horrific images of from Abu Ghraib in Iraq, the American occupation faced waves of international anger and disgust. Despite this opposition some actors looked to rehabilitate torture by using cultural artefacts to induce a different set of emotional attachments. United States Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia mounted a vigorous defense of torture by invoking the fictional character of Jack Bauer from the television drama 24. Challenging hardening attitudes towards torture, Scalia stressed that in the television show “Jack Bauer saved Los Angeles... He saved hundreds of thousands of lives... Are you going to convict Jack Bauer?” (quoted in Freeze, 2007). The fact that the show is fictional is neither here nor there. What matters is that the show is appropriated as a resource in a broader struggle over how audiences should ‘feel’ over the use of torture in national security policy.

3.2 – Social Memory and Trauma

There is an intimate connection between emotion, memory, and trauma. As Daniel Bar-Tal argues, memories “are never carbon copies of the information provided by learning” (2001:603); they are the effects of social practice (e.g. witnessing, memorializing, celebrating, commemorating, etc.). Far from being a neutral record of history then, memory becomes “what keeps the past—or at least a highly selective image of it—in the present” (Bell, 2006:2). This selectivity is overtly political. How traumatic
events like war are memorialized or forgotten determines whether these events are remembered as moments of “national glory”, “genocide”, or any other range of alternatives (Edkins, 2003:16-17).

From this perspective social memory and trauma appear as deep reservoirs of emotion. Daniel Bar-Tal points to how the Jewish memory of centuries of persecution, culminating in the Holocaust, makes Arab threats feel acutely existential (2001:611-612). In a similar argument, Fattah and Fierke (2009) explore how Islamic terror groups mobilize collective memories of Arab humiliation at the hands of the West which is envisioned as stretching back centuries. Far from offering unambiguous emotional attachments however, memory and trauma are consistently objects of contention. Mälksoo’s (2009) discussion of the memory politics in Europe is a poignant example. While Western European countries remember the end of the Second World War as a triumph over Nazism and the beginning of the European project, for Eastern countries like Poland and the Baltics it denotes the beginning of a period of suffering under communist regimes. Because memory and trauma are potent sources of emotional entrainment their control can be hotly contested, leaving actors to conclude that “memory must be defended” (Mälksoo, 2015).

This kind of contention is not always overt. It may occur behind the closed doors of political institutions. Thus, when Canadian military officials were charged with commemorating the country’s mission in Afghanistan they expressed serious concerns over holding the ceremony in close proximity to July 1st, the day traditionally reserved for celebrating Canadian confederation. In their eyes the merging of the events would have led to an unacceptable “militarization” of Canada day (Blanchfield, 2014). In other cases, contention takes the form of dispersed practices outside formal institutions, such as the vandalism of monuments. In this case Auchter (2013) points to how monuments intended to memorialize migrants who died crossing the U.S.-Mexico border are recurrently vandalized by anti-migrant vigilantes.

3.3 – Public Rituals

For many in the West, a “ritual is an archaic practice that is at odds with modernity, having more to do with other times and places” (Fierke, 2013:40).28 This dismissal is a mistake. Highly formalized, invariant, and traditional forms of practice — what I term rituals — are a conspicuous feature of everyday life and shape how we communicate, interact, and feel about the world. While Collins’ discussion of rituals is confined to domestic contexts these practices extend to international arenas. From the rituals of statecraft such as summits and state dinners, to expressions of condolences for victims of terrorist attacks, to the playing of national anthems in international sports, rituals abound in world politics.

Like Fierke (2013:39-44), I see rituals as deeply traditional — as history sets the precedent for the ritual form — as well as being focused on material, bodily performances.29 Rituals are often more than just words; they can incorporate a range of material artefacts from the laying of wreaths, to the pinning of medals, to the lowering (or raising) of flags, and beyond. Following Oren and Solomon (2015), I see rituals as distinguished from other social practices by their repetition, because iteration is a powerful force in shaping meaning and feeling. In their work Oren and Solomon point to the role ritual repetition in the securitization of Iraq. Far from referring to an objective assessment of Iraq’s arsenal, the Bush administration’s claims over WMDs became real — or at least felt this way — through the

28 For notable exceptions in IR see Guzzini (1993) and Reus-Smit (1999).
29 Following Irving Goffman, Fierke sees the body as conducting a “theatrical performance” (2013:44). This means rituals can be performed poorly, as when a diplomat fumbles greeting a dignitary by forgetting their name or their country.
repetitive, ritualistic chanting of ‘WMDs’, a ritual in which audiences and even critics were enjoined to participate. Through a combination of repetition and a range of expressive forms (facial expressions, prosody of voice, bodily movements, music, images, sacred artefacts, etc.) rituals constitute a reliable pathway for emotional entrainment. When analysts bemoan political speeches that endlessly repeat buzzwords and slogans, while bypassing policy details, they end up missing the forest for the trees. These speeches are rituals and their effect is emotional entrainment. But even when analysts do recognize the significance of rituals as conduits of emotion, such as the candle light vigils that spontaneously emerge after terror attacks (Hall & Ross, 2015:19), they are often examined in isolation. The presence of different rituals, counter-rituals, and contested rituals is obscured. The ritual of standing for the Star Spangled Banner in American sports culture may be a potent pathway for creating national solidarity, but it’s a ritual that’s open to being contested by those who refuse to stand, take a knee, or raise their first in defiance (Brennan, 2016).

These alternative forms of ritual practice are significant precisely because they represent different sources of meaning and feeling for situations. Consider one journalist’s reporting of the aftermath of the Bastille Day terror attacks in France. Not only was the scene marked by memorials for the victims, it also included an anti-memorial for the site where the attacker was killed:

“They cast stones. They spit. They called him unprintable names. They tossed garbage — plastic bottles, debris from McDonald’s meals, cigarette butts. Some broke down crying. One well-dressed Middle-aged woman struggled to light a paper towel on fire, then tossed it on the slowly growing pile of debris, igniting an acrid pyre just 10 yards from where flowers and teddy bears piled in tribute to the victims.” (Birnbaum, 2016)

These rituals may be more complementary than conflictual. In other cases, such as the clashing remembrance poppies discussed above, the conflict will be overt. The broader point here is that public rituals, much like popular culture and memory and trauma, are both highly fertile domains for emotional entrainment and acute sites of political contestation. They shape the emotional topography of a community and the political opportunities and constraints that follow.

4.0 Embodied Judgement and the Limits of Securitization

In stressing the contentious character of entrainment and embodied judgments this argument places front and center the volatile relationship between emotion and political action. Always vulnerable to flux, there is nothing to ensure the prevailing feelings of one period carry to the next, nor is there reason to believe political opponents won’t conscript equally potent forms of emotion to mobilize alternative projects. Both of these observations cut against the fear-as-mobilization thesis and its reading of fear as a ready and reliable resource — an unproblematic strategy called into force by elites without contest.

This section completes the final arc of the chapter by steering the preceding discussion of the contentious politics of emotion into a critique and reformulation of securitization theory. This begins with a revised account of the audience to securitizing moves. Drawing on the discussion of uncertainty above, I focus on how audiences are bombarded by a copious number of security claims leading to a fundamental challenge over which interpretations to accept and which to reject. To overcome this challenge audiences are forced to rely on embodied judgments — emotions — to sort through the sound and noise of security discourse. By swiftly serving to legitimize some threats and security practices, while denying the legitimacy of others, the cumulative effects of emotions are to fasten in

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30 Oren and Solomon explicitly note that emotion is a key feature of rituals but bracket this issue on account of space constraints (2015:14 fn 79)
31 On the relationship between the prosody of speech and emotion see Ross (2014:110-112)
place the boundaries of the audience’s security imaginary. Constrained by what audiences feel is, and is not, threatening, securitizing actors are limited by the boundaries of the local security imaginary.

4.1 Audiences, Uncertainty, and Emotion

Securitization theory was designed to explain how issues become ‘security’ issues and what are the effects of this development. While depoliticized issues garner little public attention, and politicized issues constitute the bulk of day-to-day public deliberation, securitized issues represent a special intensification of politics. This intensification comes from framing a referent object as existentially threatened by some actor (or object) in a way that demands priority of action and mobilizes a response (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998:25). By presenting something as a security issue, actors reshape the political agenda because if we don’t act now it will be “too late” in the future (Buzan et al., 1998:26). This urgency is created through speech acts, practices which deploy the constitutive power of language to create new social realities in the same way “naming a ship” or placing a bet transforms social relations (Buzan et al., 1998:32, 26). At the center of these speech acts are referent objects, those “things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival”, in the eyes of a given community (Buzan et al., 1998:36). The emphasis on community here signals an intersubjective quality; security is something that neither exists objectively in nature nor subjectively in independent minds, but is negotiated and agreed upon in a social collective. Thus, for security claims to be successful they need to be accepted by an audience.32

And yet a failure to specify the role of the audience is now a recurring criticism of this approach. Balzaqç remarks that “although the [Copenhagen School] appeals to an audience, its framework ignores that audience” (2005:177); Stritzel argues that “[securitization theorists] have not yet conceptualized the exact relationship between the actor and the audience very clearly” (Stritzel, 2007:362); and McDonald laments that “the ‘audience’ are so undertheorized as to ultimately remain outside the framework itself” (2008:564). And while the theory’s so-called facilitating conditions are supposed to point analysts towards those features which make a securitizing move successful, none of these conditions directly relates to the audience.33 This has left securitization theory frustratingly oblique. It positions the audience as the ultimate “judge of the act” (Buzan et al., 1998:41), but with no clear sense over what this judgement looks like.

My hunch is that the root this incoherence can be traced to how securitization theory never recognized the central challenge faced by audiences: uncertainty. Like so much of constructivist IR, securitization theory has eschewed the question of how groups grapple with uncertainty. Audiences of security discourse — whether they are domestic constituencies, transnational movements, allied states, ethnic groups, or otherwise — are bombarded by a range of different security claims on daily basis. From the threat of climate change, to a revanchist Russia, to cyber-attacks and beyond, security discourse is suffused with claims of threats demanding immediate action. It is the very urgency of these claims which frustrate calls for a program of communicative action centered around sustained and deliberative reflection (e.g. Williams, 2003). The result places a double on us on audiences: not only do

32 Although in practice there may be multiple audiences. See Salter (2008).
33 The facilitating conditions refer to the use of a clear grammar of security, having an authoritative speaker, and the intrinsic features of a threat which facilitate its securitization. The first refers to whether speakers outline clear “plot that includes existential threat, point of no return, and a possible way out” (Buzan et al., 1998:33). The second refers to the social position of the speaker in relation to the audience (i.e. are they a trusted source of information). The third refers to intrinsic features of threat the properties of threat which facilitate its recognition as a threat (i.e. is the threat diffuse and ambiguous like global warming, or is it centralized and more self-apparent like tanks crossing a border?).
they need to sort through a wide range of security claims, but they must do so quickly. How then, can we think about audiences sorting through the blooming, buzzing confusion of security discourse?34

Overcoming this challenge means relying on embodied judgments. Here emotions serve to narrow the field of plausible interpretations in three crucial ways. First, at a general level, emotions drastically reduce uncertainty by focusing attention on only those events and objects which we hold to be significant. Embodied judgements don’t become attached to the marginal and mundane, they become embedded in values, identities, and interests that we take as central to our existence. An event may still be objectively possible, but we ignore or dismiss it because it fails to hold emotional significance for us.35 This dynamic is most visible in securitizing moves which look to elevate what are regarded as mundane threats, such as Senator’s Marco Rubio’s claim that maintaining the United States’ sugar subsidy is a matter of national security (Mider, 2016). Beyond a small corporate constituency, the protection of the domestic sugar firms from competition lacks any emotional resonance with the broader American public. Not only do these types of security claims often fall of deaf ears, they can even weaken a speaker’s position by making them appear ‘out of touch’ or ‘unserious’ in the eyes of the audience.

In other instances, embodied judgements may expedite the acceptance of securitizing moves. A population exposed to years of entraining processes working to induce fears over migrants will already be disposed to accept claims that migrants are threatening. This scenario is the closest to the fear-as-mobilization thesis because it posits embodied judgments facilitate uncritical, even unconscious, acceptance of security claims. But there is one crucial difference. By linking anxieties over migrants to processes of entrainment this example stresses how those anxieties pre-date the securitizing move. These judgements may activated, reinforced, and even further cultivated by security talk, but such talk does not create a fear of migrants out of whole cloth. The preexisting distribution of embodied judgements — the emotional context — shapes the audience’s receptivity towards a security claim. In some cases these judgements will dispose audiences an enthusiastic acceptance of security claims, effectively leading to situations where security speech becomes akin to ‘preaching to the choir’.36

Finally, the reverse can also be true. Some emotions towards a group can constrain and frustrate a threat assessment. In 2009 the United States’ Department of Homeland Security released a report on the threat of right wing terrorism. It suggested that, through a combination of economic downturn and the election of America’s first black president, right wing groups would become more active and work to recruit disaffected veterans who had the skills to conduct attacks (Department of Homeland Security, 2009). The report provoked An immediate and harsh backlash. Then House Minority Leader John Boehner argued that “characterize[ing] men and women returning home after defending our country as potential terrorists is offensive and unacceptable” (CBS News, 2009). Homeland Security quickly withdrew the report and Secretary Napolitano issued a public apology to veterans (CNN, 2009). The team of analysts responsible for the report was disbanded, and their database on non-Islamic extremism was closed (Ackerman, 2012). As a securitizing move, the report certainly elicited an emotional reaction from the audience, but one that was vehemently hostile to its to its characterization.

The uncertainty-reducing function of emotions then, cuts both ways. Everyday fears of migrants make audiences confident that migration is a national security issue. But different affects — admixtures

34 Buzan and Wæver’s answer is that political actors organize this confusion with macro-securitizing moves which “incorporate, align and rank the more parochial securitisations beneath it” (2009:253). Here Buzan and Wæver replicate Wendt’s hierarchical arguments about identity (see section 1.0). In doing so they are confronted with the same problem: what hold this hierarchy of security threats together?
35 On object and event relevance see appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991b; Moors et al., 2013)
36 On the emphatic acceptance of security claims see Van Rythoven (2015:470)
of pride, respect, affection — make audiences confident in rejecting the claim that veterans were a threat to national security. Audiences interpret security claims through the prism of embodied judgements. Competent “[s]ecuritizing moves then do not succeed by invoking vague affective attachments, but by eliciting culturally specific fears whose activation hinges on deploying recognizable memories, identities, images, metaphors, and other tropes to construct a plausible, yet anxiety inducing, future” (Van Rythoven, 2015:466). Far from facilitating securitization, emotion is just as likely to frustrate it.

Cumulatively, these examples point to a boundary producing function of emotions. By offering certainty in determining what is and is not a threat, embodied judgements produce a bounded domain, a limited space of plausible security interpretations for a community. Building on earlier constructivist work, we can refer to this space as constituting the audience’s security imaginary.

4.2 – The Emotional Boundaries of the Security Imaginary

Traditionally, the term security imaginary refers to “structure of well-established meanings and social relations out of which representations of the world or international relations are created” (Weldes, 1999:10). This reservoir of well-established interpretations is “shared by large groups of people, if not society as a whole” and “creates a shared sense of legitimacy” for some security discourses, while denying the legitimacy of others (Pretorius, 2008:106). While sympathetic to this argument, I offer one crucial amendment. I view the boundaries of the security imaginary as held in place by embodied judgements. Collective fears, anxieties, and suspicions work to fasten objects and events within the security imaginary. Different emotional relationships – such as collective joy, pride, or even empathy – signal a different relationship to an object which places it outside the imaginary. Here embodied judgments serve as beacons of social navigation; some guiding us to accept a security interpretation, others signaling us when we are way off course.

As a corollary of emotion’s capacity to manage uncertainty, this boundary drawing work can leave security imaginaries with a rigidity making them relatively stable over time. As tropes in popular culture become clichés, ways of remembering trauma become institutionalized, and public rituals congeal, the emotions holding a security imaginary in place are stabilized and become, to a certain degree, contingently predictable.

This stability is significant because it cuts against the grain of poststructuralist readings of securitization. By emphasizing the performative power of language, these approaches downplay the structural constraints of context and assume “‘there is nothing outside the text’ and that meaning can never be fixed” (Stritzel, 2007:361). This narrowly reduces securitizing moves to the power of language, a move which treats “audiences as passive vessels waiting for emotions to be authoritatively spoken into them... [And yet there is always the] potential for audiences to come to the interaction with embodied feelings that may pre-emptively frustrate an emergent threat image” (Van Rythoven, 2015:463). Audiences are never passive bystanders. Emotions prepare us to react — and even potentially contest — a security claim.

In one final example we can illustrate these boundary effects by turning to the 2016 American presidential election. While the securitization of religious minorities is a historical feature of presidential contests, Republican candidate Donald Trump’s comments on Muslims offer a particularly acute example. Repeatedly characterizing Muslims as dangerous, Trump called for radical security measures including a total ban on Muslim migration and a national tracking database. And while Trump’s comments may have activated, reinforced, and even further cultivated currents of Islamophobia they

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37 For further discussion of security imaginaries see Guzini (2016), Muppidi (1999), and Nossal (2011).
38 Consider the perceived threat of JFK’s Catholicism.
did not create these feelings out of thin air. This form of embodied judgment is the result of entrainment processes, broadly dispersed across society and rooted in popular culture, memory and trauma, and public rituals. For audiences with bodies already aligned to this mode of judgment there was no doubt over the genuineness of this threat.

But this represents only one potential form of emotional relationship towards Muslims in America. Other entraining processes have worked to inculcate pride, respect, and even veneration for Muslim Americans and their contributions to society. Nowhere was this dynamic on display in greater clarity than in the speech by the Khan family at the Democratic National Convention. In telling the story of the death of their son US Army Captain Humayan Khan, the Khan family stressed that Muslims have a history of undertaking the ultimate sacrifice to protect America. The structure of this story is instantly recognizable as it taps into a well-established set of “rhetorical conventions” of seeing military service, and the sacrifices it often entails, as the epitome of American civic virtue (Krebs, 2009). From reciting the pledge of allegiance, to patriotic parades, to early flight boarding for service members, to magnets and bumper stickers calling to ‘Support Our Troops’, the United States is suffused with public rituals, tropes in popular culture, and practices of memorialization which collectively instill veneration for citizen-soldiers. Indeed, despite a broad-based decline in trust for American public institutions, the military continues to receive the highest level of trust in national polls (Gallup, 2016). By positioning Muslims, and other minorities, in the citizen-soldier tradition the effect of the Khan’s speech was to marshal powerful emotions which vigorously contested a blanket securitization of Muslims. This contestation is visually represented in Figure 1.

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39 The speech also stressed that different religions, genders, and ethnicities have made similar sacrifices.
This diagram illustrates the politics of emotional contention in securitization. The boundaries of the American security imaginary are not, as some poststructural readings suggest, spoken into existence. They are a site of struggle. While continuous attempts to demonize Muslim communities as existentially threatening push this group into the center of the security imaginary, countervailing affirmations of the sacrifice and service of this group vigorously resist such interpretations. Those who are exemplars of this practice cannot be a threat to the republic because they embody its highest virtues, and to suggest otherwise is a betrayal of these values.

The reason for qualifying ‘Processes of Entrainment’ as ‘Dispersed’ is because these patterns of embodied judgment fail to map discretely to any one group. While it’s certainty true that these embodied judgments will be more acute amongst particular constituencies — fear of Muslims among Trump supporters for example — analytically segregating audiences in this way would be a mistake. Affects and emotions don’t often map 1:1 on to a particular group identities, instead they tend to diffuse and circulate. We see this when constituencies who nominally support Trump express anger over his treatment of the Khan family, as well as among democrats whom, while committed to a more
inclusive vision of citizenship, are still disposed to accepting security measures that disproportionately target Muslim communities. What matters here is less which groups make up an audience and more the distribution of embodied judgments across an audiences. Ultimately, it the distribution of affect and emotion which both enable and constrain securitizing moves.

5.0 Conclusion

This chapter laid out a theory of the contentious politics of emotion in securitization over the course of four moves. First, I’ve made the case that when we think about emotions in social theories like constructivism, we should think about how they help actors manage interpretive uncertainty. Second, viewing emotions as embodied judgements affords a conceptual language to understand what emotions are and how they help us navigate the world. Third, we can understand the social origins of emotions by tracing to them to processes of entrainment, particularly those rooted in popular culture, memory and memorialization, as well as public rituals.

The final section pulls these threads together to reshape how we think about securitization. Starting from the uncertainty of public audiences over which securitizing moves to accept and which to reject, I argued audiences rely on emotions to navigate security discourse. While some embodied judgments such as fear, anxiety, and suspicion ensure audiences are confident that a threat is genuine, others make security claims appear inappropriate, even preposterous. Together, the effect of emotions is to limit the boundaries of local security imaginary, that range of security claims the audience feels is legitimate.

Ultimately, what a theory of the contentious politics of emotion in securitization affords us is a means to think through how the relationship between politics, emotion, and security is more complex and less mechanical than the fear-as-mobilization thesis leads us to believe. Because the theory is based in dispositional power analysis, and emotional dispositions can be activated and mobilized through a myriad of different pathways, the theory contains no nomothetic predictions. There are no ‘laws’ of emotion in the politics of security. The only predictions this theory makes is 1) that security debates will be marked by greater diversity of emotional experiences than simply fear, and 2) that these emotional dynamics will often constrain rather than simply enable securitizing moves. What specific outcomes emerge, and especially whether a security claim gains widely accepted legitimacy, depends on contextually specific distribution of emotions. In chapters 5 and 6, I show how this plays out over the course of two different empirical studies. But first, we need to address what is arguably the most challenging subject in IR’s emotion turn: methodology.
Works Cited


