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The Securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta

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Abstract

The Covid-19 viral pandemic was a ‘black swan’ event *par excellence*. It provided the global community with the first existential threat of the 21st Century - and nobody saw it coming. The initial reaction of states was to seal borders and adopt a nationalistic approach to dealing with the pandemic. The issue was swiftly elevated to the level of high politics and national security through a process defined as securitisation. Malta was not spared this process and the securitisation of the Covid-19 virus led to the introduction of extraordinary measures to control viral transmission and minimise avoidable population mortality.

Analysis of the literature revealed a potential gap, with no published studies on the securitisation process and its effects in Malta. This led to the formulation of the research question “*What were the consequences of the securitisation of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malta?*” A conceptual framework was created from the extant literature, drawing mainly on the Copenhagen, the Paris and the Welsh Schools’ interpretation of securitisation.

The Prime Minister, Robert Abela, was identified as the primary actor securitising the Pandemic, as an agent of the state, with the Maltese public as a passive audience. The healthcare professions were secondary actors and securitisers, whilst the World Health Organisation acted as a norm entrepreneur. A clear period of securitisation was identified with the process of de-securitisation taking place rapidly and all extraordinary measures being rolled back, once the existential threat posed by Covid-19 had receded. The securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta followed a socially constructed interpretation whilst demonstrating clear realist tendencies, reflected in the reaction of the state when dealing with the security dilemma of balancing citizens’ wellbeing and the nation’s future economic viability. The consequences of the securitisation were illustrated in a restriction in human rights, a reduction in economic activity and an inequitable effect on vulnerable groups. It is proposed to draft a template for a transparent and legally enforceable instrument to be applied to future issues requiring securitisation, in order to pre-empt and mitigate the negative consequences of the process.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Malta, securitisation, Copenhagen School, Realism*

Did we do all we could have? Did people die needlessly? Were freedoms and human rights unnecessarily curtailed? How will we react to the next Pandemic?

The above will haunt the state executive and the health professions for years to come. The academic's duty is to dig deep and to provide objective analysis of the recent Covid-19 Pandemic and present an interpretation of the reaction of institutions and state structures to it. This will ensure that the maximum amount of knowledge and experiences can be extracted to enable an improved societal response next time round.

This work has attempted to carry out this task in a humble and hopefully effective manner.

It is dedicated to all those who gave their efforts, in some cases their lives, to ensure a safe and healthy future for the Maltese people.

I salute you.

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Abbreviations

CS	Copenhagen School
EU	European Union
EM	Extraordinary Measures
IR	International Relations
JST	Just Securitisation Theory
ISR	International Sanitary Regulations
IR	International Relations
MFH	Minister for Health
PM	Prime Minister
PRC	People's Republic of China
ST	Securitisation Theory
SPH	Superintendent of Public Health
TCN	Third Country National
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHO	World Health Organisation
UN	United Nations

Introduction

Initial Ideas and Train of Thought

The Covid-19 pandemic¹ (hereafter referred to as the Pandemic²), the conflict in the Ukraine³ and the concomitant sequelae of these events have exposed the state and social structures to previously unforeseeable effects and reactions. Executive bodies adopted the politics of exceptionalism to justify the introduction of extraordinary measures – in some cases martial law in all but name and mandatory vaccination - both in authoritarian regimes and in established western democracies. The majority of populations affected acceded to these measures with no appreciable resistance, acquiescing on the basis of the 'common good', without discussion on the immediate and future consequences of these actions.

The reaction to the Pandemic in the Maltese Islands and the Mediterranean was varied – coordination between states was not apparent with a disparate degree of opinion and analysis of the threat – both from a public health and a state security perspective.⁴ Of particular interest is the manner in which the Pandemic was projected by the state in Malta as an issue of national concern and the measures which were taken on the basis of this projection.

These initial comments constituted the basis for the germination of the initial conceptual query that gave rise to the research question, and the foundations of this dissertation: *how* did the Pandemic in Malta undergo a *process* of being elevated to an issue of national *security*, and, more pertinently, what were the *consequences* of this process? Have diplomatic or military concerns taken over an objective and sector-informed approach or has 'speech' driven strategic

¹ Pandemic, from the Greek *pan* meaning all and *demos* for people; the WHO defines it as "an outbreak of a new pathogen that spreads easily from person to person across the globe".

² The timeline for the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic can be delineated as having lasted from January 2020 to May 2023; this period is that throughout which it was classified as an infection of global concern by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

³ The state of Ukraine was invaded by Russian forces on the 22nd of February 2022. Hostilities are ongoing at the time of writing (August 2023).

⁴ Cuschieri et al., 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mediterranean Region over 18 Months'.

information dissemination from states and international institutions led global society adopt the belief that specific health concerns can be elevated to 'wars'? And justify state-led actions beyond the remit of an elected executive as we know it? Did the global norm-setting role of the World Health Organisation (WHO) play a decisive part in the process at a national level in Malta? Did a tight focus on the threat posed by the Pandemic lead to avoidable deaths from Covid-19 and consequently to an escalation of severity in other areas of healthcare. Hence, was the process of reacting to Covid-19 flawed and too narrowly structured?

Health and Security

Formulating answers to the above queries necessitated evaluating two dimensions that have always maintained an uneasy relationship. Health and security are key aspects of human existence and functionality within the societal constructs that have developed over time. Humanity has always prioritised good health and equated this ideal state with the concept of security and longevity. The notion, however, that security concerns may stimulate health policies and in reverse, health concerns may be the source of security decision-making, is a product of the last decades' thinking. Liberal approaches to the evaluation of social interactions, and the constructs that are created through the course of human development and historical deeds, have brought forth the concept of human security. This visualisation of health and security posits that the securing of individual health is a basic human right and hence the obligation is placed firmly on the social structures that administer and govern groupings, regions, or states to obtain and sustain localised and global environments that promote a healthy existence.⁵

⁵ Kauppi and Viotti, *International Relations Theory*, 1–20.

This process of securing health, on a global and on an individual level, raises issues which are contentious by nature.⁶ Is health security to be approached at the individual or the societal level? If health and security are to be considered at the granular level, is it feasible to ensure collective safety whilst respecting individual desires and rights? In the latter case what powers should an overarching organisation or elected executive be handed? Is exceptionalism and extraordinary action justified? Can the consequences of this exceptional behaviour be quantified and limited? Should these measures be reversed as soon as possible once an existential threat to human health has elapsed? Will these exceptional measures develop into ‘norms’? Is ‘global health security’ a term to be embraced and integrated into the mindset?

The Covid-19 Pandemic provided an excellent illustration of these dichotomies and the paradoxes created by the interdisciplinary interconnectedness of satiating the demands of both state and human security. Prioritising the health of the individual, or that of the state or the state economy generated antagonistic and principled arguments for each path of action and was fertile ground for a deepening of the analysis within an academic context.

The traditional approach, within the academic sphere, to the consideration of the multiple dimensions relevant to health and public safety (that is, security) has been to evaluate them individually. This dissertation will argue, amongst other suggestions, that this approach is flawed and that these two dimensions of humanity are so tightly intertwined that it is neither possible nor correct to adopt a ‘siloes’ manner of study. Doing so would be ignoring the indivisibility of one of the most primal and innate properties of all living organisms on this planet – that of ensuring one’s survival by securing one’s good health. The dissertation will also argue that, despite the evolution of International Relations (IR) theory to include liberal and socially constructed perspectives, the process of reacting to the Pandemic was grounded in

⁶ Brown et al., ‘The Role of Health Systems for Health Security’.

a realist evaluation of the situation rather than an approach that considered the needs of societal components at the granular level.

These were some of the first brain-storming concepts that came to mind whilst ideating and incubating the work, and they indicated the need for a deeper insight with a greater academic rigour in order to develop a credible response to these initial thoughts.

Hence, the work went on to analyse the societal response to Covid-19 and its consequences, basing its interpretative modalities on the field of International Relations, attempting to evaluate this process of reacting to the Pandemic through a security studies lens, whilst keeping the local context and theoretical precepts in mind.

The Body of Work

This dissertation weaves a story, providing background and literature to interpret the thoughts put forward. The narrative is simple, but of immense import. Covid-19 brought about the introduction of exceptional measures that impacted all areas of society. This work describes how these measures were put in place, the academic basis for this process and most importantly, the consequences that these measures had on Maltese society. The plot introduces actors from the area of security studies in academia, it looks at the WHO and the Maltese healthcare system, the Maltese actors in the political scene and considers goings-on in other countries, finally binding all the variables into an interpretation based on the literature and transposed onto the historical narrative.

It is divided into two Parts and six Chapters (Figure 1). Part I reviews the literature on securitisation, healthcare governance and the securitisation of health and the Covid-19 Pandemic – the intention of this Part was to provide a brief but solid grounding to securitisation theory and its application to global healthcare issues – this allowed for a rigorous academic

interpretation of the Maltese securitisation process in the Second Part. It commenced by building the basis for the modern interpretations of securitisation, running through the parallel development of International Relations Theory and global history; this allowed for a discussion of healthcare governance – in the global and the local context. Having elucidated the role of the WHO in dealing with global healthcare issues and emergencies, analysis of this role from the perspective of securitisation and specifically for global epidemics is provided. The reaction of regional organisations and states to the Pandemic is reviewed and this prepares the ground for the work ahead.

Part II describes the work carried out. At this point a gap in the literature is identified and the rationale for the research carried out in this dissertation is derived and then proposed. Chapter Four describes the method of research; its adoption and implementation are justified. The reasons for selecting a case study are stated and the limitations of the study are clearly outlined. Chapter Five is the centrepiece of this dissertation. It takes the securitisation of the Pandemic in Malta as a case study and examines it through the lens developed in the previous parts. The model constructed in Chapter Four is used to define the actors in the securitisation process in Malta, and assign their tentative roles – in line with the theoretical frameworks reviewed in Part One. The consequences of the securitisation process in Malta are identified and discussed in the light of the literature.

The Sixth and final Chapter draws up the main conclusions of the study and proposes arguments based on this. A summarisation of thoughts emanating from the work is presented, and recommendations for future work put forward.

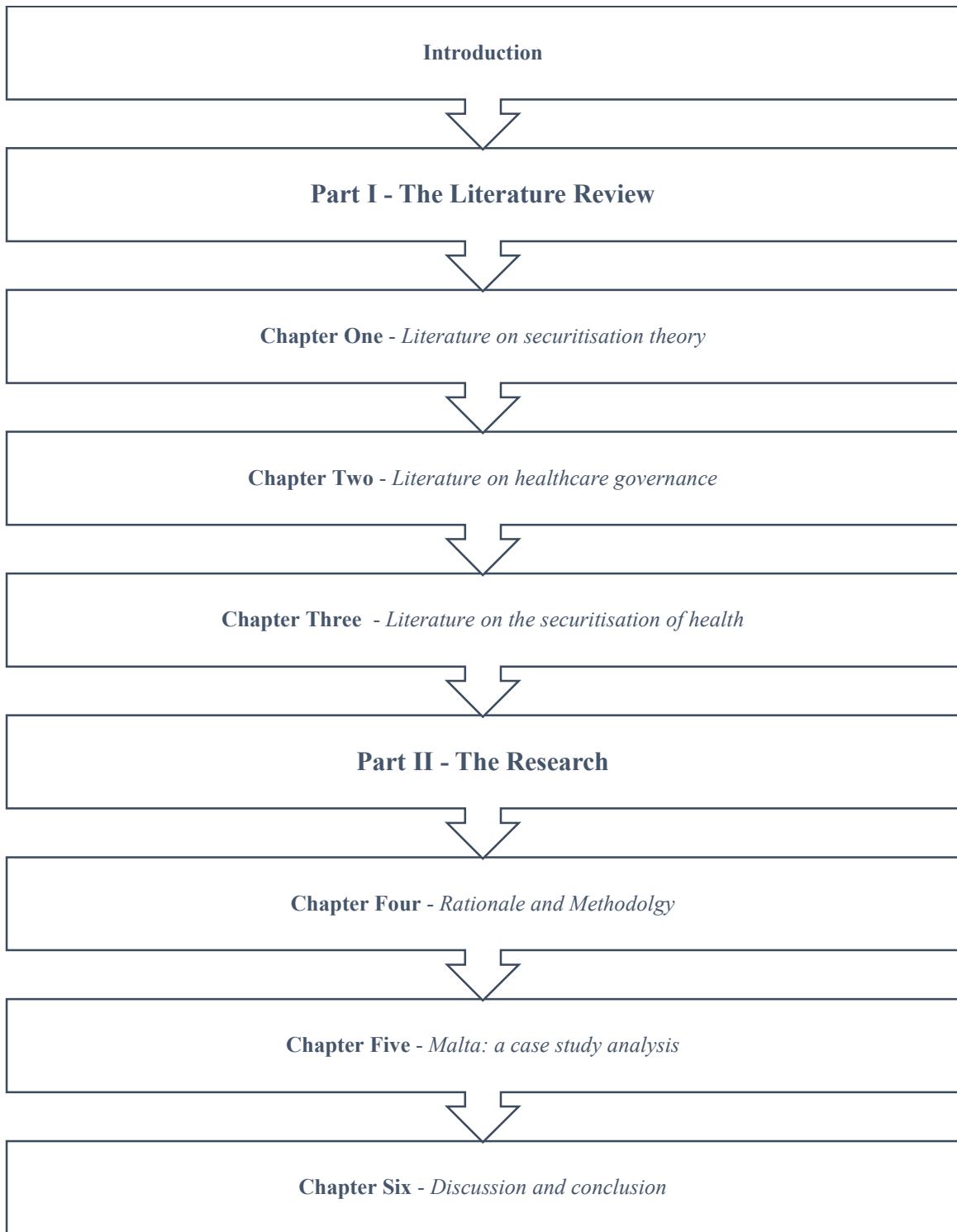


Figure 1- Workflow rationale and progression

Part I – A Review of the Literature

The literature was consulted for three areas deemed to be relevant to the analysis of the process of securitising the Pandemic in Malta and the consequences of this same process. These areas were (i) securitisation theory, (ii) healthcare governance, and (iii) the securitisation of healthcare, and the securitisation experience of Covid-19 in other states. A brief introduction to the Pandemic to set the scene is next, after which the review chapters follow.

The Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic requires scant prequel - it provided the world with its first great challenge of the 21st Century. The index case was reported in Wuhan, China in November 2019 and reports began seeping out of the country over the next few months until cases of epidemic proportions were reported on in Italy and Spain. The Pandemic ravaged the globe for most of 2020 and 2021; it was officially declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020, and classified as a pandemic on 11 March 2020; on the 5th of May 2023 it was announced that Covid-19 was no longer a global threat, though not in any way eradicated. Rather Covid-19 is now established as a known, transmittable viral variant.⁷ At the time of writing, deaths in Malta directly attributed to Covid-19 amounted to 872,⁸ with 6,954,336 worldwide victims.⁹

⁷ World Health Organisation, 'Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic'.

⁸ <https://www.who.int/countries/mlt/>. Accessed 13/08/2023.

⁹ <https://covid19.who.int/>. Accessed 13/08/2023.

Chapter One – Securitisation Theory

This section introduces the literature on securitisation. The main schools of thought - the Copenhagen School (CS), the Paris and Welsh Schools and eminent scholars in the field - including Professor Barry Buzan, Rita Floyd, Thierry Balzacq and Ole Wæver - are referred to and their perspectives woven into the conceptualisation of securitisation that is proposed. Without adding unnecessary layers of academic complexity to the discussion these questions will be answered: how do we define security? Whose security are we defining? How do we determine what is a threat to security? What is securitisation and what does this process entail? Can we develop a conceptual framework that can be utilised to interpret the securitisation of Covid-19 in the Maltese Islands?

1.1. Security

Prior to broaching the concept of securitisation, a brief definition of the security dimension and its aspects is necessary. The concept of security carries with it an inherent emotional and anticipatory connection; as humans we are subject to the fears generated by the unknown or by the unthinkable – as in the case of nuclear holocaust or widespread crimes against humanity.¹⁰ Initially one can consider security in the terms of preventing or protecting against any entity or process that constitutes an existential threat to the continued existence of a defined grouping of society.¹¹ Hedley Bull gives us his take on global security and order, defining it as

¹⁰ For an interesting introduction to unforeseen events and our general misconceptions regarding the former see Ferguson, Niall. *Doom - the Politics of Catastrophe*. Penguin, 2021 and Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. - *The Black Swan. The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. New York: Random House, 2007.

¹¹ Kolodziej, *Security and International Relations*, 2005, 1.

*“Those patterns or dispositions of human activity that sustain the elementary or primary goals of social life among mankind as a whole . . . Underlying the questions we raise about order among states there are deeper questions, of more enduring importance, about order in the great society of all mankind.”*¹²

Politics is the means by which states maintain stability and enable governance.¹³ Security is one of the forms that politics can adopt; all security issues are political by nature. Within a specific societal domain, no security issue can be excluded from the realm of political discourse. Conversely, not all political issues can be classified as being relevant to the security concerns of a state. In evaluating security, one may consider the actors involved in deciding what is identified as a threat, the tools that can be employed to combat the threat and the historical context.

Prior to taking this further, it is at this point that a foray into International Relations (IR) theory lays the basis of security and securitisation. Up to the turn of the 20th century and arguably to the end of WW2, IR analysts were, in the main, analysing security from the sole perspective of the state. Security was the domain of the state, an overarching authority to whom a measure of personal sovereignty or freedom has been ceded by its citizens in exchange for protection. This is no longer the sole interpretative modality adopted by scholars. The next sub-sections will briefly trace the evolution of the interpretation of IR – both from an executive perspective (state leadership) and from a theoretical perspective (academia) – moving (historically) from the realist approach, grounded in territorial integrity and military force, to liberal and socially constructed theories, founded on human values and individual freedoms (Table 1). A critical observation to be made here is an emphasis on the interpretative nature of IR theory, as opposed

¹² Bull, Hedley, *The Anarchical Society_ A Study of Order in World Politics*, 20.

¹³ Buzan, *People, States & Fear - An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*.

to a purported normative function. History and fact are immutable – the manner in which one interprets them to project argument on the past or influence future policy is subjective, as are all IR theories.

Table 1 - The dimensions of security and international security viewed from the state¹⁴

Levels of analysis	Principal actors	Scope of actor relations
Interstate	States and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)	Bilateral and multilateral relations of states: security and welfare functions of the state; United Nations, NATO, etc.; actor exchanges are coercive.
Systemic	States	The expectation of violence or coercive threats in resolving interstate differences; actor exchanges are coercive
Transnational actors and their roles in international civil society: economic and socio-political dimensions	1. Economic: States; economic actors, including multinational corporations, IGOs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) 2. Socio-Political-Cultural: States, IGOs, NGOs, individuals, and groups	1. Globalizing markets and the diffusion of technology and innovation; actor exchanges are voluntary and non-coercive 2. Humanitarian programs; educational /cultural exchanges; terrorist attacks, etc.
Domestic	States, individuals, groups, associations, corporations, and transnational actors	1. The state as threat to civil liberties and human rights 2. The state as protector 3. Regimes and their impact on the security interests of other states 4. Regimes and international security Actor exchanges are a mix of coercion and non-coercion

¹⁴ Adapted from Kolodziej, *Security and International Relations*, 2005.

This fondness for the state as the unifying social unit is the legacy of the Westphalian Pacts of the 1600's, further consolidated by the empire building and colonial absorption of the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and later Germany.

1.2. Early Concepts of State and Security

Security had long been the domain of the proto-state prior to Westphalia; amongst the earliest strategists to realise this – well before the concretisation of the notion of statehood – was Niccolò Machiavelli. An Italian writer and one-time chancellor to the republican government in 15th century Florence, he laid down the precept that the security of the state or principality trumped all other issues and that the actions executed to achieve “*this will always be judged honorable, and will be praised by Everyone*”. This has now been paraphrased to *the end always justifies the means*.¹⁵ It can be argued that Machiavelli prioritised the security of the state but not absolutism in the manner of Hobbes. His conception of republicanism was based on Roman civil structures and the works of Livy.¹⁶ He proposed a form of absolute ruler or ruling body, based “*..on the people*”¹⁷ and in time this led to the concept of an overarching authority to whom a measure of personal sovereignty or freedom is ceded, in exchange for a common good.¹⁸ This cession of freedoms in return for protection from harm was developed and refined by Thomas Hobbes in the 1600's. Hobbes firmly believed that the nature of mankind was to exist in a constant struggle and that without the oversight of a “Leviathan”,¹⁹ society would lapse into anarchy.²⁰ He made no direct preference for monarchical or parliamentary control,

¹⁵ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 104.

¹⁶ Jackson, ‘Imagined Republics’.

¹⁷ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 72.

¹⁸ Vatter, ‘Republics Are a Species of State: Machiavelli and the Genealogy of the Modern State’.

¹⁹ Drawn from the Book of Job, Leviathan signified a monster that “beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.” (Job 41 i–xxxiv).

²⁰ Newey, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Hobbes and Leviathan*.

though he was a fervent supporter of the British monarchy and absolute rulers. He went into self-exile in France at the time of the Reformation in Britain and only returned when summoned to the Royal Court by Charles II following the Restoration. At around the same time that Hobbes was penning *Leviathan* the Treaties of Westphalia were being drawn up.²¹ These agreements set the stage for the establishment and mutual recognition of the precursors of modern-day states. At the pinnacle of this was the tacit understanding that state governments or leaders were the only authorised entities that controlled the execution of violent acts.²² It followed that states were anointed the protectors and entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring and maintaining the security of their citizens. Thus, an initial focus on the state within the area of security studies was justified because it was the primary actor in administering societal groupings on a regional and global scale and it had a monopoly on legitimate use of force which enables it to fulfil its obligation of providing a secure environment for its population.²³ Up to the end of the First World War approaches to security were almost completely based on this perspective, with territorial integrity and security at state level the primary concern of national rulers or administrations.

²¹ Hobbes, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*.

²² Grayling, *The History of Philosophy*.

²³ Kolodziej, 'Security and International Relations', 2005, 25–26.

1.3. Liberalism

Liberalism - espoused by US President Wilson at the end of WW1 and the early 1920's and more forcefully by President Truman in the 1945 - translated loosely into a society based on personal and economic freedoms, with international order maintained by means of newly established transnational institutions.²⁴

In the post WW2-era, the US, well-positioned in its vantage point as the victorious and dominant Allied Power, utilised this strategic advantage to disseminate these liberal beliefs. The dissemination of liberalism as a contrasting view to realism commenced, spearheaded by the United States' policy of evangelisation and eventually the containment of Soviet-led Communist ideology. Liberalism, then and in its current version, promotes the role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and other transnational entities in promoting peace and cooperation between states and thus inherently limiting conflict.²⁵ The liberal viewpoint is one that denies the existence of a constant state of anarchy and a statism that prioritises power comparatives to other actors and hence relative security as a primary concern. Through the liberal lens, economic and social factors – in addition to the states' international presence and stature – play a pivotal role in maintaining a *status quo* and diminish the probability that inopportune events could precipitate the illegitimate use of force. Liberalism is driven by an ideal or utopian state in which individual members of societies, through NGOs, CSOs and other instruments of civil society, interact and create an environment of peaceful cooperation. Another tenet of liberalism is that, apart from the inherent advantages of cooperation and mutual aid, democratic and civil societal structures

²⁴ Kauppi and Viotti, *International Relations Theory*, 63–94.

²⁵ Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye are prime proponents of the liberal ideology with a firm belief in the power of institutions to regulate state behaviour and provide the norms for international relations. Keohane is a firm believer in the power of institutions to provide structure, as a result of social development and co-operation and Nye pioneered the concept of 'soft power' and the subtle use of cultural and social coercion to achieve diplomatic aims in IR.

would not be inclined to go to war with each other. This idea of ‘democratic peace’ was (and is?) at the heart of the US foreign policy; naturally peace was not only necessary for moral ends but also economic ones.²⁶ Apart from the moral obstacles to the violent resolution of disputes, conflict would potentially lead to the disruption of cultural and economic ties, to the detriment of all parties involved. This is not to say that realism is dead as an IR theory; in fact, it is very much alive. A cynical interpretation of US policy over the years is that it exhibits liberal rhetoric whilst executing a realist agenda. John Mearsheimer, an avid realist, posits that the necessarily realist approach of China to IR, following its demise in the 1800’s up to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) – can only lead to global conflict, unless the US takes a similarly outward realist view to its foreign policy.²⁷ This interpretation is shared by Henry Kissinger, who suggested in a recent interview with the Economist magazine on the occasion of his 100th birthday, that if the US and China do not immediately commence a process of rapprochement, then a violent conflict between the two superpowers is inevitable within the next decade.²⁸

1.3.1 Other Actors

As can be immediately deduced from Figure 2, the variables taken into consideration in the current world view of security are not only evaluated from the realist perspective, but also from alternative, deeper and more philosophical perspectives. Realism – it bears repeating - adopts a minimalist and ‘state-centric’ stance which unambiguously places these same states as unitary actors, constantly battling for survival and only relying on their own resources.

²⁶ Kauppi and Viotti, *International Relations Theory*, 84.

²⁷ “‘This Is an Issue That Makes Me Very Nervous’: John Mearsheimer on the US-China Rivalry”.

²⁸ ‘Henry Kissinger Explains How to Avoid World War Three’.

Approach	Referent Object	Threat Type	Conception of security	Methodology
Traditional	State	Use of force (primarily military)	Objective & material	Rationalist
Critical (Widener-Deepener)	Multiple e.g. Individual, Collectives, Security Clusters	Multiple e.g. use of force, economic, societal, political, environmental	Subjective and discursive (Securitisation)	Post-positivist / Constructivist

Figure 2 - Key dimensions for overarching approaches in Security Studies²⁹

Having established that states were no longer considered to be the primary actors in the security domain, as had been the case for centuries, it is pertinent to consider the other players that have grown in importance and recognition in the years following the end of the Second World war and the beginning of the 21st century. The role of NGOs and CSOs has risen to prominence and their impact on state and international policy is substantial. The most notable of these institutions are the United Nations, the WHO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The latter was the most significant military alliance at the time of its formation, and arguably still is now.³⁰ The setting up of the non-military organisations signified a change in direction and an admission that security was not solely based on military factors but also had to be considered at a more granular level. Multilateral communication, health and economic prosperity at a social and individual level also constituted security issues that were vital to a sustained global peace.

The existence of the European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the Copenhagen School for security Studies (CSS), amongst others has introduced multiple non-state players

²⁹ Extracted from Unwin, 'Examining the Analytical Challenges Posed by IS to Security Theory'.

³⁰ Hindsight is a useful tool at times! The Russian invasion of Ukraine has cemented the pivotal role of NATO in European security. In the early 1990's most analysts had predicted a vestigial part for the organisation and a swift sidestep to irrelevance.

on both a horizontal and on a vertical plane. This has made the discourse on security more varied and consequently more informed and complex.

The key entity in security studies at a global level is the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Established as part of the UN organs by the victorious powers in 1945, it possesses a wide-ranging veto on enforcing affirmative action. The UNSC has the mandate to observe, pronounce itself on and maintain – within the parameters of its mandate – global peace and security. This construct was put in place – albeit with ultimate power still residing in the hands of the Allies (with the addition of the PRC in 1971) to limit or prevent unilateral state decisions, which were deemed to be less likely with this level of global interconnectedness and cooperation on security issues. A major qualification for the last statement is the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 which can be described as a unilateral action by a state to alleviate a perceived security concern.³¹ The actions of Vladimir Putin have initiated the first conflict on European soil for 80 years and thrown into turmoil the liberal, ‘democratic peace’ established by the European Union experiment in regional integration. The EU, in effect, was (and is), one enormous experiment in securitising the military and economic concerns of post-war Europe through drastic and unthinkable action - one can surmise that in the 1950’s no analyst or leader would have envisaged the level of expansion and integration and cession of national sovereign rights that is present in 2023. In recent decades – the last 20 to 30 years – liberalism has developed further into more complex and less definite branches of interpretative theory within the IR domain. One of the most prominent and relevant to the discussion of securitisation is social constructivism.

³¹ At least in the eyes of Putin, who has utilised a revisionist approach to history to claim ‘the Ukraine’ as the food basket of Russia. One can – in hypothetical terms – argue that the constant eastwards creep of NATO pushed a megalomaniac in the vein of Putin to securitise the Ukrainian issue in his mind and that of his inner circle. Extending this train of thought, this may have made the justification of the 2022 invasion easier on the grounds of national security in the eyes of the Russian public. Analysis of the Russian leader’s public speeches indicate that he has been constructing this biased historical narrative and preparing the ground for the securitisation of the issue since at least 2007.

1.4. Social Constructs and Subjectivity

Social constructivism, in the vein of Wendt,³² argues that war, peace and security – amongst other commonly quoted descriptors in IR, are not actualities at all. It posits that these terms are all constructs that are describing socially developed states and that thus IR must be analysed at the social level. Wendt argues that the clearcut margins between the delineations of realist and liberal interpretations of IR and security are not a *fait accompli*. He posits that neo-realists and neo-liberals both share the belief that, although states are the primary actors in IR, they are subject to mutational and evolutionary changes brought about by socially constructed concepts. Both perspectives concede “*the causal power of institutions*” and of individual contribution and societal interactions which form the basis of global relations.³³ The primacy of human rights, the right to freedom of speech, democratic rule, health, nutrition and security of body and property are the basis of this approach.³⁴ Without getting too deep into this area of thought, one can immediately discern a paradox between the rationales of extreme realist or statist views on security and those of liberalists. In the realist view the state must act to protect its citizens - as a duty foisted upon it by the citizens themselves as part of the state-citizen pact in the manner of John Locke’s thinking in Leviathan. This endows the state apparatus with great power, and consequently the potential for abuse is rife. On the positive side, coordinated and cohesive action is possible once an overarching authority can evaluate and react to perceived threats in a unitary manner. Conversely, the liberal view endows the individual with the right to decide their own fate; this allows for a nuanced and selective definition of what is to be determined a threat and how to engage in deflecting or preventing the said threat. As a drawback of this

³² Alexander Wendt (1958-) is an American political scientist. His views came to the forefront following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the development of the relations of states beyond the traditional struggle for survival and power at sovereign level. Intersubjective social structures and constructs form the basis of his works, as opposed to objective, fixated realities. He introduces the structure vs process argument.

³³ Wendt, Alexander, ‘Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics’, 392.

³⁴ Wendt, Alexander, ‘Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics’.

rationale, individual action can lead to societal disruption and confusion, with the overall security of the state compromised by the random and counter-productive actions of individual units.

It was these concepts that led scholars to ideate the modern tools by which security issues are analysed in academia. One of the pioneers of this manner of thinking is Professor Barry Buzan;³⁵ he proposed a ‘widening’ of the scope of security and its application to a larger scope of potential threats, as opposed to the traditional, ‘narrow view’ of military approaches to state security. This line of thought was derived from an analysis of the current – at the time in the 1970’s – flat and two-dimensional approach to security. He did this in his seminal work *People, States and Fear*;³⁶ here he put forward, amongst other arguments, the need to analyse security on three levels: the individual, the institutional and the state. This is in line with what has been briefly laid out so far. Once the realist, statist, viewpoint was set aside, securitisation was developed as an alternate lens through which to consider security issues on a societal plane. This is not to say that realism was discarded completely; Stone, in fact, considers Buzan to be a hybrid of neo-realist and constructivist thought with a slant towards the latter.³⁷ Buzan argued that security as a concept was underdeveloped and only assessed in the traditional, objective visualisation of threats. He posited that that a security threat is not a threat because of its innate, independent properties, but because of its social context and construction.

The modern-day global security scenario has evolved dramatically in the decades since Buzan, and other constructivists stimulated the reinterpretation of security. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and 9/11 and the subsequent Global War on Terror has led to a complete recalibration of the superpower balance and global polarity. This, some argue, brought about

³⁵ Professor Buzan is currently Professor Emeritus at the International Relations Department of the London School of Economics. He has authored numerous works on security studies and was the first to put forward the concept of securitisation.

³⁶ Buzan, *People, States & Fear - An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*.

³⁷ Stone, ‘Security According to Buzan; A Comprehensive Security Analysis?’

an inevitable period of US hegemony in the first decade of the 21st century, both in raw power quantum and in ideological terms. The re-emergence of China and Russia is now again upsetting the Great Power balance, leading to what Zartmann has come to call “a New World Order”.³⁸ Whilst these facts merit deeper discussion, it is beyond the remit of this dissertation and hence the focus is now on the process of securitisation.

1.5. Conceptual Models for Securitisation

The groundwork for the core divergences in the conceptualisation of securitisation has been laid in the previous pages. The realist proponents adopt an objective view, that is, an issue is a threat to the referent object because of its inherent properties, regardless of context. The liberal and constructivist view is in opposition to this factual statement of affairs; it posits that an issue is defined as a threat and hence proposed as the object for securitisation by the environment in which it is presented and by the presenters – ‘the securitisers’ – themselves. The acceptance of the audience, which is the subject of securitisation, is necessary to provide legitimacy and confirmation to the process.

In its barest form, securitisation can be defined as the act of promoting an issue to the level of high politics. Such a simplistic definition requires expansion and clarification. The Copenhagen School of Security Studies (CS) has been the source of the main theory utilised to interpret security in academic terms. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde developed

³⁸ Lecture delivered at the University of Malta, October 2022 and attended by the author. Professor Zartmann correctly, in the opinion of the author, posited that Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine in February 2022 to “prove that he could”. In other words, Putin wished to make a statement regarding the relative strengths of the superpower or Great Power variables. Whether this has backfired is now up for discussion, but the initial aim of the Russian President appears to have been achieved. Great Power politics is now a three-way play, albeit with all actors – the US, China, and Russia – exhibiting very diverse relative strengths, cultural mindsets, perceived historical grievances and security concerns.

the theory of securitisation based on the social constructs that create the process, that is the construction of a threat within the context of the actors involved.³⁹ This was based on Buzan's earlier thinking on security and the necessity to 'widen' the scope of analysis within the contemporary international relations scenario and 'deepen' the study of Securitisation Theory to involve more complex philosophies. A structural - social approach - an interaction between the contextual actors results in the development of an awareness of the security risk - the process is not linear or predefined - what can be established is the point at which the actors accept or elevate the issue. Language is the prime instrument or tool in the process. Hence, securitisation is not a linear deterministic process, but it is socially constructed - the interpretations vary.

In the CS visualisation of the securitisation process, the speech act has a central role; the act of enunciating the threat to the relevant audience for reaffirmation of the belief that the threat is existential is deemed to be both the 'publicisation' of the threat and the *de facto* legitimisation. The manner in which the use of language and the definition of language itself varies.

Wæver and Buzan place great emphasis and devote the majority of their arguments for this theory, to the illocutionary power of words and the speeches thus constructed. The commitment of Securitisation Theory to the speech act depends heavily on the work of Austin and Searle and speech act philosophy - a movement away from descriptive grammar and generative transformational thinking.⁴⁰ The speech act moves away from the descriptive and interpretative nature of language to a functional notion. A speech act can perform an activity as opposed to language being utilised as a communicative and translational tool.⁴¹

The speech act itself is an action and not a means of delivering a message. Austin, a pioneer in this field, proposed that words can have an effect or perform an action in three ways: (i) the

³⁹ Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde, *Security, A New Framework for Analysis*.

⁴⁰ Mabaquiao, 'Speech Act Theory: From Austin to Searle', 38.

⁴¹ Stritzel, *Security in Translation*, 20–23.

word in itself has meaning, that is the innate property of a word is what it directly describes (ii) the word can, in context, stimulate or provoke an action (iii) the word can have a physical or tangible effect, which is the result of the action it provokes. Jürgen Habermas encapsulates it neatly as *“to say something, to act in saying something, to bring about something through acting in saying something.”*⁴² Habermas proposes that actors have direct involvement in their motions and that these are governed by norms and expectations, based on individualised communication that is genuine. Naturally, this is a utopian environment which would require an ideal setting for a hypothetical speech act; Habermas does, however, introduce the concept of guiding norms that have been predetermined and accepted by the actors and audience – whose roles may be interchangeable.⁴³

Although not linguists, Wæver and Buzan have thus based the core of CS theory on the speech act. Within the confines of the CS theory, this projects securitisation as a linear process, commencing with the threat and then the speech act, leading to audience acceptance and the extraordinary measures that follow. Wæver places great emphasis on the ‘securitisers’, and goes so far as to state that *“something is a security problem when the elites declare it to be so”*⁴⁴

Figure 3 depicts this process in a simplistic manner based on the Copenhagen School’s (CS) conceptualisation of the securitisation process.

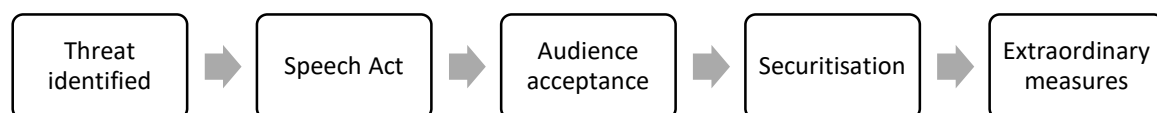


Figure 3- Simplistic Copenhagen School model for securitisation⁴⁵

⁴² Edgar, *Habermas: The Key Concepts*.

⁴³ Gaspar, ‘Habermas’ Theory of Communicative Action’, 409–10.

⁴⁴ Ole Waever, “Securitization and Desecuritization”, *On Security*, Ed by Ronnie Lipschutz, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 6 cited in Stone, ‘Security According to Buzan; A Comprehensive Security Analysis?’

⁴⁵ By author.

Such a deterministic statement endows the securitising actor with significant power, irrespective of context and the nature of the listeners or audience. The most basic models of communication theory – Shannon-Weaver amongst them – incorporate a measure of feedback loops and iterative development to the transmission of information.⁴⁶

The CS model does not accommodate audience participation or nature in the construction of the process. This is a point taken up by critics who argue that the approach is too naive in that it proposes a linear and progressive timeline, which is utopian as a model for real-time social and political events. The lack of acknowledgement of a feedback mechanism that considers the adaptation of the conception of the threat is a significant flaw in the original model. Stritzel stresses that the audience, despite being proposed as the nominal ‘gatekeeper’ in this instance, is not developed further. As a generic connotation, the audience is not given enough consideration. He, and Balzacq, argue further that the original framework devised by Buzan et al is ‘self-referential’; Balzacq posits that instead securitisation should be perceived as an ‘intersubjective’ process.

Stritzel then proposes a refined definition of the process based on these arguments as

“a discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed to treat something as an existential threat, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat, which typically involves sociolinguistic as well as sociopolitical processes of production/genesis, diffusion/transfer and reception/translation in a discourse.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Shannon and Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*.

⁴⁷ Stritzel, *Security in Translation*, 4.

Balzacq takes the definition to a higher level of specificity with the following and addresses the issue of the audience's receptivity and the direct reference to the 'unprecedented' nature of the actions required:

*“an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development”*⁴⁸

Balzacq makes three central assumptions in his interpretation of the CS approach to securitisation, namely that the audience is central to the process, there is a co-dependency between agency and context and the structuring force of the *dispositif*. Balzacq argues - using Austin as his basis - that language or the act of speech when describing the perceived or constructed threat is not simply the communicative tool but is an action in itself - this; on a philosophical level moves away from a descriptive interpretation of the speech act to one of action.

Stritzel develops the securitiser/audience relationship as a 'conceptual tension'; he places emphasis on the dual nature of securitisation – the speech act and the negotiation process by which the audience legitimises (or not) the securitising act. Stritzel goes as far as to state that

⁴⁸ Balzacq, *Securitization Theory*, 3.

*“the (decisionist) performativity of security utterances as opposed to the social process of securitization, involving (pre-existing) actors, audience(s) and context(s), are so different that they form two rather autonomous centres of gravity”.*⁴⁹

Whilst possibly not accurate in separating the two actions, the point that both are central to the determination and legitimisation of potential threats is undeniable – as opposed to the passive role played by the audience in Buzan et al’s original conception. McDonald further puts forward arguments for the need to integrate the audience deeper into the model but expresses reservations on whether this will reduce the centrality provided to the speech act in the primary iteration of the CS model.⁵⁰

These critiques of the CS model form what may be termed the second-generation approach to Buzan et al’s framework. Going deeper into the theory underpinning some of the criticisms one can pick up some of the philosophical strands of thought regarding the speech act. As previously stated, the CS model bases on Austin and Searle as proposing the Speech Act as an action defined by the securitiser and the audience, implying a contextual element. Yet this is at odds with Wæver’s own interpretation of his model when he states that a text: *“...produces its own meaning, rather than relating it to a ‘context’”* In this passage Wæver is drawing on Derrida⁵¹ and the objective nature of a text, as opposed to an inter-subjective interpretation of a speech. Wæver also looks to Butler for support here; Butler introduced the concept of performativity to speech acts and the retroactive nature of their constitution; Wæver uses this to argue that the act itself empowers the securitising actor via its innate, indeterminate force.⁵² Once again, criticism of the CS model points out its lack of specificity when deciding on its

⁴⁹ Stritzel, ‘Towards a Theory of Securitization’, 364.

⁵⁰ McDonald, ‘Securitization and the Construction of Security’.

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) was a French philosopher, academic and a prolific author. His main contribution was the concept of ‘deconstruction’ and the interpretation and relative hierarchy of speech and the written word.

⁵² Buzan and Wæver, ‘Slippery? Contradictory? Sociologically Untenable? The Copenhagen School Replies’.

own nature; is it a normative process or a prescriptive one? Is the audience a major actor, or simply a passive element? Wæver does not accept a two-way process between the actor and the audience and yet the two variables form part of the CS model. Is the securitising actor an independent mover or are they part of an institutional or state bureaucracy that tends to utilise security for its own aims? The latter reasoning is at the heart of the so-called Paris school of security studies. Drawing heavily on Michel Foucault⁵³ and Didier Bigo,⁵⁴ it places the state institutions firmly at the centre of all securitisation processes. Foucault, in the eyes of some, may be considered to be biased and opinionated rather than strictly academic in approach. Nonetheless he has influenced Bigo and others to develop a solid following based on this somewhat paranoid rationale, as is evidenced by the next quote from Bigo himself:

*“the state wants to take charge of individual security and widen the notion of public order. It aims to realise the truth programmes that it has been trying to assert for a long time with contract theories but lacked the means to carry out”.*⁵⁵

The strict focus on speech as the securitising modality is also a criticism; speech is not the only method of communication especially with the plethora of visual media available for dissemination through countless channels with almost ubiquitous access.⁵⁶

Another pertinent iteration, or rather, take on a wider approach to security studies is that of the Welsh School. The Welsh School combined Critical Theory and Radical International Relations Theory to form Critical Security Studies (CSS). In agreement with the Copenhagen School, CSS refutes the traditional security approach which provides centrality to the state, but

⁵³ Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a French philosopher, academic and activist. He believed firmly in the state control of power and knowledge, with this control wielded through state institutions. He was homosexual and suffered the contemporary prejudice prevalent at the time. The theme of state decisionism in the security domain runs through his works. He is one of the leading proponents of the Paris School of security studies.

⁵⁴ Didier Bigo (1956-) is Professor of International Relations at King’s College, London and Sciences Po, Paris.

⁵⁵ Kelstrup and Williams, *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration*, 179.

⁵⁶ McDonald, ‘Securitization and the Construction of Security’.

in contrast to Copenhagen, the Welsh School does not only consider the perceived security threats as social constructs, but also the objects as subjective elements of the process. The Welsh School, as opposed to the negative connotation appended to securitisation by Wæver,⁵⁷ attaches a 'positive' spin to the process. In brief, it has its roots in the Critical Theory (CT) advanced by Horkheimer and Habermas at the Frankfurt School; CT is a complex and nuanced interpretation of human interaction that refutes the traditional, realist visualisation of security and instead analyses human behaviour in the light of the social sciences and positivism. For the Welsh School "*True security can only be achieved by people and groups if they do not deprive others of it*" and in the words of Ken Booth "*Emancipation, theoretically, is security.*"⁵⁸

1.5.1. Jus ad bellum? Just Securitisation Theory?

The concept of *jus ad bellum* or just war is a fundamental tenet of international law and forms part of the UN founding charter. Rita Floyd has greatly expanded upon the philosophical discussion in the area of securitisation by proposing the parallel concept of just securitisation. In her 2010 paper Floyd suggests a model of securitisation, Just Securitisation Theory (JST), that would allow for a moral restraint on the process of elevating issues to the area of high politics and exceptionalism. Her rationale is based on that of just war or *jus ad bello* that is embedded into customary practice and International Law codified through the Geneva Conventions and the Charter of the UN. She argues that the process of securitisation is one to be treated with caution and deference, since the action is not the end but a means to other ends. These ends are the execution of extraordinary measures; as has been discussed earlier these measures would not be acceptable under the norms of democratic, liberal society as we accept

⁵⁷ For Wæver, 'security should be seen as a negative, as a failure to deal with issues of normal politics'.

⁵⁸ Booth, cited in Floyd, 'Towards a Consequentialist Evaluation of Security', 332.

it today in ordinary circumstances. Since securitisation of an issue frames the context as one beyond the parameters of what is normally adjudged to be the remit of the executive, the same executive's actions have no benchmark or legal *modus operandi*. Floyd further argues that this can lead to the abuse of the securitisation process; evidence that securitisation on feeble or unfounded grounds provide facile means for dictators or authoritarian leaders to strengthen their hold on power. In line with Aradau,

*“The exceptional politics of securitisation turns into a dangerous undertaking for democracy; even more so as the proliferation of threats risks extending ‘extraordinary measures’ and exceptional circumstances to normality.”*⁵⁹

She posits that even if the process is justified within a democratic context, the reaction can, at times be disproportionate in the extent, length and quantum employed.⁶⁰ Floyd proposes a three-pronged evaluation framework for securitisation; her intention is that the adoption and utilisation of this could lead to a more reasoned and equitable approach that could provide conceptual boundaries for the actors involved in the process. This would in turn lead to increased transparency and accountability.

Floyd bases the righteous grounds for securitisation on the presence of (i) an objective existential threat, one that clearly poses a danger to the survival of the actor (ii) a referent object for securitisation that must be acceptable on moral grounds – as an example if a program that produces chemical weapons is threatened then legitimacy is denied and (iii) a response that is commensurate with the gravity of the threat keeping in consideration the relative strength of a potential aggressor and reacting with morally directed intention.⁶¹ In her third principle of JST

⁵⁹ Aradau, ‘Security and the Democratic Scene’, 393.

⁶⁰ Aradau, ‘Security and the Democratic Scene’.

⁶¹ Floyd, ‘Towards a Consequentialist Evaluation of Security’; Floyd, *Security and the Environment*; Floyd, ‘States, Last Resort, and the Obligation to Securitise’.

Floyd provides the rationale for the evaluation of the consequences of a securitisation process prior to its inception. This concept is pivotal to the work undertaken in this dissertation and is the basis of the research carried out. In putting forward her JST, Floyd is possibly adopting a utopian approach to the issue; the concept of framing securitisation and setting parameters for states or entities to abide by is laudable. Additionally, accepted norms and frameworks can lead to self-fulfilling and circular loops with an increase in instances of securitisation due to the simple existence of a legitimate structure and process to do so.⁶²

The probability of these states or entities agreeing to common boundaries and adhering to them is something that is unequivocally up for discussion. Even if proposed at national level it is arguable that all the actors in the political landscape would be willing to concur, as this could place restraints on the manner and tone of political discourse. That said, it is not a given that public intervention cannot apply sufficient pressure to engage or divert the political direction prevalent at the time.⁶³

Vuori also elaborates on the CS simple model and puts forward five strands or threads for securitisation: future threats, raising the visibility of an issue via the process, using it as a deterrent, classifying past actions as security moves and utilising securitisation to obtain political and executive control. The classic illustration of the securitisation of a future act is the US and UK's invasion of Iraq in 2003 based on a threat that could have materialised.⁶⁴

⁶² This rationale forms the basis of the Paris School of securitisation that, broadly and simplistically portrayed, argues that bureaucratic security entities and police structures formulate an existential and self-propagating mandate to securitise society from all possible threats, including the behaviour of the members of the society itself.

⁶³ An example of this is a recent change of heart by the state to initiate a public inquiry into a fatal incident at a construction site, following intense public pressure. Though not typical of Maltese public engagement, nevertheless it is a sign that public opinion is the ultimate judge of state policy in a healthy democracy.

⁶⁴ Eves and Thedham, 'Applying Securitization's Second Generation to COVID-19', 2.

1.6. De-securitisation

Figure 4 shows the complementary processes of securitising and de-securitising an issue, together with the concomitant political accommodations. In line with Floyd’s last conditions for Just Securitisation – that of a measure commensurate with the current threat – an extraordinary measure cannot (or at least is not intended to) be permanent and/or excessive in both absolute and temporal terms. In other words, a mechanism should hypothetically be in place to allow for the reversal of exceptionalism and high politics. Similarly, Balzacq argues for a process of de-securitisation once an issue is no longer an existential threat. The former is necessary to allow the re-contextualisation of the issue in the ordinary social frame in which it operates; health cannot be solely considered in terms of a security discourse.

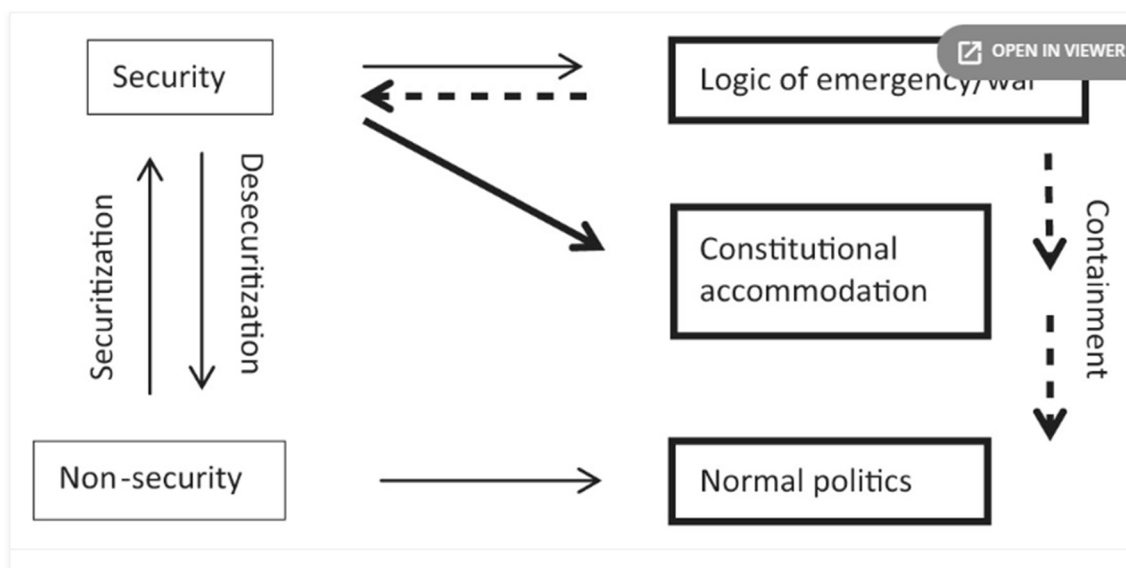


Figure 4 - De-securitisation in the context of politics⁶⁵

Wæver, as the original prophet for securitisation, is simultaneously a prime proponent of the need to have a process by which actors can reverse the politics of exceptionalism that the CS

⁶⁵ Extracted from Hanrieder and Kreuder-Sonnen, ‘WHO Decides on the Exception?’

securitisation framework demands, and yet one of the foundation stones of modern securitisation theory itself. De-securitisation is a concern for Aradau⁶⁶, who highlights the philosophical discrepancy between the CS discursive approach to de-securitisation and the political aspect that the objective process necessitates.⁶⁷ Wæver himself introduces another antithetical argument by supporting the post-securitisation process of de-politicising the issue at hand, whilst then qualifying the resulting state as one of ‘asecurity’. In this instance, Wæver is tying himself up in philosophical knots, since he has proposed securitisation as a means of achieving the desired security state and then in the same breath, defines the withdrawal or reversal of the exceptional process as leading to an absence of security. Logically it would appear he is suggesting that securitisation is permanent, which he refutes *a priori*.

The interpretation of securitisation has led to the current trends of post-structural analysis and exceptionalism and the promotion of issues not normally considered within the realm of high politics to this lofty arena. It is this manner of thought that can be traced in the application of security theory to the Pandemic, and this leads on to the discussion of healthcare governance and then to this notion of exceptionalism and healthcare crises. Williams has cautioned against this by pointing out that this can construct norms and behaviour that are “*underpinned by an understanding of the politics of enmity, decision, and emergency which has deep roots in Schmitt’s understanding of political order.*”⁶⁸

Huysmans takes this further and argues that securitisation as a sole concept, without and equal and forceful logic for an opposite state, can lead to a “political realism” and an “...ordering

⁶⁶ Aradau takes pains to force the argument that de-securitisation is not a product of or a mirror image to securitisation. She intricately develops the theory that de-securitisation is an independent state of (human) security that exists without the necessity to invoke exceptionalism or restrictive rules or legislation.

⁶⁷ Aradau, ‘Security and the Democratic Scene’.

⁶⁸ Williams, cited in Aradau, 392.

force of fear of violent death by a mythical replay of variations of the Hobbesian state of nature’⁶⁹

The conceptual gist to be extracted here is that securitisation, whether a purely objective, discursive, subjective or a hybrid process composed of the former perspective, should be complemented by a means of de-escalation. In the absence of the latter taking place, securitisation could – and has in certain circumstances – be appropriated as an instrument by malicious or authoritarian regimes. In a democratic context, this could lead to a backsliding of civil and social rights in the name of public safety, national interest, and populist theories. McDonald brings to the fore the argument that a securitisation framework based solely on the CS conceptualisation is too *narrow* in that the act itself can only be designated by threats to security, irretrievably binding it to a negative and reactionary connotation.⁷⁰

Emancipation is another route to human security and de-securitisation, not as a reversal of a current or recent process of securitisation, but one long embedded in national and global practice. This is an argument, drawn from another field of study, feminism, that can be utilised to interpret and demonstrate the concept of de-securitising an issue. Naturally, such a deepening of the discussion is beyond the scope of this work; none the less it serves to illustrate the multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary aspect to the consideration of security. This is far removed from the two-dimensional visualisations put forward in the previously outlined, first-generation, basic models for socially constructed theories of securitisation.

The next section introduces healthcare governance and weaves in the concept of current global and national healthcare executive structures and their role in reacting to and securitising health-related issues.

⁶⁹ Huysmans, cited in Aradau, 392.

⁷⁰ McDonald, ‘Securitization and the Construction of Security’, 564.

Chapter Two - Healthcare Governance

This section broadly sketches out the concept of how states deal with health security and the securitisation of health. The complexities and paradoxes of handling both dimensions concurrently and the development of global health governance – in parallel to and in concert with the evolution of the IR landscape - and its role in reacting to international health crises are discussed. The political and executive structure of the Maltese healthcare system is outlined and its potential relation and dependence on global institutions for guidance and leadership defined. The idea of norm setting in the field of health security is introduced and applied in the context of infectious disease at a global level and the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The manner and form of current national and global health governance has come under scrutiny with the advent of the Pandemic. Whereas in times of normalcy health matters are principally the domain of the healthcare professions, Covid-19 has dragged the issue of health structures and institutions into the spotlight.

2.1. Historical Background

Healthcare has always played a pivotal role in the wellbeing of society and thus in its consequent survival and enhancement. In ancient times humankind struggled against the invisible and unidentified agents of death, that in the form of plagues and rapidly spreading epidemics, would cut massive swathes through populations, decimating entire countries in a matter of weeks. Apart from the human cost, disease exerted a military and economic cost on states, prompting leaders to develop a policy of prioritising the national interest when it came to healthcare issues. The next section will review the literature on global and local healthcare

governance and then lead on to the role played by these systems in the securitisation of healthcare issues.

One of the first steps adopted by the forerunners of today's states – the Italian city state Venice led the way – was a quarantine period for cargo ships for 40 days following arrival from specified locations. Based on nothing more than the biblical period that Christ spent in the desert, this term was serendipitously sufficient to enable the incubation and detection of a number of diseases that were prevalent at the time. Ships' masters were obliged to record any instances of illness or possible symptoms. Despite the disruption to trade, Milan, Florence, Genoa and Marseilles followed suit.⁷¹

In the modern context, the first International Sanitary Conference was held in Paris in 1851. An ongoing cholera epidemic made the potential for an international legal health framework timely. The convention brought together representatives from 12 European states, each country being represented by a medical doctor and a diplomat, an early example of close cooperation between the health and foreign-policy communities. The conference did not, however, prove to be a success. It lasted a full six months and failed to achieve its objective of producing an international agreement to halt the spread of the disease, principally due to ongoing differences in opinion concerning how and by whom cholera was being transmitted across Europe.⁷² It must be pointed out that at the time the fact that bacteria, viruses and other micro-organisms were responsible for the cause of disease and that the concomitant prevention of their transmission limited the spread of epidemic proportions, had not yet been established. It was only in 1876 that Robert Koch established that a rod-like organism – the anthrax bacillus – was the cause of the disease,⁷³ leading on to the breakthroughs in the understanding of infectious disease that followed, culminating with the discovery of penicillin as the first bactericide by in

⁷¹ Rushton and Youde, *Routledge Handbook of Global Health Security*, 189–91.

⁷² Rushton and Youde, 192–94.

⁷³ Blevins and Bronze, 'Robert Koch and the "Golden Age" of Bacteriology'.

1928 by Alexander Fleming. This contributed greatly to a reduction in mortality from minor infections and injuries, both in civilian cases and throughout the course of the Second World War.⁷⁴ The end of the Second World War saw a modification in the approach of the Allies to global health governance, and as described earlier led to the formation of a body independent of the UN devoted solely to global health oversight. In 1948, when the WHO Constitution was ratified, the primary aim of the newly formed organisation was the prevention of the spread of disease. The WHO is the overarching body tasked to oversee global health and set norms within the context of health and human well-being. Formed in 1946 following the establishment of the United Nations⁷⁵, it was stated, amongst other principles, in its founding constitution that,

“The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest co-operation of individuals and States.” Furthermore, the next principle goes on: *“The achievement of any State in the promotion and protection of health is of value to all.”*⁷⁶

The concepts of health and security are inextricably connected at the very genesis of the WHO. The extent to which the WHO can recommend or seek to have a meaningful impact on those areas of health that are affected by other dimensions -such as security - is debatable. As an example, malnutrition is a leading cause of death and retarded development in underprivileged societies, but the WHO cannot forward and recommend policies that propose interventions or modification in the economic arena of domestic politics. The WHO is composed of three separate bodies, (i) the World Health Assembly (WHA) – the WHA is to the WHO what the

⁷⁴ Ligon, ‘Penicillin’.

⁷⁵ The Constitution was adopted by the International Health Conference held in New York from 19 June to 22 July 1946, signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., 2, 100), and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

⁷⁶ ‘Constitution of the World Health Organisation’.

UN General Assembly is to the UN. Composed solely of member states, ultimate authority resides with the WHA when it comes to budgetary affairs and policy, (ii) the Executive Board (EB) – composed of technicians appointed by the MS, it oversees the operations and institutional affairs of the WHO, and (iii) a secretariat including the director-general (DG). The secretariat executes the policies dictated by the WHA. The majority of employees are technical experts that implement the directives emanating from the policy organs of the WHO.^{77,78}

The role of the WHO in global health governance will be expanded upon further on in this section; prior to that a brief background on the development of global health systems is necessary.

In 1951 the fourth WHA was held, and the latest International Sanitary Regulations (ISR) issued. The 1951 regulations identified six quarantinable diseases that had to be reported to the WHO because they were highly contagious, caused widespread human suffering, and were disrupting international trade. In 1969, when the ISR were revised and renamed the International Health Regulations, the scope was reduced to four diseases; in 1981, following the successful eradication of smallpox, the list was reduced yet again, to only three: cholera, plague, and yellow fever. At this point the driving force behind the WHO was still the containment and elimination of communicable disease. In the decades that followed, this began to transmute from a mass population centred approach to one more narrowly focused on individual needs and rights.

The UN Human Development Report in 1994 was a watershed statement in multiple dimensions. For the first time health and individual human integrity were linked.⁷⁹ The concept of human security was created in seven areas, with health being one of them. The evolution, or devolution, of the security of the state to that of the individual was not an instantaneous event

⁷⁷ Kamradt-Scott, *Managing Global Health Security*.

⁷⁸ McInnes, *The Transformation of Global Health Governance*.

⁷⁹ United Nations, *Human Development Report 1994*.

but rather one precipitated by the UNDP⁸⁰. The late 1970's and 80's had witnessed Le Troisième Monde and the Brandt Report, with the North-South divide being ideated and the Club of Rome Group and *The Limits of Growth*.⁸¹ The philosophical development of a notion of the need for equality and equitable resource distribution to be reduced, or rather elevated, to the individual level - as opposed to the anarchical and unstable sovereign states – grew out of these visualisations of society and were crystallised in the 1994 UNDP HDR based primarily on the influence of Mohamed Ul Haq who argued that the world is entering “*a new era of human security*” and “*the entire concept of security will change-and change dramatically*”.⁸² The UN Commission on Human Security in 2003 provided a brief but powerful statement with

*“Good health is both essential and instrumental to achieving human security.”*⁸³

In May 2005, a revised version of the ISR was endorsed by the 58th WHA.⁸⁴ In doing so, the WHA formalised a new set of understandings about the behaviour expected of states and other international actors in the event of an outbreak (and, indeed, the measures states would have to put in place in preparation for future outbreaks). The new regulations entered into force on June 15, 2007, and since then, discussed further on in this chapter, the institutionalisation of these new norms— both in terms of states’ willingness and their capacity to comply—has remained an ongoing (and highly politicised) process. The evolution of the role of the WHO in global health is concisely and accurately illustrated in the Table 2.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Shinoda, ‘The Concept of Human Security: Historical and Theoretical Implications’.

⁸¹ Fukuda-Parr and Messineo, ‘Human Security: A Critical Review of the Literature’.

⁸² Bajpai, ‘The Idea of Human Security’.

⁸³ Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*, 96.

⁸⁴ ‘Revision of the International Health Regulations - 58th World Health Assembly’.

⁸⁵ Kickbusch and Ivanova, ‘The History and Evolution of Global Health Diplomacy’, 17.

Table 2 - WHO policies by decade⁸⁶

Decade	Main thrust of policy
1950's	Major diseases
1960's	Liberation of former colonies—health manpower development
1970's	Eradication of smallpox, new issues such as family planning
1980's	Primary health care WHO–UNICEF—Health for All— Equity cooperation
1990's	Investment in health, poverty eradication
2000's	Common health security and health as a global public good

2.2. Modern Healthcare Governance

In modern times the concept of global health has taken on a new meaning. The post-WW2 prescient vision of David Mitrany⁸⁷ to comprehend that health could have a dual role as the provider of a common good and a unifying role – as opposed to the previous nationalistic and defensive approach to healthcare issues, has come to fruition.⁸⁸ This has led to the development of Health Diplomacy and its primary aims of furthering the national interest through healthcare issues – security from bioterror and readiness for reaction to mass disease and fostering equity and equality in global healthcare and health standards by using diplomacy to disseminate care and knowledge in a global context.⁸⁹ The WHO, EU bodies, Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières are just a few of the non-state actors that have come to influence the global health

⁸⁶ Adapted from Kickbusch and Ivanova, 17.

⁸⁷ David Mitrany was instrumental in developing the concept of utilising healthcare initiatives to promote intertaional unity and global peace. He published *Territorial, ideological, or functional organization?* (1942) and *A Working Peace System* (1943). His driving aim was to ensure that a new post-war global health organ would not be handicapped by structural rigidity and inflexibility. His suggestions were incorporated into the WHO Constitution in 1946.

⁸⁸ Mitrany, 'The Functional Approach to World Organization'.

⁸⁹ Kamradt-Scott, *Managing Global Health Security*, 22–43.

scenario in contemporary international relations. The rearrangement of the World Order after the disintegration of the Soviet Union has not been confined to the political arena and power politics in the strict sense and has now come to encompass the cross-disciplinary dimension of diplomacy and security.

The dimension of health was impacted and concurrent developments in the academic evaluation of IR led to an expansion of consideration of the role of health in diplomatic circles. Kickbusch and Liu propose that health issues can be evaluated on the basis and in the context of, several dimensions, Table 3.⁹⁰

Table 3 - Seven dimensions of health diplomacy⁹¹

Seven dimensions of global health diplomacy
Negotiating to promote health in the face of other interests
Establishing new governance mechanisms in support of health
Creating alliances in support of health outcomes
Building and managing donor and stakeholder relations
Responding to public health crises
Improving relations between countries through health
Contributing to peace and security

⁹⁰ Kickbusch and Berger, 'Global Health Diplomacy'; Kickbusch and Liu, 'Global Health Diplomacy—Reconstructing Power and Governance'.

⁹¹ Adapted from Kickbusch and Liu, 'Global Health Diplomacy—Reconstructing Power and Governance', 2157.

2.3. Global Health Governance

Health governance has developed into Global Health Governance, a change in global institutions that can be construed as a product of neo-liberalist policies that have been adapted to a global reality. The failure of both states and non-state actors to establish, disseminate and enforce international health regulations has led to the realisation that neo-liberal policies for the health domain need to be embedded and institutionalised for them to obtain effective legitimacy and efficiency.⁹² McInnes makes the point that GHG is a natural development emanating from globalisation, that already established institutions are empowered with renewed and novel mandates and that GHG is not restricted to the health dimension but has crossed over into the realm of politics, IR, and security.⁹³

The latter point has been effectively and clearly highlighted by the SARS (2003), Ebola (2014), Covid-19 (2019) pandemics. The WHO, as self-appointed norm entrepreneur, issued edicts and declarations on the Pandemic. States, however, do not necessarily respond in a uniform manner. As will be demonstrated later, once Covid-19 emerged and in the absence of solidly embedded and quasi-universal acceptance of the status of the WHO as a component of a system based on principles of International Law, several states prioritised what they considered to be their overriding national interest at the time. The roots of this patchwork of reactions can be traced to the haphazard development of international health governance and Global Health Diplomacy (GHD) - which is Health Diplomacy in a global context.⁹⁴

⁹² Although not within the scope of this dissertation, a look at the conceptual frameworks governing the adoption and utilisation of innovations is relevant here. The 'invention' or formation of a 'norm' and its formal adoption is not sufficient to witness its effect. Effective impact is only observed upon user utilisation, which in this case necessitates the embedding of norms in the bureaucratic processes of national and supra-national organisations. See Davis, F. D., Bagozzi, R. P., & Warshaw, P. R. (1989). User Acceptance of Computer Technology: A Comparison of Two Theoretical Models. *Management Science* (35) and Rogers, E. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovations* (Fifth edit). New York: Free Press.

⁹³ McInnes, *The Transformation of Global Health Governance*, 11.

⁹⁴ Brown et al., 'Applied Global Health Diplomacy: Profile of Health Diplomats Accredited to the United States and Foreign Governments'.

The advent of health issues with the potential to impact the globe, based on the transmission of disease through a greater turnover of humankind circumnavigating the earth, and the emergence of highly infectious and pathogenic microbes has propelled GHD to the priority lists of IR in current times. This is coupled to the additional burden on global health of non-communicable disease, brought about by the deviation of traditional, healthy diets to ones based on refined sugars and carbohydrates. This has caused an upsurge in obesity rates and concomitantly a rise in the incidence of diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and certain types of cancers. The latter have been increased in frequency by novel chemicals and manufacturing methods that have given rise to hitherto unknown carcinogenic compounds.⁹⁵ Hence, GHD has played a more significant role in recent years, and, as the next section will clarify, is the tool utilised by states to leverage their relative strengths in situations of health crises.

2.3.1. Health as a Soft Power Tool

Is it moral? Must as in other scenarios, the Great Powers dominate and promote their self-interest over global well-being? Or does health provide us with a different balance of power – to play on old analogies? How does health policy and associated diplomacy reach the foreign policy agendas of nations? To what extent does a domestic policy approach to health dictate one pursued at an international level?

The pandemic has reawakened the above questions. A term – vaccine diplomacy – has been re-appropriated, in the context of Covid-19. The term health diplomacy had been in use since the 1970's when the Soviet Union had proposed and engaged in a campaign with the US to eradicate smallpox. This then evolved from medical diplomacy to global health and enabled

⁹⁵ Fidler, 'Reflections on the Revolution in Health and Foreign Policy'.

the rise of the WHO as prime actor in healthcare crises in 2003, when it took the lead in securitising the SARS Pandemic.⁹⁶ Vaccine diplomacy was then a natural offshoot.

The Pandemic provided the more privileged states with an opportunity to construct a narrative to shape their legitimacy within the global health governance structure. Concurrently it allowed them to project their national identity and showcase effective and decisive executive action. Not all states or entities grasped the opportunity with the same foresight or alacrity. China provided the world with a narrative based on emphasis on scientific and technological prowess, donated vaccines to states in need, and supplied Personal Protective Equipment and funds. Huawei offered communications support whilst the official line prioritised gift giving and efficiency of state.⁹⁷ The US adopted the opposite approach and passed up on the opportunity to influence global politics through healthcare interventions and leadership. Under President Trump it reduced WHO contributions, initially refused to acknowledge the severity of the virus, reacted sluggishly and insufficiently to the spread of Covid-19 and withdrew into a nationalistic shell.⁹⁸ The EU, despite being the poster child for liberal integration and democratic peace in Europe, did not react in accordance to its image. Member states looked inwards, closed borders and shunned Third Country Nationals (TCN); the focus was on singular, national responses, rather than a unified and concerted effort. Only once Russian overtures to countries on its Balkan flank became an apparent security threat, through overt Russian vaccine and Covid-19 related diplomacy, did the EU begin to address the issue in a holistic manner.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ The unilateral action of the Director-general, Gro Harlem Brundtland in pushing the WHO to proclaim the SARS pandemic a global concern catapulted the WHO to the forefront of the securitisation of the virus. In one fell swoop, the Director-general both securitised and set the norms for member states to follow. Lacking any formal appointment to the role of global securitiser -as it may be – the WHO has since taken the lead in evaluating the threat caused by specific pathogens and issuing international guidelines accordingly. This Napoleonic attitude has been questioned by the US, particularly during the Trump administration, and the WHO has been accused of favouring Chinese interests. In fairness to the US, Chinese influence within WHO has increased in direct proportion to the decrease in US engagement and funding contributions. See McInnes, Colin. *The Transformation of Global Health Governance*. Palgrave Pivot. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.

⁹⁷ Lee, 'Vaccine Diplomacy'.

⁹⁸ 'Vaccine Diplomacy'.

⁹⁹ Manfredi-Sánchez, 'Vaccine (Public) Diplomacy'.

The Pandemic amplified the role and proliferation of multiple actors in GHG and disease framing. Socially constructed realities positioned the coronavirus as a health threat and as a local, national, or global concern depending on the actors securitising the issue.

The evolution of GHG and GHD catapulted the WHO to the forefront of the mobilisation of global resources in the fight against the Pandemic. The next Chapter discusses how the health and security concerns facing the WHO led it to take the lead and effectively set off a global ‘securitisation’ which legitimised – or provided justification for - unspecified and unlimited measures in its members states, including Malta. Prior to this, a brief overview of the Maltese healthcare system is next in Section 2.4.

2.4. Local Health Governance

The healthcare system on the island is comprehensive and indiscriminatory. Healthcare in Malta is provided within two distinct settings – tertiary or hospital care and community care. All contributors to the state National Insurance system are entitled to free emergency treatment and surgery at health centres and the main acute hospital, Mater Dei. Elective surgery is also free, with waiting times dependent on the severity of the condition.¹⁰⁰

“The health system in Malta consists of a public sector, which is free at the point of service and provides a comprehensive basket of health services for all its citizens, and a private sector, which accounts for a third of total health expenditure and provides the majority of primary care. Maltese citizens enjoy one of the highest life expectancies in Europe.”

The health system is highly centralised, with all services revolving around and complementing the state system. The key professional actor within the latter is the Superintendent of Public

¹⁰⁰ Azzopardi-Muscat, Buttigieg, and Calleja, ‘Health Systems in Transition’.

Health (SPH), who is the head of the Directorate for Health Regulation, responsible for regulatory oversight both within the state system and the national context. The Minister for Health (MFH) wields political power in this sector, with a good measure of professional experience, as most holders of this position have been eminent members of the local medical community. Ultimate executive authority resides with the Head of Government, the Prime Minister.

As can be deduced from Figure 5, the regulatory bodies occupy a position that places them in legal limbo; whilst entrusted with supervising the actions of the professions they oversee, their legal powers are severely curtailed, and they do not have the capacity or remit to intervene directly in situations where the executive may be over-reaching or not abiding to traditionally established parameters of competence. Enforcement resides within the executive arm of government with no direct link to the regulatory bodies.¹⁰¹

In instances of misalignment between HCPs and the government, it is the trade union representatives of the respective professions that enter the scene and apply the appropriate pressure on the state to respect and accommodate professional opinion and practice, rather than the respective professional councils. This tends to lead to an adversarial tone to discussion, as opposed to one attuned to mutual advancement.

Local state healthcare is aligned with practices and recommendations issued by the WHO, which, as been already stated, does not wield direct executive power but sets global standards that states bind themselves to observe. Malta is a member of the WHO, having attained full member status.

¹⁰¹ This anomaly is in place to prevent legal prejudice by having judge, jury, and executioner within the same entity. It, however, results in an unseemly delay and ineffectual process of delivering decisive and timely control.

In the event of an emergency, the SPH is endowed with the responsibility of co-ordinating responses to health issue, under the remit of the Ministry of Health as the lead authority.¹⁰²

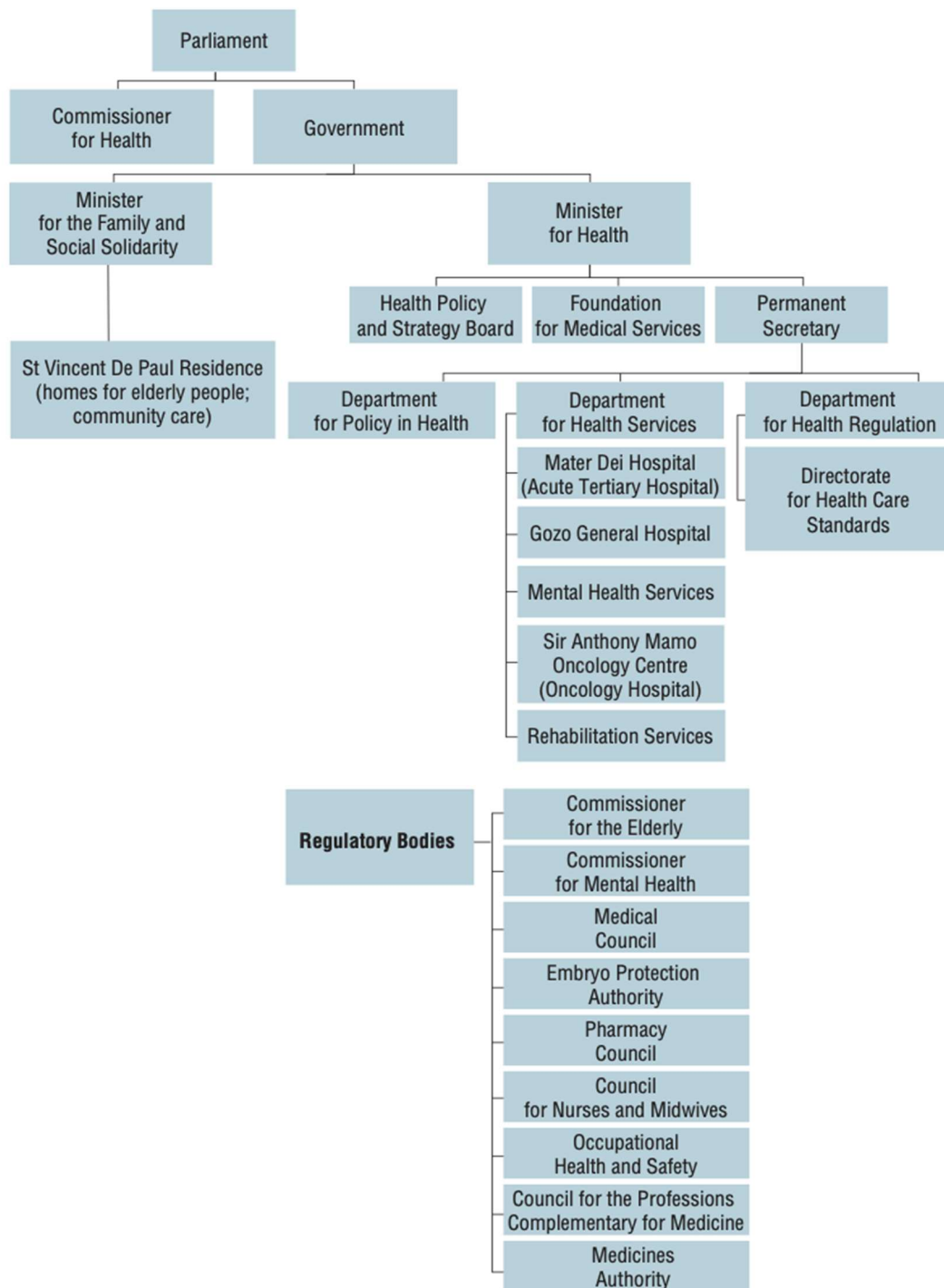


Figure 5 - Political and executive structure of the Maltese healthcare system¹⁰³

¹⁰² Waitzberg et al., 'Early Health System Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Mediterranean Countries: A Tale of Successes and Challenges', 467.

¹⁰³ Extracted from Azzopardi-Muscat, Buttigieg, and Calleja, 'Health Systems in Transition'.

Chapter Three - The Securitisation of Health Issues

Health governance and securitisation – the next step is marrying the two areas so far dealt with in this review. The two have traditionally been considered as important but separate dimensions. The metric for security was the maintenance of territorial integrity and health was the domain of the healthcare professions. Health issues and foreign policy were not a traditional mix. Global cooperation has changed this view in recent decades. The manner in which the WHO and its members states, propelled by civil society and NGOs, have approached health related issues has engendered an elevation of these dimensions. This process of constructing a subjective need for attention and the devotion of resources to health is derived from the general shift in the interpretation of state and national needs in the Western World, from a realist perspective to one centred on human rights and security.¹⁰⁴

This shift in the interpretation of the subjective import of health in relation to the individual and state dynamic has its roots in the integral role that health plays in the mundane but daily functioning of societal interactions. A pioneer in the field of the concept of the Global Political Economy (GPE), Susan Strange can be paraphrased as follows “*The political and the economic are inextricably linked.*”¹⁰⁵ The surge in the global economy and the globalisation of humanity has further enmeshed the dimensions of health and security, with the transmission of communicable disease facilitated by the ease of modern travel and the migration of workers to foreign lands.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Fukuda-Parr and Messineo, ‘Human Security: A Critical Review of the Literature’; Bajpai, ‘The Idea of Human Security’.

¹⁰⁵ She presciently selects the security system centred around the Westphalian model of sovereignty and the globalisation of the world economy in the US model as primary dangers to global stability and highlights the inequalities in wealth distribution and the plundering of the global South to the detriment of its native-born citizens. Moreover, she predicts that nationalism and state-specific agendas will evolve if the status quo is maintained. Forty years on, Professor Strange can be described as having drawn the correct assumptions, at least in broad terms, when one analysis the global reaction to the Pandemic. See Strange, Susan. ‘The Global Political Economy, 1959-1984’, 267-283.

¹⁰⁶ Kaunert, Leonard, and Wertman, ‘Securitization of COVID-19 as a Security Norm’, 3.

The health of a population is linked to economic progress in a linear manner. Below average health outcomes equate to an inefficient and weak workforce, dragging down the economy and reducing political power - both domestically and in interstate relations. This evolution has led to a traditionally domestic concern entering the realm of IR – trade, diplomacy, foreign and security policy. A dimension associated with low politics – standards of living and Quality of Life (QOL) has now entered that of high politics – equating economic stability and power with peace and security in the national and international planes. Thus, in a short period of time – metaphorically speaking, a few decades – there has been a transition to *“the centrality of security to contemporary global health and its governance.”*¹⁰⁷

*“Efforts to approach public health challenges through security concepts have prevailed in a way that constitutes a transformative development for public health governance.”*¹⁰⁸

Or so argues David Fidler. Before furthering the discussion on the securitisation of health, it is necessary to visit the idea of the formation of a ‘norm’ or practice and how this has evolved in the context of healthcare governance. David Mitrany, one of the forces behind the founding of the WHO, had encapsulated the wishes and the paradoxical results of those same aims when cautioning against building too rigid a framework or too flaccid an enforcement procedure.

“The main question is - would some kind of international federation under present conditions strengthen the trend for material integration, so as to make of it a general and positive foundation for peace? A federation comes into being' for certain specific ends, and for those only. A federation unites, but it also restricts. It rests on a rigid division of powers and functions

¹⁰⁷ McInnes, ‘National Security and Global Health Governance’, 43.

¹⁰⁸ Fidler, ‘The Challenges of Global Health Governance’, 5.

between territorial authorities which have equal status; and that division is usually and necessarily laid down in a written constitution provided with an armoury of safeguards against its being lightly tampered with."¹⁰⁹

In this brief passage, Mitrany neatly addresses the major advantages and flaws of an organisation such as the WHO – unity of purpose, the issue of supra-national sovereignty and the rigidity that a constitution demands together with the necessity to enforce this. He clearly espouses the institutional approach to liberalism, to be later championed by Keohane and others with

*"If Governments have the welfare of their own peoples at heart, they could let such organizations get to work; and if the organizations are successful and their number grows, world government will gradually evolve through their performance."*¹¹⁰

In this last quote, he pre-empts the need for the development, establishment and adoption of international norms that would allow a global health organisation to 'lord' over the world's wellbeing. It is here that it is necessary to 'marry' two concepts of the literature. Securitisation theory has proposed a 'speech act' or securitising proposal – it, however, does not provide a convincing theory for how this act is accepted and/or stimulates further action by the audience and/or the securitiser themselves. Hence the adoption of novel or innovative behaviour needs to be evaluated, in the context of the securitisation of an issue. Once this behaviour can be construed as normal practice and/or is adopted by the majority of the population or entities

¹⁰⁹ Mitrany, 'The Functional Approach to World Organization', 352.

¹¹⁰ Mitrany, 358.

involved, then one can state that a norm has been established. This leads on to the next discussion on the manner of evolution of such norms.

3.1. Development of a Norm

Finnemore and Sikkink propose three steps for the life cycle of such a norm: emergence, acceptance – cascade and internalisation. This process leads to socially constructed norms or accepted patterns of behaviour. These norms can be further classified as regulative norms or constitutive norms.¹¹¹

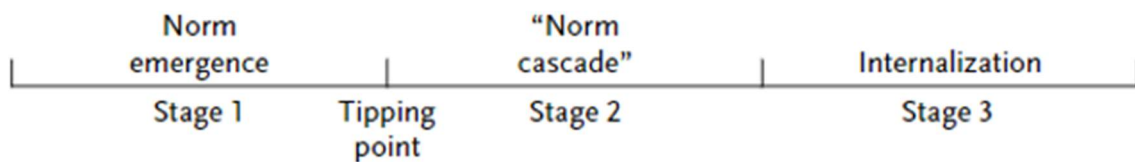


Figure 6 – The stages of norm development¹¹²

	Stage 1 Norm emergence	Stage 2 Norm cascade	Stage 3 Internalization
<i>Actors</i>	Norm entrepreneurs with organizational platforms	States, international organizations, networks	Law, professions, bureaucracy
<i>Motives</i>	Altruism, empathy, ideational, commitment	Legitimacy, reputation, esteem	Conformity
<i>Dominant mechanisms</i>	Persuasion	Socialization, institutionalization, demonstration	Habit, institutionalization

Figure 7 - Actors, motives, and mechanisms in norm development¹¹³

¹¹¹ Finnemore and Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change'.

¹¹² © MIT, extracted from Finnemore and Sikkink.

¹¹³ © MIT, extracted from Finnemore and Sikkink.

As Figures 6 and 7 suggest, any behaviour that is repeated in a consistent and reproducible manner can, in time, be accepted as normal practice. This is not the case in all forms of practice and the process is not linear or moves at a constant pace. This rationale can be transposed to the WHO and its role as a norm setter and global securitiser in the arena of infectious disease and threats to world health. At this point, one can discern a major issue, mentioned previously and to be repeated later, with the process of ‘norm’ formation with respect to the WHO and its declarations. In Figure 7, Stage 3 or internalisation of the norm must occur; this involves habit and institutionalisation. The latter is a concern already highlighted and the consequence of the lack of an overarching authority for the global state system that could enforce the integration and practice of a norm.

This ‘norm’ setting role of the WHO has been developed over the last two decades. With the changing IR landscape – the wave of globalisation, both economic and human – and the fall of the USSR and the rise of terrorist organisations – novel, health-related threats began to arise. HIV-AIDS was the first modern-day disease to be declared an issue of security concern by the UNSC in 2000 and by the UNGA in June 2001 in a Special Session.¹¹⁴ Several academics have proposed the WHO as the institution endowed with the greatest influence in global emergency situations.

¹¹⁴ McInnes, ‘National Security and Global Health Governance’, 43.

3.2. The Securitisation of Covid-19

This section provides an overview of the current work on the Pandemic in the context of it being framed as a threat to public health and state security and the consequent reactions to this evaluation. The manner of the introduction of extraordinary measures at a global, regional, and national level is analysed, with the role played by the leading global institution – the WHO – in the securitisation of Covid-19 highlighted as a primary variable in the process.

3.2.1. *An Advisory, Norm Setting, or a Securitising Role?*

The initial *blessing* for the classification of the Pandemic as an event of global concern emanated from the WHO. The WHO acted as the global referee in determining when and how to securitise the Pandemic. This instantly elevated the issue to the level of high politics. In its role as an authority and entity of high-standing, the WHO designated the Pandemic as constituting an existential threat to the society, or in this instance the global community, and the receiving audience accepted this designation, implicitly securitising the issue. In securitisation theory, the securitising actor touts the clear and present danger posed by the referent object to the community as the rationale for extraordinary measures to be taken to combat the danger posed by a threat. Hence the pronouncements by the WHO were significant to all regional groupings and unitary states as they provided the moral, if not the legal basis, for the groupings' and component states' consequent reactions to the Pandemic. Direction was expected from the WHO, ever since when Brundtland as Director General had taken the lead in the 2003 SARS pandemic in making the call to classify a disease or health issue as one of global concern and pandemic proportions.

This *de facto* global refereeing status granted the Pandemic emergency status and effectively laid the ground for its securitisation on a global level once declared. What WHO did not and

could not do, was dictate consistent and equitable measures on a global scale. In the absence of a resolution by the United Nations Security Council which would be binding under international law, dictates from the WHO simply have the status of recommendations.

*“The initial instinctive reaction to the COVID-19 crisis by most countries was to look inwards and act alone.”*¹¹⁵

In this instance the WHO was both acting on a norm – when declaring the Pandemic to be one of global concern – and creating norms – by suggesting actions to be taken by member states.¹¹⁶ The theme that has run through the brief overview of the WHO in its context as a global health norm setter resurfaces once again; the ideals on which the organisation is based are admirable and the work it has overseen since its founding, even more so. Nevertheless, the Pandemic has crudely reopened and laid bare the glaring fault line in its structure – it may be considered to be a powerless organ when the adherence to, and enforcement of, accepted norms is necessary. Despite this, as stated earlier, the WHO declaration of the status of Covid-19 as a global pandemic was the signal for numerous countries to enact extraordinary measures and restrictions at a societal level. This is clearly illustrated in Figure 8.

¹¹⁵ Wemer, ‘What the World Can Learn from Regional Responses to COVID-19’.

¹¹⁶ Kaunert, Leonard, and Wertman, ‘Securitization of COVID-19 as a Security Norm’, 1.

Threat

- *Covid-19*

Securitisers

- *Political executive & National Health Institutions, HCPs*

Norm setter

- *WHO*

Audience

- *Public*

Exceptionalism

- *Restrictive measures*

Figure 8 - The role of the WHO in the securitisation of Covid-19¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ By author.

3.2.2. *Israel*

The Israeli experience was dominated by the employment of the military in dealing with the Pandemic, even in areas where other elements of the Israeli state resources could have been directed. Levy draws attention to the fact that, although the army retains considerable authority and resources and is imbued with innate discipline and efficiency of execution, its immediate legitimisation by the public as the appropriate agent of the state was worrying. He argues that the securitisation of Covid-19 allowed the entry of the military into the frame, and that from then on, the actual presence of the military further securitised the issue in the eyes of the people. Peri supports this by suggesting that amongst other factors, the semi-permanent state of war prevalent in Israel, the citizen component of the army and a weak civilian bureaucracy contributed to this acceptance.¹¹⁸ It appears that the Israeli army utilised its role in monitoring social media for viral spread to identify Israeli citizens ostensibly cooperating with Palestinian terrorists, in breach of their initial task and deployment. PM Netanyahu had justified the military intervention by stating that Israel was in '*a war against an invisible enemy*' and framing the issue as one requiring securitisation. The Pandemic was put in the agenda of the National Security Council via unilateral action on the part of the PM; the securitisation of Covid-19 was the result of a deliberate political act, with little speech act to the audience, which was not consulted prior to this elevation. This is in contrast to the Maltese case, where the PM allowed for a gradual build-up of tone and threat, using the healthcare professionals as support and justification, before securitising and legitimising extraordinary measures. In addition, the military had no visible role in dealing with the Pandemic, with pride of place given to the multiple healthcare professions involved in frontline action.

Levy develops his argument further, positing that the Israeli political elite 'enemised' the public, viewing it as a threat itself because "*The public are, in fact, the problem: they panic*

¹¹⁸ Levy, 'The People's Army "Enemising" the People: The COVID-19 Case of Israel', 105.

buy, depriving the vulnerable of essentials from toiletries to food and medicine; they socialise; they party; they travel; they put others and themselves at risk. People are the vector for the spread of the virus when left to their own devices."¹¹⁹ Although the public was not 'enemised' at any point throughout the securitisation period in Malta, the MFH did allude to public behaviour that could pose a risk when stating that *"BBQs, parties, and dinners are still dangerous"*¹²⁰

In the Israeli instance, securitisation became a circular argument with the presence of the military and a weak democratic structure – at this time at least – further reinforcing the security discourse and actions of the state.

3.2.3. Greece

Dimari and Papadakis adopted Floyd's Just Securitisation as a framework for the analysis of the process in Greece. Dimari, in a separate and previous paper, argues in agreement with Buzan and Aradau, that securitisation is a negative undertaking and can prove to be detrimental to democracy. The authors propose an amended version of Floyd's JST, depicted in Figure 9. The dangers of Floyd's JST¹²¹ are highlighted by Dimari, are that it can take a prescriptive form and not just a normative one. This would inherently encourage the securitisation of issues which might never ascend to the realm of high politics in the absence of a framework to do so. This rationale allows a parallelism to the Foucauldian interpretation of the security-minded state and the self-fulfilling security searching aim of bureaucratic security systems and organisations. Whilst this might not necessarily lead to the institutionalised security paranoia that pervades the Paris School, it is a valid point.

¹¹⁹ Chandler, quoted in Levy, 117.

¹²⁰ 'Some Shops to Re-Open, Malta-Gozo Travel to Resume; Masks in Public Places Now Mandatory'.

¹²¹ See page 30 of this dissertation for more on Floyd and JST.

Part	Criteria
Just initiation of securitization	<p>There must be an objective existential threat to a referent object, a danger with a sufficiently high probability to threaten the survival or the essential character of political or social order, an ecosystem, a species, an individual or human beings as a group</p> <p>Referent objects are entitled to defend themselves/are eligible for defensive assistance in case they are morally justifiable [.....]. Human beings are justifiable referent objects by virtue of being intrinsically valuable</p> <p>The right intention for securitization is the just cause_ Securitizing actors must be sincere in their intention to protect the referent object they themselves identified and declared</p> <p>The expected good gained from securitization must be greater than the expected harm from securitization; where the only relevant good is the good specified in the just cause</p> <p>Securitization must have a reasonable chance of success, whereby the chances of achieving the just cause must be judged greater than those of alternatives to securitizing</p>
Just conduct in securitization	<p>The security measures used must be appropriate and should aim to only address the objective existential threat that occasions securitization</p> <p>The security measures used must be judged effective in dealing with the threat. They should aim to cause, or risk, the least amount of overall harm possible; and do less harm to the referent object than would otherwise be caused if securitization was abandoned</p> <p>Executors of securitization must respect a limited number of relevant human rights in the execution of securitization</p>
Just termination of securitization	<p>Desecuritization of just securitization must occur when the initial and related new objective existential threats have been neutralized, whereas desecuritization of unjust securitization must occur immediately</p> <p>Desecuritization should ideally be publically declared_ and corresponding security language and security measures should be terminated with immediate effect</p> <p>In order to avoid renewed and/or reactionary securitization, desecuritizing actors should undertake context-specific restorative measures</p>

Figure 9 - Criteria for Just Securitisation¹²²

The authors applied Floyd's JST framework to the Greek securitisation of Covid-19 and concluded that it was 'just', as defined by her parameters. The threat was existential, the steps taken were in proportion to the threat posed by the virus, and not excessive or overly limiting in nature and were reversed as soon as was possible without endangering the health of the Greek population.¹²³

¹²² Extracted from Dimari and Papadakis, 'The Securitization of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Greece: A Just or Unjust Securitization?', 5.

¹²³ Dimari and Papadakis, 17.

3.2.4. France

The pandemic hit France hard. It was unprepared and a nationwide lockdown was announced on the 16th of March 2020. President Macron delivered a speech justifying exceptional measures and securitising Covid-19 at a macro level, repeating “*nous sommes en guerre*”¹²⁴ six times, effectively opening and closing the debate on whether the threat was existential or not for the Fifth Republic.¹²⁵ The state of emergency and exceptionalism was the first time it was declared in French history; the transfer of absolute power to the executive, bypassing the legislative arm of the democratic structures in France was significant. The state of health emergency gave the executive the right to rule by decree and reduce parliamentary scrutiny to the level of a rubber stamp and led to fears by the French deputies and public that,

*“The normal regime of democracy has become the exception and the regime of exception the norm”*¹²⁶

As in Malta, the French government was caught in a securitising dilemma of what to prioritise – health, the economy, education? This is well illustrated by President Macron in November 2020 when he introduced the rationale for a de-securitisation of the Pandemic following a second lockdown,

“[we must] save as many lives as possible, contain the epidemic, all the while taking into account ... other sick people, isolation of certain people, our economy, and what is part of our life: education, culture, sport, and our way of life”.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ We are at war – in French.

¹²⁵ Yang, “‘We Are at War’: Securitisation, Legitimation and COVID-19 Pandemic Politics in France’, 8.

¹²⁶ Slama, cited in Yang, 11.

¹²⁷ Macron, cited in Yang, 13.

The French solution to this dilemma was a ‘transitional regime’, which retained some of the exceptional power of the executive but removed the formal state of emergency. Opposed by the French Assembly, it was justified by the President as being necessary to avoid a sudden return to ‘normality’ and a Covid-19 rebound wave if this exit from extraordinary measures were not gradually staged.¹²⁸

3.2.5. Sweden

Sweden was an outlier in the context of both the securitisation of the Pandemic and the reaction of the state organs to it. In contrast to the great majority of European countries, mandatory containment measures were not introduced. The reasons for this can be broadly attributed to the Swedish desire to adhere rigorously to the ‘rule book’ and not introduce authoritarian measures, a socially ingrained culture of individual responsibility, the reluctance of the executive to overreach and expand its powers in this ‘opportune’ moment and a political culture based on the dualism of the state executive and the independent specialist organs of the state. The Swedish PM did not make any securitising Speech Acts and the most powerful statement was restricted to,

*“Every person now has to mentally prepare for what awaits. We have a general spread of [Covid-19] in Sweden. Life, health, and jobs are threatened. More will become sick, more will be forced to say their final farewell to a loved one. The only way to cope with this is to face the crisis as a society in which everyone takes responsibility for themselves, for each other, and for our country.”*¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Oswald et al., *The Pandemic of Argumentation*, vol. 43, chap. 11.

¹²⁹ Swedish PM Löfven, cited in Larsson, ‘The Swedish Covid-19 Strategy and Voluntary Compliance’, 240.

Visibility on a daily basis was limited to the head of the Public Health service and political interference and comment kept to a minimum. The Swedish constitution does not accommodate unilateral executive action in the event of public emergencies, and this led to a slow reaction of the legislature to enact appropriate legislation. Hence the reaction of the executive was perceived to be inadequate and not resolute or timely enough. Despite the existential security threat, the Swedish executive chose to remain within the constraints of the legal structures provided by the constitution and did not canvas parliament for alternative or novel legal instruments until January 2021 when a Pandemic Law governing public assembly and gatherings was enacted.¹³⁰

3.2.6. Regional groupings

The Pandemic was a test for the credibility and robustness of regional organisations and the concept of regionalism as one enhancing state and human security. On paper, the potential for a unified, consistent, and equitable reaction was in place, with the oversight of a global health organisation endowed with the authority and credibility of the WHO. The manner in which regional organisations or structures reacted to the Pandemic was related both to the extent of the integrative process and the nature of regional dynamics, and the relative weight given to the declarations by the WHO with respect to the norms to be followed.

¹³⁰ Larsson, 241.

3.2.6.1. The EU

The Pandemic caused shockwaves to run through a tightly integrated regional organisation such as the European Union (EU). States with strong far right and nationalistic undercurrents such as Hungary, Austria, Italy, and Slovakia were amongst the first to seal themselves off, followed by most of Europe.¹³¹ In the words of the EU itself,

*“Intra-Schengen border closures and systematic internal border checks have been implemented in a unilateral, paranoid, ad hoc and uncoordinated fashion.”*¹³²

In defence of the EU, the close legal integration which has required the cession of a measure of national sovereignty, allowed for a relatively common approach once the initial shock had subsided. Vaccine procurement prices were concluded in bulk contracts with manufacturers and a substantial financial recovery plan for member states was set up. Regardless, the general trend in Europe was to circle the wagons – both at national and EU level.

3.2.6.2. The African Union

The African Union co-ordinated efforts by ECOWAS and the West Africa Health Organisation to purchase supplies and keep vital statistics updated, although the knowledge on safety measures transmitted to the public was limited in scope and effect.¹³³

¹³¹ de Melo and Papageorgiou, ‘Regionalism on the Run: ASEAN, EU, AU and MERCOSUR Responses Mid the Covid-19 Crisis’.

¹³² Carrera and Luk, ‘In the Name of COVID-19: An Assessment of the Schengen Internal Border Controls and Travel Restrictions in the EU’.

¹³³ de Melo and Papageorgiou, ‘Regionalism on the Run: ASEAN, EU, AU and MERCOSUR Responses Mid the Covid-19 Crisis’, 61–63.

3.2.6.3. Asia

ASEAN reacted early and set out high level policies; the effectiveness of these at a regional level was hampered by the weak institutional and executive structures within the grouping.¹³⁴

3.2.6.4. South America

MERCOSUR is dominated by Brazil and Argentina – no cohesion at a political level and the Brazilian President’s refusal to take on the Pandemic as a threat to public health ensured that there was no co-operation at inter-state level.

3.2.6.5. The Gulf

The GCC did attempt to adopt common policies with respect to containment and border controls, but the level of co-operation did not extend to a common response on a granular plane.¹³⁵

One can argue that global health would have been worse off had there been no regional integration, albeit at varying levels depending on their location. The value of communication at regional level is a great tool in the field of public health and epidemiology, and this, at a minimum, was evident in several regions, but not on an inter-regional nexus. Current data on infection loci, rates and mortality provide medical specialists with vital reference points that reinforce and support efforts to contain and eradicate communicable disease. Supra-national organisations or blocs such as the G7 and G20 and the WHO are important cogs in a global response to a crisis of the magnitude such as the Pandemic.¹³⁶ However, these organisations or

¹³⁴ de Melo and Papageorgiou, 63.

¹³⁵ Al Awaidy et al., ‘COVID-19 in the Gulf Cooperation Council Member States’.

¹³⁶ Baker et al., ‘COVID-19 and Other Pandemics Require a Coherent Response Strategy’.

informal groupings bring into play the issue of sovereignty and interference in certain areas of perceived sole national concern and it is here that regional organisations appear to have proved their value and their potential. Co-ordinating and executing delicate and extraordinary measures at regional level is less unwieldy than when escalating to the international or global arena. Acharya suggests that disparate interpretations and hence reactions to a supposedly universal norm stem from the perception of the source by the actor, the context of the norm, the agent diffusing the norm and the level of contestation and rebuttal and iteration of the norm itself both by the executor of the norm and the audience experiencing the effect.¹³⁷

3.2.7. Comment

This ‘black swan’¹³⁸ event was, by definition, uncatered for, and executive actors around the world were forced to improvise in order to put forward timely, acceptable and effective reactions. Despite being a transmittable disease – a coronavirus – the Pandemic’s direct and indirect impact was not limited to the health dimension of society. The speed at which it dispersed within local and then global communities, and the apparent unnaturally high mortality rate associated with infection created an atmosphere of fear of the unknown.

Notwithstanding, the elevation of the Pandemic to the level of a disease of global proportions set in motion a chain of events that resembled more the mobilisation of military forces – which in several countries was actually the case – in preparedness for war, rather than the actuation of a plan to deflect, mitigate and treat the effects of communicable disease.¹³⁹ This war-like reaction, evidenced by a few memorable quotes below, further served to define and strengthen a mindset that negatively impacted the potential for regional and global co-operation, as with:

¹³⁷ Acharya, as cited in Kaunert, Leonard, and Wertman, ‘Securitization of COVID-19 as a Security Norm’, 6.

¹³⁸ Taleb, - *The Black Swan. The Impact of the Highly Improbable*.

¹³⁹ Dimari, ‘The Emergence of a New Security Apparatus in Greece’; Levy, ‘The People’s Army “Enemising” the People: The COVID-19 Case of Israel’.

” We have been able to fight this war against Covid-19...”, Prime Minister of Malta, Robert Abela,”¹⁴⁰

*“We are at war,” President of France, Emmanuel Macron.*¹⁴¹

And supported the concept of global and regional unity from Ursula Von der Leyen:

*“We must look out for each other; we must pull each other through this. Because if there is one thing that is more contagious than this virus, it is love and compassion. And in the face of adversity, the people of Europe are showing how strong that can be.”*¹⁴²

This initial reaction to the Pandemic was one grounded in the traditional approach to security; the threat was perceived as having current and future ramifications that could impact national interests and was thus treated as an entity to be guarded against. This conceptualisation led to the visualisation of an *invasion* and the necessity to repel an outsider. It is not surprising that internalisation or an inward-looking perspective was adopted in certain cases, contrary to the present trends in global relations. States’ primary instinct was to revert to nationalistic policies – closing borders and restricting the free movement of both citizens and third-country nationals.¹⁴³

Parallels can be drawn between these three examples of securitisation in other democratic states and the process in Malta. In each of the states, the politics of exceptionalism were justified by war-like rhetoric and swift action. The securitising Speech Acts were executed by the leader of the Executive and implemented without any feedback or accommodation for the reaction of the

¹⁴⁰ Office of the Prime Minister, Malta, ‘Message to the Nation by Prime Minister Robert Abela on His First Hundred Days as Prime Minister’.

¹⁴¹ Mallet, “‘We Are at War’ against Virus, Says Macron’.

¹⁴² Von der Leyen, ‘Full Version - State of the European Union Debate’.

¹⁴³ Fraundorfer and Winn, ‘The Emergence of Post-Westphalian Health Governance during the Covid-19 Pandemic: The European Health Union’.

audience. Both the existential threat (realist perspective) posed by the virus and the norm set by the WHO (liberal institutional norm setting) were leveraged as support by the securitising actors for their exceptionalism. Israel was a clear outlier in that the military was tasked with the execution of extraordinary measures over the appropriately competent state organs; this is an indication of the current political climate in the country whereby the executive appears to be intent on maintain close control of social momentum via structures such as the Israeli Defence Force which grants it direct and vertical hierarchal authority. The military was employed in Greece and France to combat Covid-19, though not in the visible and prominent roles granted to uniformed elite in Israel.

The measure of parliamentary and public discontent with regards to the EM was greatest in France, in following with a national tradition of social activism and protest, whilst not evident in Greece, Israel, or Malta. This was counterbalanced by the sweeping powers granted to the French President by the state of health emergency that was declared at the outset of the Pandemic. In Greece, the measures were not met with public resistance, except for the initial period when confusion reigned over the number of ICU beds available and the capability of the Greek state health system to absorb all cases requiring hospitalisation and intensive care.¹⁴⁴ The Greek experience is further nuanced by an unfortunate nexus between the securitisation of the Pandemic and that of irregular migrants. Dimari posits that the process of elevating Covid-19 to the higher regions of political discourse reenergised the incorrect classification of the issue of irregular migration as a security issue. He argues that the dimensions of individual security and responsibility that formed part of the securitisation of the Pandemic, enabled securitising actors to cross over to the concept of irregular migration and re-securitise this, creating a new security apparatus.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Petsas, cite din Dimari and Papadakis, 'The Securitization of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Greece: A Just or Unjust Securitization?', 15.

¹⁴⁵ Dimari, 'The Emergence of a New Security Apparatus in Greece'.

The Swedish experience is an outlier for an advanced democracy in Europe. A weak executive coupled with the social notion of a weighty individual obligation to society resulted in the state adopting a rule-following rather than rule-breaking approach to dealing with the Pandemic. This does not necessarily signify that the process of securitisation failed in Sweden; rather it may be a sign that instead of adopting a Hobbesian mentality at every sign of potential danger, one might be better advised to consider the alternatives to immediate exceptionalism and a diversion from ordinary democratic processes.¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, the Swedish executive was heavily criticised by the media and opposition for its sluggish and limp reaction, indicating that a measure of decisiveness is always a necessary in public discourse, even if it is to de-securitise rather than consolidate the existentiality of a potential threat. The Swedish rationale is based on the potential for harm and permanent restriction on present libertarian gains – a well-founded fear, as will be discussed in the next sections that deals with the consequences of exceptionalism, with specific reference to the Pandemic.

¹⁴⁶ This is an argument favoured by Aradau, Williams and Huysmans who do not view the process of *not* securitising an issue as a deficit, but rather as a superior route to resolving the same issue and achieving individual freedom and emancipation from state and societal control. See Section 1.6. of this dissertation.

3.3. Extraordinary Measures and their Consequences

The process of promoting an issue to the level of national security or deeming it necessary to be an essential component of ordinary security concerns, is not without consequence. The securitisation process for Covid-19 was not a socio-neutral event; it impacted all sectors of society - whether in a negative or positive manner. The literature reviewed exhibited several predominant themes; the author selected human rights, vulnerable groups, and the economy as examples of consequences to be reviewed and then amplified as part of the case study.

3.3.1. Human rights

The effects of securitisation on human rights are fertile ground for academic discourse; from the time of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 to the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic, no communicable disease had tested the framework and robustness of this facet of international law.¹⁴⁷ The HIV-AIDS epidemic was the first to surface in the 1980's, with the WHO specifically directing that no HIV-positive individual be denied entry to another country based on their medical status. This tenet was not severely tried as in most instances patients kept a low profile; the SARS and Ebola outbreaks were likewise relatively small scale and limited in regional impact, without the global reach attributed to Covid-19.

In contrast, the measures instituted as a result of the securitisation of the Pandemic have had a definite impact on the human rights of the affected populations: the right to public or private assembly, the right to education, to attend religious functions, and to practice sport have all been limited or denied. Is this securitisation a danger in itself? Kirk proposes this as the

¹⁴⁷ Gozdecka, 'Human Rights During the Pandemic', 206.

securitisation of securitisation¹⁴⁸ and further posits that sceptics of the dangers of the virus had ‘weaponised’ the consequences of securitisation as a tool to diminish the threat it posed to society.¹⁴⁹

Diez argues that the securitisation of Covid-19 can be viewed as regressive securitisation, in that the consequences of the process gave rise to severe restrictions in human rights and a rolling back of the liberal and stateless utopia proclaimed in the early years of the 21st Century.¹⁵⁰ His argument is that the effects of the process were not narrowly limited to the health dimension of the issue, but spilled over into the arena of political power and executive over-reach. This is in line with the reaction in France, where public and parliamentary opposition to Presidential powers was vociferous¹⁵¹ and the UK where the government itself resisted exceptionalism before being pushed into hasty action by the self-imposed restrictions of sports organisations and educational institutions.¹⁵² Diez further suggests that the manner of securitisation defines its consequences;¹⁵³ he provides the example of New Zealand, where immediate strict measures were introduced without the use of war-like rhetoric and whilst maintaining an active public debate.¹⁵⁴ Newman adopts a more modern perspective and directly argues that since the Pandemic posed a threat to human health, then it was perforce an issue to be construed as one of human security. He does, nevertheless, highlight the resurgence of realism in the approach to the securitisation of the Pandemic and the consequences of the

¹⁴⁸ One can argue – and this is nomenclature derived by the author of this dissertation – that this constitutes secondary securitisation, as opposed to the primary process directed towards the coronavirus.

¹⁴⁹ Kirk, “‘The Cure Cannot Be Worse than the Problem’”, 143.

¹⁵⁰ One can keep in mind Francis Fukuyama’s ill-advised proclamation of “The End of History” in 1998, when declaring that the liberal ideology espoused by the US at the time, was the perfect and ultimate construct for international relations and human existence.

¹⁵¹ see Yang, “‘We Are at War’: Securitisation, Legitimation and COVID-19 Pandemic Politics in France’.

¹⁵² Stott, West, and Harrison, ‘A Turning Point, Securitization, and Policing in the Context of Covid-19’, 2.

¹⁵³ This interpretation may be applied to Malta; as will be described in the case study, the state securitised the Pandemic through strong rhetoric supported, though, by consistent and credible support from the medical professionals forming part of the state healthcare system. This framing of the measures through a health lens reassured the public of both the necessity and the consequences to be borne.

¹⁵⁴ Diez, ‘Progressive and Regressive Securitisation: Covid, Russian Aggression and the Ethics of Security’.

measures introduced.¹⁵⁵ These measures had an impact at a macro and micro level; at the level of states nationalism and a fear of the outsider were evident and the issue of borders and the delineation between sovereign territories once again became relevant. As a result of the securitisation of Covid-19 it can be argued that a step back in the consideration of individual rights occurred; apart from the big-picture re-establishment of state borders as a demarcation line, human rights were impacted in several dimensions.

3.3.2. Vulnerable Groups

The securitisation process was not gradual, selective, or equitable. The elevation of issues commonly treated by processes not associated with urgency, existential threats and exceptionalism can have ulterior and undesired effects, and in addition create a nexus hitherto not visualised initially both by the securitising agent(s) and the audience.¹⁵⁶

This is clearly illustrated in the establishment of an unwarranted connection between the securitisation of the Pandemic and that of irregular migrants. The initial reactions of states to curl up and close borders created an overspill to the dimension of migration – which had already been securitised in the EU prior to Covid-19. In 2021 Demirkol examined this process for the period 2006-2018 in the European Union and found no empirical basis or justification for this action, promoted by politicians and the media. Irregular migrants were portrayed as threat to culture, identity and economic security.¹⁵⁷ This was not a novel observation; Huysmans was amongst the first to raise the concept of migration as a securitisation issue in Europe early on

¹⁵⁵ Newman, 'Covid-19: A Human Security Analysis'.

¹⁵⁶ It is here that the rationale put forward by Floyd establishes itself as a 'third generation' iteration of the CS securitisation model. At this point it not simply the action within the narrowly defined procedural time frame but in addition the consequential effects on the actors and other dimensions not directly implicated in the initial proposition.

¹⁵⁷ Demirkol, 'An Empirical Analysis of Securitization Discourse in the European Union'.

in 2000.¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, Huysmans draws a connection from the unified, internal market in the EU to a homogenous cultural approach, that then inherently leads to the rejection of outsiders and securitises any object that does not conform. This here is conceptually a significant observation since it creates a link between migration (human security) and the economy and develops the antithesis that a borderless Europe leads to an increase in a ‘nationalistic’ mindset and a fear of those not forming part of the project.

These observations were magnified and re-connected as a consequence of the securitisation of Covid-19. Dimari proposes a case of triple securitisation in Greece: that of Covid-19 (the Pandemic as an existential threat to the state and its component individuals), that of the individual (with the restriction of individual liberties and rights) and that of individual responsibility (with the onus of abiding to recommendations and legal proclamations to contain the disease).¹⁵⁹ Whilst the discussion on whether the individual was securitised as a result of the primary securitisation process has been raised by Kirk and McDonald¹⁶⁰, the securitisation of individual responsibility is a novel consequence to be identified. Dimari elaborates this as being portrayed by the Greek executive as a moral and social obligation – extending this one can hypothesise a future construct whereby states or executive bodies aspire to attain legal control over individual moral choice through a similarly derived method of exceptionalism.¹⁶¹ Building on the theoretical concepts expanded in the previous pages and the dual visualisations of securitisation and de-securitisation, the space for a discussion not inherently limited to the actual decision to securitise, but a process that in tandem with this primary gateway also considers the *a posteriori* effects of this decision – or the consequences – is created.

¹⁵⁸ Huysmans, ‘The European Union and the Securitization of Migration’.

¹⁵⁹ Dimari, ‘The Emergence of a New Security Apparatus in Greece’, 344.

¹⁶⁰ As a consequence of the securitisation of Covid-19 they argue that a secondary securitisation – that of the individual – as a result of the restrictive and unwarranted measures introduced has occurred.

¹⁶¹ Paranoia possibly tinged by Orwell and Huxley, but still food for thought.

Russell et al describe the leverage of the emergent health threat posed by the Pandemic as the excuse for restrictive and discriminatory penning of minority populations in tower block residential compounds in Australia. The basis for this action was ostensibly to protect those whose liberties were being trampled upon.¹⁶² The emergence of this rationale is a common theme in situations when the executive or the police arm of the state carries singles out vulnerable groups for more severe or punitive restrictions in times of threats to national security, under the guise of appearing to be more caring and ‘benevolent’ towards those groups on the margins of society.¹⁶³

Tazzioli and Stierl clearly state that the Pandemic has “prompted transformations in human mobility”; they highlight the fact – as described in the previous paragraph – that the Pandemic was seen as an opportunity to single out those groups whose ability to translocate had already been restricted.¹⁶⁴ Gravlee, in a study published in the US, proposes the term ‘syndemic’ to define systemic racism in the context of unequal healthcare throughout the Pandemic. He identifies grave inequalities in access to care and health outcomes, that are exacerbated by Covid-19 and the measures introduced because of it.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Russell et al., “‘It Is Not about Punishment, It’s about Protection’: Policing “Vulnerabilities” and the Securitisation of Public Health in the COVID-19 Pandemic’.

¹⁶³ Barker puts forward the term ‘benevolent violence’ to describe this approach, drawing on the dualities present in the way Nordic welfare states deal with the Roma. In this case, the Swedish state banned the Roma from begging – their main income stream – and simultaneously prevented them accessing the Swedish welfare system. See Barker, Vanessa. ‘Nordic Vagabonds: The Roma and the Logic of Benevolent Violence in the Swedish Welfare State’. *European Journal of Criminology* 14, no. 1 (January 2017): 120–39.

¹⁶⁴ Tazzioli and Stierl, ‘Europe’s Unsafe Environment’, 76.

¹⁶⁵ Gravlee, ‘Systemic Racism, Chronic Health Inequities, and COVID-19’.

3.3.3. *The Economy*

The economy, at a national and an individual level, was a major variable when considering the impact of the Pandemic and any measures taken to contain it via exceptional action. Pertinently, Fetzer demonstrates that US citizens exhibited considerable anxiety regarding their future financial status in the immediate period following the first spurts of exponential infection in North America. Significantly, these concerns were recorded prior to the introduction of any restrictions by state or federal governments.¹⁶⁶ These concerns were not without foundation and were only reinforced by the swiftness and severity of the extraordinary measures put into place. Makridis estimated the cost of lockdown in the United States at US\$1 trillion per month,¹⁶⁷ bringing into context the future cost of present-day action – the consequences of a hasty securitisation based on shaky science and no historical evidence.¹⁶⁸

The restrictions on personal mobility impacted the world economy; lockdown brought about a decrease in GDP across the board. As a consequence of the securitisation of the virus, economic activity was seriously and negatively affected. This was not solely due to the restrictions on movement but in addition to the fear of infection and viral transmission that permeated populations.¹⁶⁹ The World Bank proposes that restrictions introduced by policy makers should be tailored to allow economic activity that respects social distancing and permits individuals to function in a visibly safe environment.¹⁷⁰ Data from the same publication suggests that short but stringent lockdowns cause less economic damage and have a more beneficial effect on the control of infection.

¹⁶⁶ Fetzer et al., ‘Coronavirus Perceptions And Economic Anxiety’.

¹⁶⁷ Makridis, ‘The Cost of COVID-19: A Rough Estimate of the 2020 U.S. GDP’.

¹⁶⁸ Unless one is to take the Spanish Flu epidemic as a reference or a lesser known, but more relevant event, the 1957 influenza epidemic which hit the US and was contained through a rapidly instituted vaccination program and no lockdown. This minimised any adverse effects on the economy and caused only a moderate rise in unemployment. See Ferguson, Niall. *Doom - the Politics of Catastrophe*. Penguin, 2021, 155-159.

¹⁶⁹ International Monetary Fund, ‘The Great Lockdown: Dissecting the Economic Effects’, 65.

¹⁷⁰ International Monetary Fund, 70.

3.4. Conclusion

The review of the literature, albeit limited by the scope and expectations of the dissertation, clearly defined the way forward for the author. Securitisation was described as a useful modality for the interpretation of events that normally do not fall under the umbrella of security issues but present an existential threat to society – the Covid-19 Pandemic was presented as one of these threats. The evolution of the securitisation process and its application to health and disease was elucidated, and the role of the WHO in global health securitisation revealed. Maltese health governance, and its reliance on the WHO has been described, as were the reactions of other states to the Pandemic. Finally, it has been also established that securitisation is not without a cost; it has consequences, and this is what led on to the development of a rationale and a research question, and the methodology employed to fulfil the latter.

Part II – The research

Rationale

The previous pages have clearly established that the advent of the Covid-19 coronavirus provoked modifications to social behaviours and the adoption of norms that were deemed necessary and extraordinary. The Maltese context for the way in which these norms were proposed and the chain of events that led to their acceptance by local society and hence their *de facto* legitimisation, was of interest to the academic researcher for several reasons:

- (i) There is no clear rationale for the ultimate determination that the Pandemic was a threat to national security. *Prima facie* it appears not to have been based on a transparent or pre-determined set of parameters.
- (ii) The process by which the issue travelled through the Maltese executive and society has not been documented.
- (iii) The measures enacted and enforced have not been examined from the perspective of security and health.
- (iv) The consequences of these measures have not been quantified, both in their extent and their magnitude. The probability that one or more of the measures may have been discriminatory based on gender, race or citizenship has not been studied.

As defined earlier, in academic terms and in the context of security studies, the process of identifying the Pandemic as a security threat is termed securitisation and it involved the dual concepts of national security and public health. The literature review summarised in the previous chapters did not reveal work that provided an analysis of this event in Malta and of the consequences of the measures introduced, from the perspective of security studies. Hence

a potential gap in the literature was identified. Evaluating the securitisation process through the lens of security studies was deemed to be the first step towards filling this gap. This led to the development of the research question, formulated as follows:

What were the consequences of the securitisation of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malta?

Sub-questions expanding the main one and drawing on the initial reflections above were derived as follows:

- a) What path did the process for the framing of Covid-19 as a security issue follow?
- b) Can a clear period of securitisation be identified?
- c) What measures were implemented within the legal, social and health dimensions and were all sectors of society affected equally?
- d) Have these measures all been withdrawn or suspended, that is, has Covid-19 been de-securitised?
- e) What were the consequences of this securitisation? Can adverse or unforeseen effects be documented as a direct result of the securitisation of Covid-19?

Chapter Four - Methodology and Research Design

In the interim between the repealing of the extraordinary measures implemented due to Covid-19 in Malta (May 2022) and this research, the literature has been further enriched with works on the subject matter and thus provided a source of information that was directly applicable to the process.

The approach adopted in evaluating Malta as a case study for the securitisation of Covid-19 was a qualitative one. Both the nature of the subject and the manner of analysis does not lend itself to the collection and collation of quantitative data. Qualitative analysis has a significant role in the social sciences; the identification of trends or themes within the social dynamics of a specific population cohort or of a general population for a defined time frame can lead the researcher to develop hypotheses to interpret past events. Basing the interpretation of the data on conceptual frameworks derived from the extant literature provides the foundations for the development of a prescriptive and potentially normative academic conceptualisation.

In this work, it was decided to first review the literature on the core disciplines involved: securitisation, health governance and the securitisation of health and then to develop a conceptual framework. Once this was completed internet searches were conducted in local media and sources of legislation and the framework was then utilised to interpret the securitisation process in Malta.

“A conundrum is inherent in this extraordinary capacity of qualitative methods to capture the relative rather than the absolute nature of truth.”¹⁷¹

In the previous quote, Sofaer posits that the subjectivity of qualitative analysis is a drawback in research; as the literature will demonstrate in later pages, this is a positive property in this

¹⁷¹ Sofaer, ‘Qualitative Methods: What Are They and Why Use Them?’, 1106.

instance. Current interpretations of securitisation have a strong basis in the subjectivity of the security threats and the relative roles of the actors involved.

The core of the work is the case study for the securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta. A case study was chosen for these reasons:

- (i) The nature of securitisation is that it is a sociological phenomenon. Its process and outcomes cannot be quantified numerically. Descriptive and narrative methods provide a more detailed and accurate representation of the events.
- (ii) A case study allows the researcher to apply the conceptual framework examined and developed through the examination of the literature in practical terms. This demonstration visibly highlights the theoretical with actual events in a real-life context.
- (iii) A case study can be critical, descriptive, interpretive, and potentially lead to the development of prescriptive norms.
- (iv) A case study allows deep insight into a specific subject and setting, making for a detailed analysis of a process or phenomenon not usually possible via qualitative, numeric-driven research.
- (v) Although case studies can be criticised as lacking in rigour, this is addressed by clearly outlining all steps taken to enable reproducibility and ensuring a minimum of researcher bias in content or case selection.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Crowe et al., 'The Case Study Approach'.

4.1. Limitations

As with all academic work this study has its limitations, and this qualifies the conclusions drawn, whilst setting the stage for wider, deeper, and superior iterations of the work. The salient points to taken into consideration are:

- (i) Primary sources would have been the gold standard. Obtaining access to the primary actors was not possible within the time frame and the resources available to the author. Nevertheless, the secondary sources utilised were those seen and heard by the public and hence the actual securitising speech acts.
- (ii) Securitisation is not a standardised process with accepted and measurable stages, with defined limits for the power of the executive. The notion of precisely what is necessary to safeguard the state is an unqualified and intangible quantity. Hence criticism and analysis of such a process is inherently flawed since there are no comparable metrics for both process and outcome.
- (iii) The internet search keywords were arbitrarily selected from the narrative extracted from the extant literature. Whilst attention was devoted to their choice the method was not based on a computational method but on the author's academic experience and knowledge of the field. Utilising a word-count statistical program to analyse the content of the narrative and thus then search for the highest-ranking words would provide more academic rigor.
- (iv) Two internet search engines were utilised; DuckDuckGo does not use trackers, but Google does. Hence the results obtained by the latter may have been biased by previous searches and personalised cookies. An iteration of the process could be carried out using a VPN and masked IP. The news articles that were selected by the Google search engine may also have been promoted by algorithms based on paid-

for Search Engine Optimisation. The number of search results per engine (10) was limited by the scale of the study. This could be enlarged to provide the results with greater statistical power and accuracy.

4.2. A Conceptual Framework

Current approaches to security theory appear to adopt a descriptive (think Busan et al, Balzacq), normative (think the Paris School, Stritzel) or a high-level philosophical take (think Rita Floyd). These theories, as sketched out in the previous pages, suggest a stepwise process. If this initial visualisation of securitisation is considered in linear terms it presents as a flat, two-dimensional model, Figure 10.

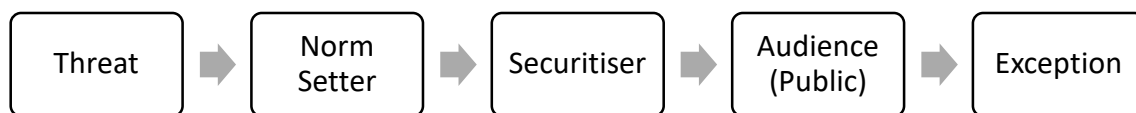


Figure 10 - Securitisation process in linear depiction¹⁷³

The humble opinion of the author is that these approaches are flawed. The literature reviewed has provided sufficient proof that such a model would not approximate a description of the process in actual terms – that is - in a real-life context. The necessary feedback created at every step of the securitisation process would impact both the next step and the previous ones in an

¹⁷³ By author.

iterative, multi-dimensional loop. Thus Figure 11, adapted from the schools of thought briefly introduced in the previous pages, should provide a framework with greater interpretative utility.

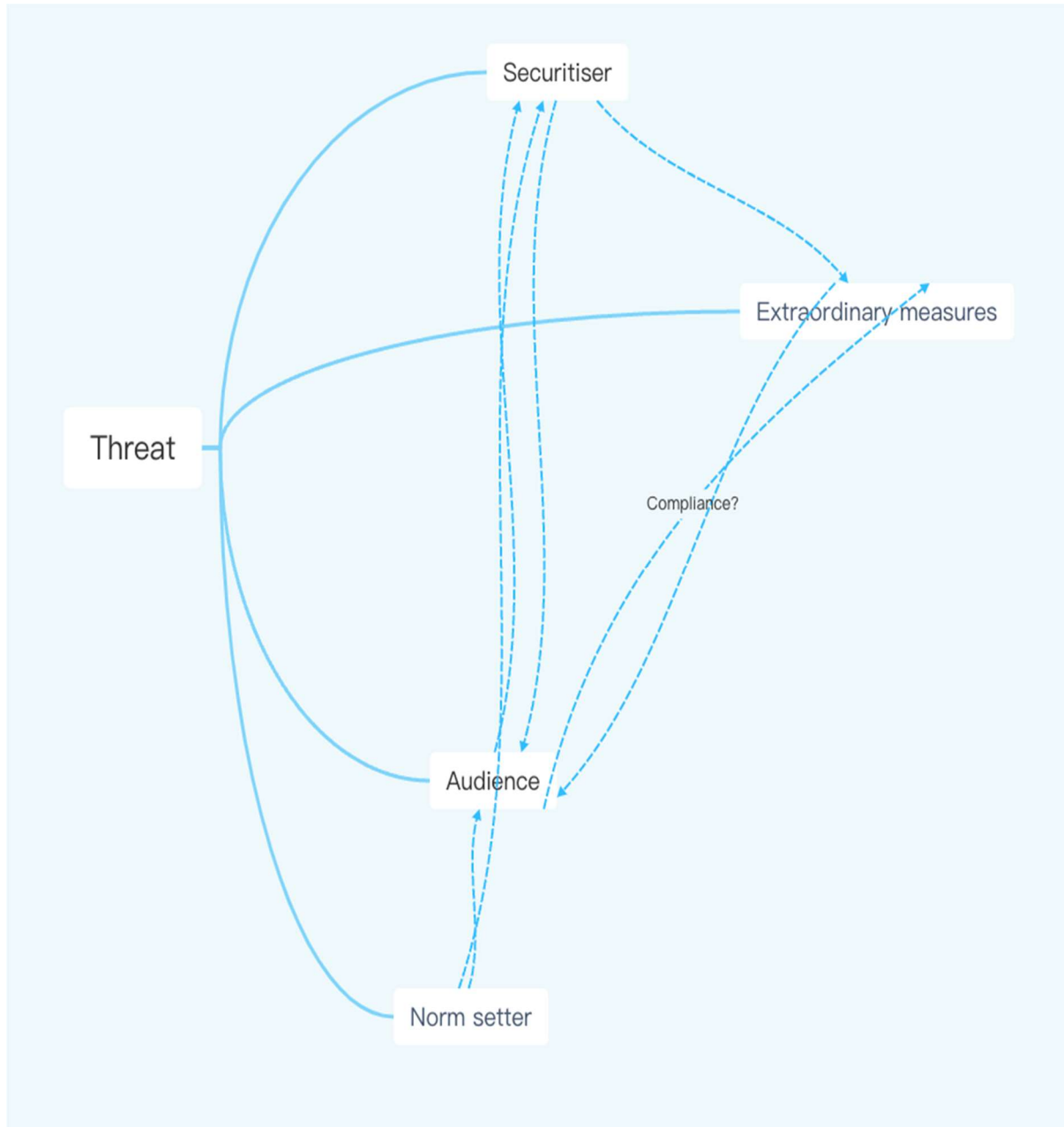


Figure 11 - Conceptual model for securitisation¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ By author.

Points of note are:

- (i) The audience is not passive but reacts to the speech act. This signifies a possible non-acceptance of the securitising act. This could result in total failure or a renegotiation.
- (ii) The threat is not fixed. The two-way interaction between the threat and the securitiser and the same with the audience signifies that the securitiser could subjectively transform into a threat to the audience and likewise the audience could transform into a threat to the securitiser. By means of an example, this fluid interpretation of the securitisation allows for an audience to rebel against the securitising actor and threaten it in response to unacceptable measures.
- (iii) Continuing the rationale in (ii) above, the subjective nature of the threat as proposed by the Welsh School can result in the securitiser – or the process of securitisation – being deemed a threat itself. This example underscores the basic conceptual divergence between the traditional, realist interpretation of security, with objective and inherently ‘dangerous’ and tangible threats and the later Copenhagen and Welsh Schools’ dynamic and contextual (at least in later iterations) understanding. Several authors have emphasised the possible dangers of over-securitisation, positing that “the cure cannot be worse than the disease.”¹⁷⁵
- (iv) The framework is not sequential. The threat is not the first issue or step. This implies that it may not only be objective, but subjective. Moreover, the subjective illustration of the threat may initiate not only from the eventual securitiser but from the Norm setter or even the audience.

¹⁷⁵ Kirk, ““The Cure Cannot Be Worse than the Problem””; Oana, Pellegata, and Wang, ‘A Cure Worse than the Disease?’; Meyerowitz-Katz et al., ‘Is the Cure Really Worse than the Disease?’

- (v) Predicting a clear outcome is impossible. The dynamics proposed by such a framework involve multiple interactions in multiple dimensions. It does however allow for a more realistic description of actual events.

With this framework in mind a search was carried out for instances that could be interpreted as having constituted a significant part of the securitisation process and its consequences. This was carried out via internet search engines for selected keywords (See the Appendix for condensed search results). Keywords were selected on the basis of the extensive literature review carried out prior to the execution of the case study; these were “covid press release Malta *actor* march 2020”. Initially the search was conducted without the surname of any specific actor; this, however, was not productive as the search results were generic and did not refer to any significant pronouncements. Once ‘Abela’ was added to the search string, relevant search results were obtained. The process was repeated using the same set of keywords substituting ‘Abela’ with ‘Fearne’ and then a third time with ‘Gauci’; these substitutions were affected to include the Minister for Health, Chris Fearne and the Superintendent of Public Health, Charmaine Gauci. It was hence decided to limit the search engines to the three primary actors identified in Table 5 and analyse their role in the securitisation process.

Two search engines were utilised - Google, and DuckDuckGo - in an effort to minimise potential algorithmic biases.¹⁷⁶ The top ten results for each internet search engine were selected and tabulated. For each one the date, headline, major quotes, key themes and URL were recorded. Particular attention was paid to reference to the importance of extraordinary measures and the inference to security or war. The articles were analysed for their main reference, that is whether the core theme was relating to health, war, measures limiting human rights, business

¹⁷⁶ This was not an exercise in examining the algorithmic bias exhibited by internet search engines. Notwithstanding, the divergence in results between Google and a masked provider such as DDG was worrying to say the least.

interests or other actors in the list in Section II above. Table 4 illustrates an expansion of the themes to the references that were utilised to classify the passages within the speech acts.

Table 4 - Themes identified from 'speech acts'.

Theme	References
Health	Public, individual health, vaccination, infection rates
War	Conflict, freedom, war, victory
Human rights	Restrictions, lockdown, stay-at-home, mask wearing, public aggregation
Business interests	Financial measures, subsidies, budget, taxation relief, tourism
TCN	Entry, work permit, Identity Malta

The timeframe adopted for the bulk of discourse analysis concerns itself with what is termed as the First Wave (FW) of the Pandemic from March 2020 to the end of July 2020. The core process of securitisation and the first instance of de-securitisation occurred within this period. Certain comments or public statements are extracted from later periods, mainly to illustrate points not captured earlier on. Actions and measures enacted after the start of the Second Wave (SW) in August 2020 and culminating in a second semi-lockdown in March 2021 following the record daily case record of 510 on the 10th of March 2021, were undoubtedly the result of the initial securitisation process put into motion in the halcyon weeks that unfolded after the 7th of March 2020.

The next chapter analyses the process of securitising the Pandemic, taking Malta as a case study.

Chapter Five – Analysis – The Case of Malta

5.1. The Securitisation of Covid in Malta

The theories expanded in the previous chapters have provided a clear picture of the conceptual frameworks constituting the main body of current academic thinking. The CS framework initiated by Wæver strips any shred of objective nature from the security threat and places all the onus on the act of securitisation itself. It bears repeating that the underlying *forma mentis* here demands that almost any object can be deemed a security issue. Hence the CS take on the process is one steeped in the Act and the Actor and not the threat. Stritzel and Balzacq nuanced this by fleshing out the role of both context and audience. The Paris School, driven by Bigot and his Foucauldian approach has the state and bureaucratic systems consolidating their power and existence via the creation of security processes and threats. The institutionalisation of security is thus a focal point of the Paris School. The Welsh School takes the middle road, melding Critical Studies and the CS. Both the subject and the object can be moulded subjectively. This approach puts forward a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted interpretation to security processes in the societal context. All these concepts were taken on in the analysis of the securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta. The model derived in Chapter Four (Figure 11) laid the basis for the visualisation of the process.

Hence the following workflow was adopted:

- (i) To run through the Pandemic narrative in Malta and search for potential ‘speech acts’ and/or securitising moves and consequences of the former within that time frame,
- (ii) To identify the main actors and variables and map the dynamics between them, using the model from Two as a framework,
- (iii) To apply the conceptual framework adopted to the results from (ii).

5.2. The Securitisation Process Deconstructed

5.2.1. *The Maltese Narrative*

Malta was well prepared for the advent of Covid-19. Early warnings regarding the Pandemic and its subsequent progression were provided by the serendipitous posting of a Maltese physician to the WHO centre in China, with planning for a possible local outbreak put into motion two months prior to the first case being reported in Malta on the 7th of March 2020.¹⁷⁷

The local media was no exception to the mass of conflicting information being reported, reflecting the global trend; in a matter of days the Prime Minister was having to hold daily press conferences and action was swift. Once the WHO Director-general proclaimed the coronavirus to be a Pandemic of Global Concern¹⁷⁸ then, as discussed in the review of the literature, the WHO was recognised as the norm setter in this context and a *de facto* legitimisation of exceptional action was in force at an international level. This filtered down to the national plane and the Ministry of Health in Malta.

Once the first imported case of Covid-19 in Malta was registered on the 7th of March, Minister Fearné sought to reassure the public by stating:

*“[There is] no reason for alarm.”*¹⁷⁹

Though, on the 10th of March PM Abela immediately set the stage for a legitimisation of extraordinary measures (EM):

*“We will take all necessary measures, even if drastic, to safeguard the wellbeing of the Maltese.”*¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Cuschieri, ‘COVID-19: The Transition towards a New Normal—Experiences from the European Country of Malta’.

¹⁷⁸ World Health Organisation, ‘WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19’.

¹⁷⁹ Agius, ‘“No Reason for Alarm” – Fearné Following First Coronavirus Case in Malta’.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Coronavirus: All Passenger Travel between Malta and Italy Suspended, PM Announces’.

This declaration can be taken to be the initial Speech Act in the securitisation process. The PM not only decisively and unilaterally stated the potential adoption of EM, but emphasised the possibility that these same measures could be considered draconian and severe in effect and scope. It is here that the interpretation of the Speech Act must go beyond what the CS proposes, in the sense that the statement not only has objective meaning but describes an Act. Moreover, in the interpretation of Balzacq and Stritzel, the Speech possesses inherent action and thus led to the nationwide consolidation of an intangible quantity (Covid-19) into a tangible threat. At this stage the concept had not yet been firmly embedded in the national consciousness, but this brief utterance had clearly framed the context of what was to follow. The manner of the PM's discourse in the initial stages followed the line of most of the EU Member States: reassuring the population and adopting an inward-looking mentality by shutting down borders on the 13th of March in unequivocal terms:

*“The ban applies to all arrivals, from whichever country.”*¹⁸¹

Within a span of three days the PM's discourse went from resisting calls for a lockdown to championing the human rights credentials of the government on the 14th of March with:

*“They have given us simple reasons: this would be a house arrest except for the acquisition of food and medicinals... for weeks on end. It could be a populist measure, but also a dangerous one.”*¹⁸²

He began the groundwork for a possible application of stay-at-home restrictions on the 16th of March. Significantly, the PM introduced the economic angle at this point in an effort to reassure the business community by proposing:

¹⁸¹ ‘Malta Imposes 14-Day Quarantine on All Arrivals in Bid to Stop Coronavirus’.

¹⁸² ‘Malta PM: Coronavirus Lockdown Not yet Necessary, Announces Economic Measures for Business’.

*“[Abela also said] that this is a situation where the government has the responsibility to assist the business community.”*¹⁸³

And announced a massive aid package to sustain those businesses bearing the brunt of the Pandemic and stating that, once again that:

*“[there is] no need to panic.”*¹⁸⁴

On the same day, the 18th of March 2020, the Minister for Economic Affairs, Silvio Schembri, raised the stakes and talked up a potentially racist and discriminatory discourse by stating the following:

*“That Malta will no longer accept applications for work from unskilled third-country nationals ‘with immediate effect’”.*¹⁸⁵

Such language was unfortunate; this had the added collateral adverse effect of ‘securitising’ TCNs along with the impending Pandemic. This association, intentional or not, was tantamount to gas-lighting and paving the road for a nationalistic and populist approach to combating the Pandemic. This populist tendency was also clear in the Trump administration’s pronouncements at the time. On the same day, Gauci suggested that restrictions were the solution to slowing or containing viral spread with:

*“If people have symptoms and stay home then we are going to limit how they are spread.”*¹⁸⁶

Adding on the 24th of March that:

*“...we must stick to the measures and social distancing.”*¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Borg, ‘Plan for a Possible Lockdown Set – PM Abela’.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Coronavirus: €1.8 Billion Package to Safeguard Business, Employment - PM Abela’.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Robert Abela Announces €1.8 Billion Rescue Package to Mitigate Coronavirus Crisis’.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Coronavirus Briefing - 10 New Cases, Total of 48’.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Coronavirus Briefing - Only Three Cases, but Curve Still Going up - Gauci’.

On the 24th of March, the PM raised the stakes for the first time introduced the concept of war and the necessity to fight. He attempted to mitigate this approach by refuting any populist tendencies and justifying fiscal prudence in the financial support measures being provided by the government with this speech:

*"We are at war, a different kind of war than the traditional sense. Every country has a war chest - the funds available for use that they can use in the war to bring their country out from the pandemic. We have this war chest, and we must be prudent in its division. We could have been populist and said that we would use the whole chest in the first set of measures, but we would have risked a moment where we would require more financial incentives but not have the funds to do so."*¹⁸⁸

At this point multiple actors were stoking the debate on the merits of lockdown strategies as opposed to continued circulation of the population and on the 26th of March 2020 a national lockdown was announced.¹⁸⁹

A fighting narrative started to gain traction, with a declaration a week later building on the war metaphor. Victory and freedom were worked into the statement, weaving in the populist strains previously disowned and the PM proclaimed:

*"This is modern day freedom. Freedom from this pandemic which once achieved will allow us to achieve and dream more. It's a victory which will be marked as a victory of Maltese and Gozitans as one people."*¹⁹⁰

At this point the lockdown was in full effect and dramatic pronouncements were toned down. The first three weeks of the Pandemic had been efficiently utilised by the government to sell

¹⁸⁸ 'New Economic Measures - Government to Pay €800 per Month for Employees of Worst Hit Sectors'.

¹⁸⁹ 'Lockdown for 118,000 People; Five New COVID-19 Cases'.

¹⁹⁰ Schwaiger, 'Malta Will Free Itself from the Pandemic – Abela'.

the threat posed by the coronavirus as an existential one. Potential reversal of restrictions was floated by Gauci on the 31st of March:

*“We are currently in discussion and assessing the situation to see what the risk would be in this case.”*¹⁹¹

A month into the pandemic the MFH rebutted accusations that the government had been caught unawares by stating that:

*“We were not taken by surprise.”*¹⁹²

Things were looking up by the end of April and Minister for Health Fearne opined so:

*“Despite the good news, the epidemic was still very much ongoing and not all measures would be eased immediately.”*¹⁹³

An antithesis in the government approach and the MFH and SPH’s public utterances was to be repeated throughout the Pandemic with the PM seemingly attempting to take the middle ground between the two actors, the healthcare professions, and the business community. So much so that on Workers’ Day 2020 Abela announced that:

“Today does not mean that everything has passed, but that normality is slowly coming closer”.

With the Minister for Health mitigating as follows:

*“BBQs, parties, and dinners are still dangerous”.*¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ ‘Coronavirus Briefing - 13 New Cases, Total Reaches 169; “Stay Indoors”, Gauci Says’.

¹⁹² Borg, ‘52 New COVID-19 Cases; Total 293’.

¹⁹³ ‘No New COVID-19 Cases Reported in 24 Hours’.

¹⁹⁴ ‘Some Shops to Re-Open, Malta-Gozo Travel to Resume; Masks in Public Places Now Mandatory’.

Abela appears to have overstated the achievements of the country by stating that Malta had the best global record in combating the coronavirus. Whilst undoubtedly a success story, the pronouncement was factually inaccurate as pointed out by the Times of Malta.¹⁹⁵ This can be construed as an effort to justify the securitisation and deflect any potential future recrimination.

5.2.1.1. De-securitisation

At the same time, the 18th of May 2020, the PM was putting forward an argument for de-securitisation and the importance of not accepting a ‘new normal’:

“We are strong enough to never accept an emergency becoming the normal. That restaurants would be closed, people be stuck at home, not going to work... that is not a normality that gives people quality of life. People are designed to celebrate life.”¹⁹⁶

The concept of exceptionalism is introduced, and the audience is given a prod at generating a public discourse. Ironically, keeping in mind the models reviewed it is the public that should have been the genesis of such thinking. This reflects the culture of apathy that pervades local civil interaction. By July 2020 a slow progression to pre-Pandemic functionality was under way and the focus was now on clearly establishing the business community as the primary referent subject to of securitisation and the PM reasoned that:

There shouldn't be the attitude that it's like nothing is happening, but at the same time let us not say that a catastrophe is coming because it is not the case.....keeping in mind all the necessary precautions as have been announced and as may be announced in the future.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ ‘Fact Check: Busting Abela’s “Best in the World” COVID-19 Claim’.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Restaurants, Hair and Beauty Salons to Reopen on Friday’.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Covid-19 Situation under Control as Number of Cases in Hospital Remains Low - PM’.

An exception to this apparent apathy exhibited by the Maltese public was a court case instituted against the SPH in an attempt to prove the illegality of the lockdown restrictions on human movement and aggregation, to which she responded in December 2021 with:

*“The well-being of a person is important, and we are taking measures that are very much needed, and when they are no longer needed, are withdrawn.”*¹⁹⁸

This brief narrative has taken us from the first case detected in Malta on the 7th of March 2020 to the end of July 2020. This period, as stated in the Methodology section was selected as the primary timeframe for the study as it was when the primary and most significant securitisation of the Pandemic occurred in Malta. When subsequent waves of infection took hold, the processes were simply those of reinforcement and/or of reintroducing concepts and exceptional measures that had previously been proposed and accepted by the Maltese population.

This abridged history of the Pandemic was then overlaid with the concepts absorbed and developed in the review of the literature to interpret them through a lens that would allow the evaluation of the securitisation process and its consequences.

¹⁹⁸ ‘Charmaine Gauci Grilled on the Witness Stand in Court Case Challenging COVID Restrictions’.

5.2.2. Identifying the Actors and Variables, and Mapping the Dynamics

Any conceptualisation of the securitisation process necessitated the identification of the core variables at play. The model derived at the end of Chapter Two was utilised to identify the players involved in the securitisation of Covid in Malta. The brief narrative in the previous pages provided the latter as (i) the Coronavirus, (ii) the state¹⁹⁹, (iii) the public²⁰⁰, (iv) the Healthcare professions²⁰¹, (v) the business community²⁰², (vi) the EU and (vii) the WHO.

Table 5 – Roles played by actors for the securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta

Actor	Role	Agents	Mode of action
Covid-19 coronavirus	Spread of disease	Human	Infection and pulmonary deterioration
State	Executive, legislative	The PM, MFH, SPH, Parliament	Public speeches, legislation
Public	Opinion	Social media, Traditional press	Reaction, push-back, reasoned analysis, or not?
Healthcare professions	Safeguarding public health	Physicians, nurses, pharmacists	Professional care, militant speech, political interest
Business community	Profit	Shareholders and constituted bodies	Lobbying the Executive and public
EU	Oversee MS interests	Council of Ministers	EU Directives
WHO	Global Health Governance	Secretariat	Norm entrepreneur, recommendations and declarations

¹⁹⁹ The connotation ‘state’ and ‘government’ are taken to be synonymous for the purposes of this dissertation on the assumption that the government is acting in full agency of the state.

²⁰⁰ The connotation ‘public’ is taken to encompass all other entities not forming part of the state or other definitions in this list.

²⁰¹ The connotation ‘Healthcare professions’ is taken to describe the medical, nursing and pharmaceutical professions.

²⁰² The connotation ‘the business community’ is taken to encompass all those interests having a direct connection to enterprise of any typology. One could argue that every citizen can lay claim to having a stake in the economic future of their country.

Table 5 defines the roles of the main actors in the scenario examined in Malta.

At the end of Chapter Four a generic framework for a hybrid interpretation of securitisation was proposed by the author. In Figure 12, this framework is overlaid onto the context in Malta at the time the Pandemic broke out.

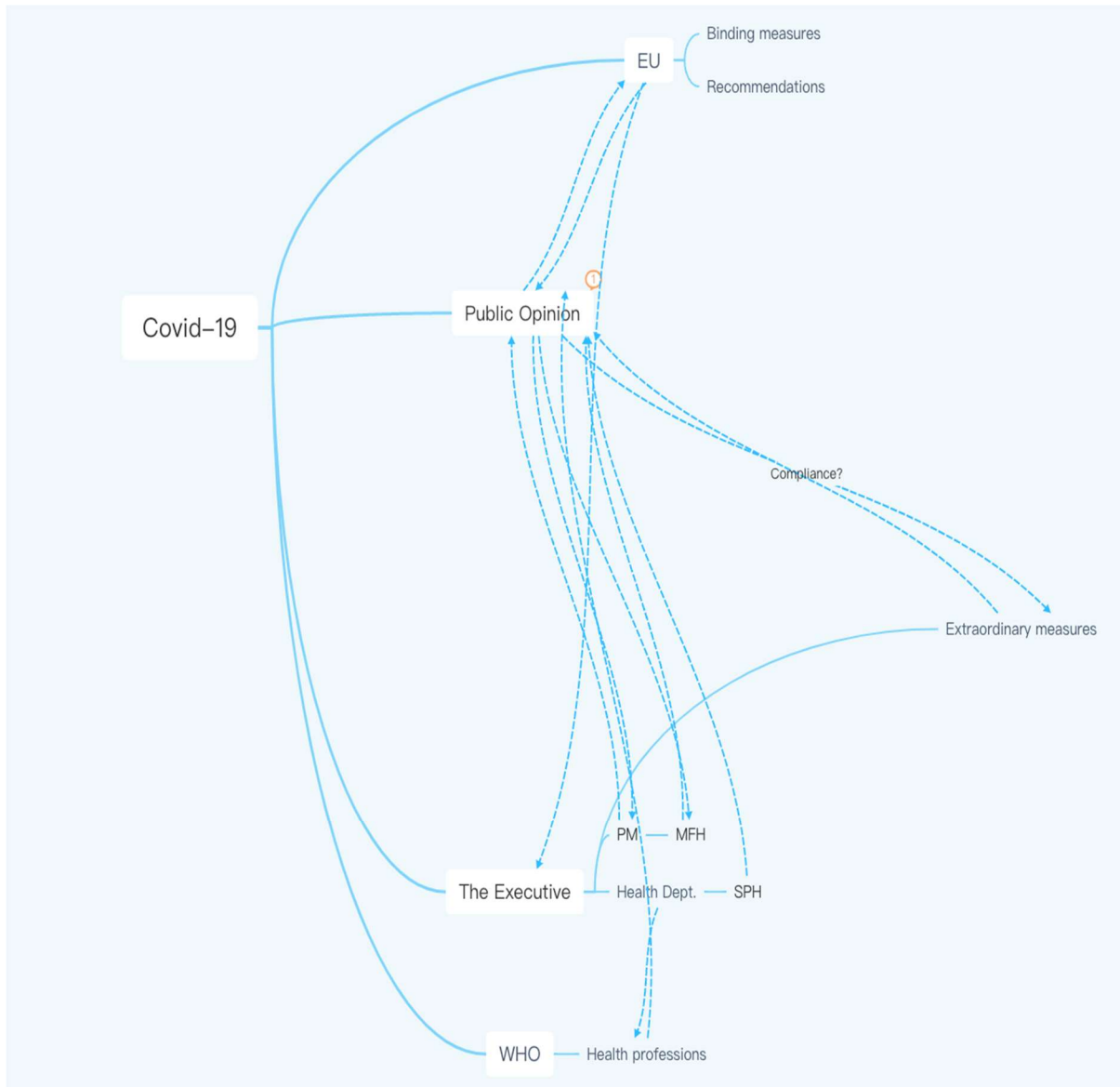


Figure 12 - Applying the conceptual model to Malta²⁰³

²⁰³ By Author.

It must be emphasised that the model does not purport to be exhaustive or definitive. The role of the WHO is depicted as being transmitted through the Ministry of Health; whilst this is the formal path, one can surmise that any declaration made by the WHO would have a direct impact on the Executive and its actions, due to its political weight in the international plane. Public opinion is taken as one cohesive group; this is not a realistic representation in that sectors of the public differed in their reactions and opinions depending on their vested interests, as would be expected. A deeper and more granular investigation was, however, beyond the scope of this work. The Executive, as was outlined in Chapter One, wields ultimate political power over all areas of the government, the Health Department, included. This does not mean that it was always in complete agreement with the political side of the state when it came to exceptional measures and their consequences, as was seen in the narrative.

The healthcare professions are grouped into a single category; from the author's professional experience this is overly simplistic, though necessitated by the constraints of the study. A more nuanced analysis, backed by knowledge of the inter-disciplinary dynamics and political undertones, would reveal that friction between physicians and nurses and the latter's union agenda, did play a part in the relative acceptance of state restrictions and health-related directives. The scope of this work was not to examine this aspect, and hence the HCPs were considered as one entity for this purpose.

5.2.3. Applying the Framework

This section will consider the narrative in the previous section in the light of the model proposed at the end of Chapter Two. The roles of the various actors in the model adopted were presented earlier in Table 5, whilst Table 6 interprets these same actors using the three main schools of thought for securitisation theory discussed in the previous chapters.

Table 6 - Roles played by actors interpreted by school of thought.

Actor	CS	Paris School	Welsh School
Covid-19 coronavirus	Threat	Threat - objective	Threat – subjective for both subject and object which can interchange roles
State	Securitiser - de facto	Securitiser - instigator	Securitiser – negotiator, subject
Public	Audience - passive	Audience – passive, powerless	Audience – an active participant in the process
Healthcare professions	Safeguarding public health, secondary securitiser	Physicians, nurses, pharmacists	Professional care, militant speech, political interest
Business community	Audience - passive	Audience – passive, powerless	Audience – an active participant in the process
EU	Regional securitiser	Societal security as a driving force	Securitiser/threat-police state?
WHO	Norm setter and/or securitiser	Institution	Norm setter/over-securitisation/threat?

Each actor is then analysed in the light of the narrative and the theory reviewed. Following that the exceptional measures and their consequences are evaluated through the same lens.

5.2.3.1. The State

The primary securitising actor was undoubtedly the Prime Minister.²⁰⁴ Prime Minister Robert Abela was handed the proverbial poisoned chalice. On the one hand he was bound by moral and ethical principles to preserve all life at all costs; on the other, short-term, drastic restrictions to economic activity in the context of a dependent economy such as the Maltese one, could have had a serious and permanent impact on the quality of life of all citizens. As is proposed by the main thinkers in the field of securitisation, decision making is limited to the circle of elites, leading to a high degree of asymmetry in information between the same elites and the audience. This asymmetry was mitigated by the presence of the MFH and SPH at the majority of press conferences following the securitisation of Covid-19. This provided a measure of support and medical justification for the securitising of the Pandemic. Prime Minister Robert Abela was the major interlocutor with the Maltese public, at least within the remit of the search as conducted. The MFH and the SPH were secondary securitisers in their executive roles within the government; it is debatable whether one can classify them as primary securitising agents, when the major declarations on the severity and dangers posed by the Pandemic were uttered by the PM.

Figure 13 provides us with an immediate interpretation of the recurrent themes that dominated the securitising speeches. Apart from the obvious reference to public health, the two prominent themes are those of human rights and economic issues. Credit must be apportioned where due; the government duly ramped down EM as the threat of the Pandemic receded and none of the Legal Notices enacted remained in force in May 2022, when Covid-19 was deemed to no longer be an issue of high politics.

²⁰⁴ See p118 of this dissertation for an expansion and qualification of this statement. The PM was the most visible actor for the government; whose agenda he was projecting requires further discussion.

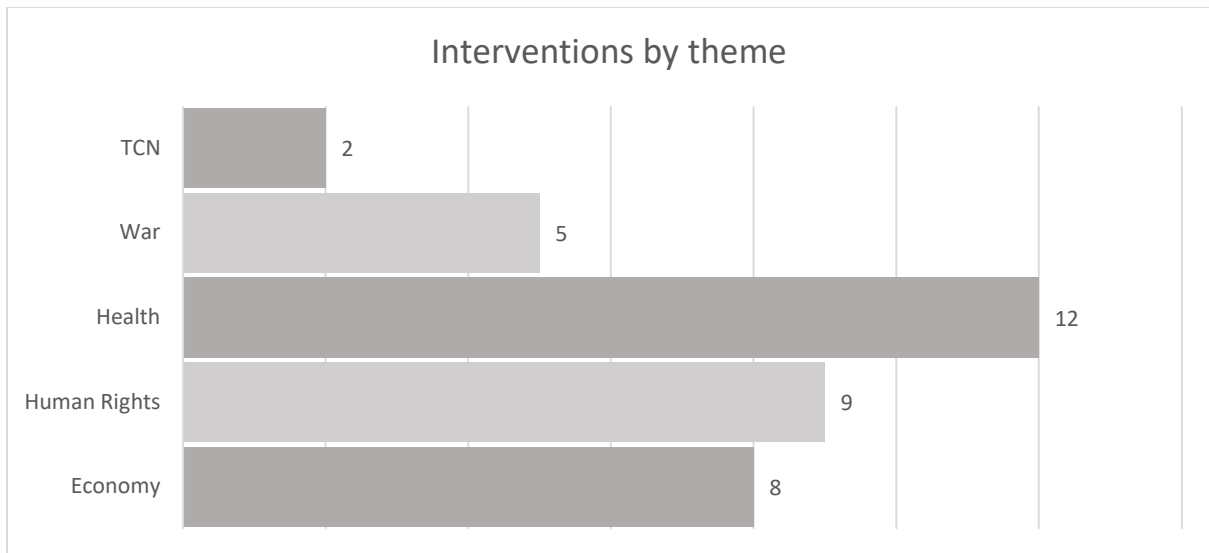


Figure 13 - The Prime Minister's speeches classified by theme.²⁰⁵

5.2.3.2. Public Opinion

The reaction to Covid was nothing like that experienced previously in recent memory in the Maltese Islands, except maybe for those citizens who had lived through the hardships of the Second World War. This wartime rhetoric was adopted by British PM Boris Johnson, who proclaimed that Britain faced its greatest challenge since 1940 and the Battle of Britain, though with none of the stature or statesmanship of Sir Winston Churchill:

*“That is why we announced the steps yesterday that we did – advising against all unnecessary contact – steps that are unprecedented since World War Two. We must act like any wartime government and do whatever it takes to support our economy.....Yes this enemy can be deadly, but it is also beatable – and we know how to beat it.....”*²⁰⁶

This same feeling permeated throughout all levels of Maltese society and the state executive, such that, as supported by the Prime Minister’s quote in the previous pages, Malta was similarly

²⁰⁵ By author.

²⁰⁶ Rawlinson, ““This Enemy Can Be Deadly”: Boris Johnson Invokes Wartime Language”.

deemed to be at war. This evaluation of the situation was taken as justification for the legitimisation of extraordinary measures enacted to contain, control, and eradicate the Pandemic.

The xenophobia exhibited in other European states reared its head in Malta, especially at the initial stages of the Pandemic when ignorance of both the cause and the means of transmission of the coronavirus was rife and public comment was subject to considerable inference and extrapolation:

*“Another case in Strand Sliema. Police and ambulance just came in 115 The Strand. They are wearing the special clothes before they are entering the building.”*²⁰⁷

Learned comment and disinformed citizens only served to reinforce this (mis-)conception of the situation:

*“We are indeed living in extraordinary times which require such extraordinary measures.”*²⁰⁸

*“Everyone rushing about grabbing things. This is crazy... I’m not scared at all but if this madness continues, how will I feed my kids?”*²⁰⁹

The mapping of the relative positioning from an interactive perspective of the actors and variables concerned earlier on indicated the centrality of public opinion and the pivotal role it should play. Analysis of the search engine data appears to indicate otherwise. One can instantly infer the points of leverage, at least from a hypothetical perspective; initially Public Opinion (PO) is seen as being central to the variables, impacting and connecting all the actors and factors. Despite this apparently central role, the narrative portrays a different dynamic in the

²⁰⁷ ‘Malta’s First Coronavirus Cases Are Girl and Parents’.

²⁰⁸ ‘These Are Extraordinary Times’.

²⁰⁹ ‘Panic Buying at Supermarkets over Coronavirus Concerns’.

securitisation of the Pandemic. Speeches by the PM, MFH and SPH clearly did not appeal for opinion or two-way communication but rather implied that the Pandemic, the existential threat it posed, the exceptional measures necessary and adherence to the latter, was a *fait accompli*. This passive or apathetic role played by the public – in security terms as defined in Chapter Two, the audience - side-lines the assumed centrality of PO as an intersubjective actor in the manner of the Welsh School's interpretation of securitisation. There is no major stage in the Pandemic in Malta where the Executive or the Health Department altered a policy or backtracked immediately in reaction to PO. In certain cases, minor modifications were made, or allowances factored in. One example is the instance when the PM announced that fines for violation of Covid-related legislation would be annulled. This action naturally provoked the ire of the healthcare professions which had endured significant hardship and personal sacrifice in order to adhere scrupulously to the restrictions imposed as a result of the extraordinary measures invoked by the Executive. The PM did not back down.

5.2.3.3. The Healthcare Professions

The healthcare professions were vocal in their insistence on prioritising health concerns over economic or other factors. This resulted in a constant warning by the Medical Association of Malta (MAM) that resources were being stretched to the limit and that the situation could implode with tragic consequences for the population. This can be interpreted as a securitising move by the MAM and the Malta Union of Nurses (MUN) if one evaluates the Pandemic as a threat to national security. Alternatively, one can consider the actions of the healthcare professions as being de-securitising and pulling in the opposite direction as the state, by determining that the coronavirus was a purely medical issue and any strategy to counter it had to be solely the domain of the experts in the field. The MAM pre-empted the virus arriving in Malta by immediately advocating a ban on foreign visitors by stating that:

*“...only residents in Malta should be allowed to board flights from Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia Romagna.”*²¹⁰

Whilst setting the tone for an adversarial approach to medico-state relations from the outset:

*“Such behaviour puts thousands of people’s health at risk in this capricious manner.”*²¹¹

At the outbreak the HCP reaction was ultra-nationalist in substance with a press release from the MAM on the 6th of March 2020 stating that the:

“...MAM and UHM note with satisfaction that the cruise liner with a confirmed case of COVID19 in a disembarked passenger will not be allowed into Malta.”

*“...their position that flights from high-risk zones only be to repatriate local residents who should follow mandatory quarantine.”*²¹²

This was followed up by continuous pressure for an immediate and wide-ranging set of measures, including a lockdown.²¹³ The HCPs were not the securitising entity *per se*, though they did securitise the issue from the healthcare perspective for the audience, and indirectly then were supporting actions taken by the state, when the PM eventually decided that extreme measures were necessary. It is here that the crux of this dissertation comes to bear on the arguments presented; are national interests all equal? Is human health all equal? Should human security today be superior as an interest to all others? What was the mechanism used to make these calls in Malta?

²¹⁰ ‘Coronavirus: Government Failing to Protect Health of Population – MAM’.

²¹¹ ‘Coronavirus: Government Failing to Protect Health of Population – MAM’.

²¹² ‘Joint Press Release by Medical Association of Malta (MAM) and UHM Voice of the Workers’.

²¹³ ‘Coronavirus: MAM, UHM, MUT Call for Pre-Emptive Lockdown with Immediate Effect’.

Reviewing the evidence draws out these paradoxes; hindsight naturally provides the academic with an advantage that the PM did not have. It is unlikely that he had sufficient data to take an informed decision, all the more so when the coronavirus was deemed a novel variant with no historical data and evidence-based practice to fall back on. In addition, an unfortunate side-effect of the democratic peace experienced in Europe in the last eight decades or so has led to a dearth of leaders experienced in wartime or catastrophe management.²¹⁴

Touching on an argument that will be addressed when the role of the WHO is analysed, should healthcare professionals make the call on what actions are justified in public health emergencies, without care for consequences on other dimensions of society, or should health be considered as a primary but not the sole aim of exceptional measures?

Considering the actors individually may lead to overly facile conclusions. The HCPs may not be considered primary securitisers in the light of the framework adopted. Notwithstanding it is undeniable that they played a central role in supporting the primary securitisation acts by the PM. It is the opinion of the author that HCPs should not be granted a primary securitising role in the local context as there is reasonable doubt that Speech Acts from their end only could or would have led to the introduction of and acceptance by the public of the exceptional measures that were ultimately the result of the securitisation. Additionally, public support for the measures would have waned, given the consequences that ensued.

This rationale takes us to the next actor in the Maltese scenarios, the business community, the *de facto* representation of the local economy.

²¹⁴ A recent article in the Economist pointed out, that for better or worse, President Zelensky of Ukraine is the only Western leader with experience of leading a state at war in its own territory.

5.2.3.4. Business community

Commercial interests played a role in the securitisation/de-securitisation dilemma. Some utterances were public, as those by the Chamber of Architects:

*“We all depend on each other, so the proposals we made are broad and apply to everyone.”*²¹⁵

And the Chamber for Small to Medium Enterprises:

*“We request more clarity and a well-defined plan for the short, medium and long term. Businesses cannot keep on walking blind-folded”*²¹⁶

And the Chamber of Commerce:

*“That it would be crazy to not have the wage supplement”*²¹⁷

*“The Malta Chamber of Commerce said the relaxation of measures affecting non-essential retail was a first step in allowing the regaining of economic traction to save as many jobs as possible.”*²¹⁸

And others undoubtedly were served behind the scenes, applying significant pressure to the PM and the health advisory teams. The business community was not consistent in its public statements with various sectors clamouring for relaxing measures and others adapting and benefiting from state subsidies.²¹⁹ From the analytical perspective it is undeniable that

²¹⁵ ‘Coronavirus: Economic Situation Causing Construction Sector Slowdown – Chamber of Architects - The Malta Independent’.

²¹⁶ ‘Second Coronavirus Wave Will Be “Devastating” – Chamber of SMEs - The Malta Independent’.

²¹⁷ ‘Cancelling the Wage Supplement Would Be “Crazy” – Chamber of Commerce - The Malta Independent’.

²¹⁸ ‘Coronavirus: MHRA Says New Economic Measures “Renew Hope for the Future”’.

²¹⁹ Anecdotal evidence collected by the author has exhibited cases of restaurant owners being better off in the lean winter months having their employees at home – paid by the state – and having far lower running costs to cover.

commercial interests played a significant role in the securitisation²²⁰ – or rather de-securitisation – of Covid-19. This role can be quantified, in the manner of the Welsh School as that of a securitiser in a different plane. The Business Community securitised the securitisation of Covid-19 as a threat to the economy and the country as a whole, whilst playing a supporting role in the initial securitisation process of the virus as a supporting actor and variable.

5.2.3.5. The WHO

How did the norm setting by the WHO impact the Maltese Islands? Can one state that the declaration was the touchstone for the measures enacted in Malta?

As one can see from the statements immediately after the WHO classification of Covid-19 as a global pandemic, the PM commenced a gradual escalation in discourse and severity of tone, supported by the credentialed and established leadership of the WHO. This norm entrepreneurship was not without fault and did not carry the weight of a UN General assembly resolution. As has been already referred to, this gave states and their leaders latitude in how to interpret and execute possible measures.

On a theoretical level, the WHO should be considered as a securitising entity in the purest sense since it lacked the legal instruments to enforce its declarations and suggestions. In the opinion of the author, it could be classified as a norm setter which framed the Pandemic in the appropriate context for national securitising agents to deliver compelling speech acts to their respective audiences, in this instance, Malta. The local Health Department follows WHO edicts closely in most cases.²²¹ The Pandemic was not an exception. The PM and the MFH leveraged

²²⁰ The author notes that not all sectors suffered a deficit because of the securitisation. Though figures are not publicly available, personal experience in the field can support the fact that pharmaceutical and personal protection equipment suppliers made significant profit as a direct consequence of the securitisation. As an example, ordinary grade face mask prices increased from 5c to Eur2, and the state intervened to set a price limit at 75c!

²²¹ The Pandemic was an instance when Maltese health authorities closely mirrored the WHO line. Vaccination, both for Covid-19 and other diseases is another. Obesity is not. WHO has consistently advocated for firm and

the declaration of the WHO to justify the extraordinary measures proposed, even though the WHO was acting on and proposing recommendations that, at the time, were not based on concrete evidence.

The same can be argued for the advent of the Covid-19 vaccine and its dispersion to the majority of the Maltese population. The scope of this work was not to investigate the detailed legal and medical issues concerning the vaccine or to act as fodder for vaccine-sceptics, nonetheless it is undeniable that the Covid-19 vaccine was developed in a matter of months as opposed to the years required for longitudinal and mass-population testing.²²² It is also undeniable that the recommendations issued by the WHO for mass vaccination were adopted by the agents of the state in Malta and that this implied that the norm setting by the WHO was unquestioned at the level of the securitising elites and the health authorities. Consequently, one can argue that the agents of the state were indirectly agents of the WHO in this instance.

This last statement brings the discussion to a point where Stefan Elbe in ‘Security and global health’²²³ raises a valid and thought-provoking question. He puts forward the conundrum: Are situations such as a global pandemic – he was referring to SARS in 2004 – leading to the securitisation of health or is it the opposite? Are such global health issues now constructing the medicalisation of security?

enforceable goals that are integrated into national health systems to combat and prevent rising obesity rates. Malta has the highest incidence of obesity in Europe and one of the highest in the world, yet no well-funded and politically backed campaign has ever been conducted. Vested interests run high, with food importers and fast-food operators forming powerful lobbies - this is not a local phenomenon, though. Is there a case to securitise obesity in Malta? Excuse the pun, but this is food for thought! See C. Hawkes, T. G. Smith, J. Jewell, J. Wardle, R. A. Hammond, S. Friel, A. M. Thow, and J. Kain, “Obesity 2 Smart food policies for obesity prevention,” *Lancet*, vol. 385, pp.2410–2421, 2015. F. Falzon Aquilina, A. Grech, D. Zerafa, M. Agius, and V. Voon, “‘Dar Kenn ghal Sahltek’-an eating disorder and obesity service in Malta,” 2015. Cauchi, H. Rutter, and C. Knai, “An obesogenic island in the Mediterranean: Mapping potential drivers of obesity in Malta,” *Public Health Nutr.*, vol. 18, no. 17, pp. 3211–3223, 2015.

²²² In fairness there are those who argue that increased number of live patient trials at the early stages can shorten the process. See Eyal, Nir. ‘Why Challenge Trials of SARS-CoV-2 Vaccines Could Be Ethical Despite Risk of Severe Adverse Events’. *Ethics & Human Research* 42, no. 4 (July 2020): 24–34.

²²³ Elbe, *Pandemics, Pills, and Politics*.

This has led, Elbe continues to a medical conceptualisation of insecurity, concretised by the AIDS virus in the 1980s, the SARS epidemics of 2002 and 2003 and Ebola in 2014. The reconciliation between the traditional view on health and security, as referred to in the discussion of GHG has not been felicitous. The inability of the WHO, by its very nature, to impose behavioural norms on states, removes any potential for the establishment of a supranational health governance structure. The latter is an impossibility given the current global approach to state sovereignty, which up to now extends to all dimensions of the population.

The role of the WHO is not as clear cut as one might wish it to be, when considering it through the lens of security studies and the securitisation of the Pandemic. Kaunert et al argue that the WHO was pivotal in the process, others posit that it simply provided states with authoritarian tendencies the opportunity to engage in restrictive and permanent curtailment of democratic rights and freedoms.²²⁴

An argument can be made regarding the biomedicalisation of health security. In line with the previously expanded realist approach to security, health has been drawn into the security discourse as an isolated concept, that is, in the same manner in which the threat of an alien invasion might be evaluated. This ‘siloes’ evaluation does not absorb all the necessary variables that contribute to both the immediate effect of a health issue, but also the variables that form an integral part of the root cause. The rapid and effective containment and eventual taming of the Covid-19 coronavirus addressed the infection at the superficial level; the structural defects in regional and global health care governance were the reasons behind the inequality in resource availability and distribution, and in the flawed process of decision making.²²⁵ Instead of serving as a springboard for an improved model for a more equitable

²²⁴ Kaunert, Leonard, and Wertman, ‘Securitization of COVID-19 as a Security Norm’.

²²⁵ Holst and van de Pas, ‘The Biomedical Securitization of Global Health’.

provision of care, the Pandemic has highlighted the jarring inequalities at the local and international planes.

The lack of an accepted global authority, with transparent processes for the securitisation of the issue and the means to enforce the recommended measures was evident. The interpretation of global security has narrowly focused on infectious disease, and more so as already stated, as a reactive measure rather than pre-planned and widespread strategies.²²⁶

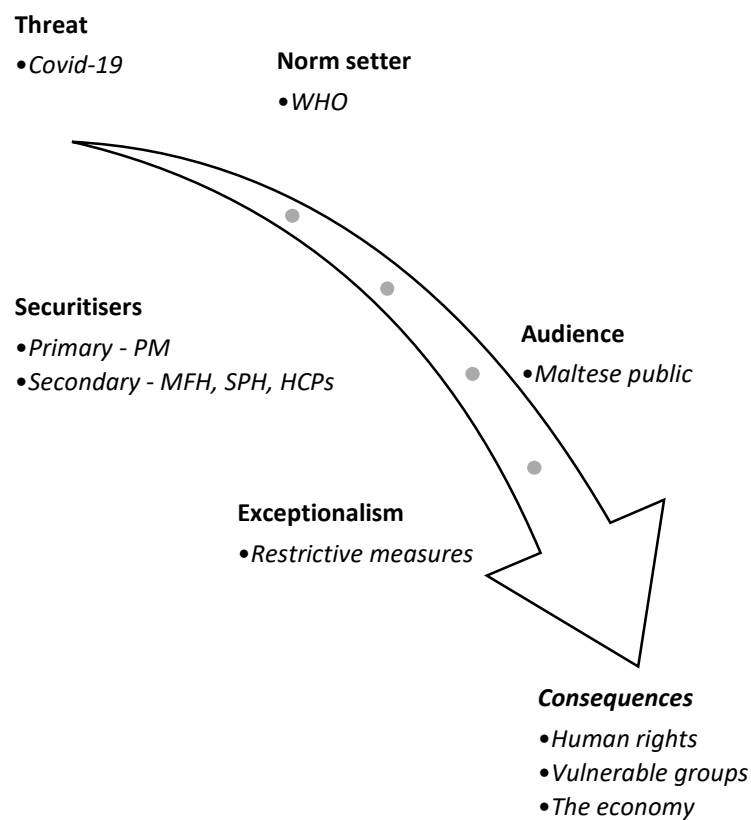


Figure 14 - Securitisation framework applied to the case study of Malta²²⁷

²²⁶ Hanrieder and Kreuder-Sonnen, 'WHO Decides on the Exception?'

²²⁷ By author.

This lack of co-ordination and direction in the securitisation of the Pandemic was not evident at a local level. As will be fleshed out below the reaction in Malta was structured and cohesive; apart from uninformed social media postings at the beginning of the Pandemic, the official position imbued confidence and addressed all sectors of society reassuring them accordingly. This leads on to the most relevant discussion of the evaluation, that of the extraordinary measures and their consequences. Figure 14 clearly illustrates the extension of the model described in Figure 8, with the appropriate actors and consequences inserted to accurately depict the securitisation process in Malta.

5.3. The Consequences of Exceptionalism in Malta

5.3.1. The Politics of the Extraordinary

A review of the literature on effects of securitisation was carried out in Chapter One, and the point made that, no action carried out because of the process of elevating an issue to the realm of high politics can be without an element of consequence. The decision not to securitise or when to securitise, hinges not only on the threat and the potential danger caused by the imminent issue but also on the collateral effects of the securitisation itself. As we have observed, Malta was no exception to the rapid and unexpected reactions to the Pandemic. This was evident both in the public and the state planes. Initially untouched by the Pandemic, the first case was reported in early March 2020. Following this, measures were put in place, via ministerial order or parliamentary approval and included a strict lockdown and the restriction of personal circulation and aggregation and the opening hours of selected business sectors. The public healthcare system repurposed and restructured its services in reaction to the Pandemic and all non-essential resources were diverted to treating and preparing for an overload of the emergency and residential modalities.

5.3.1.1. Timeline of Measures

The extraordinary measures enacted can effectively be described as having exhibited a pull-and-push scenario with the ramp up and gradual relaxation of the measures reacting to the degree of Covid-19 transmission and infection. The main pressor for public opinion was the daily publication of new infection numbers. Eventually the authorities became aware of the undue pressure that this was placing on the healthcare profession and executive and proceeded to give the daily statistics less prominence. Two main ‘waves’ can be identified. The first are those restrictions put into place in March/April 2020 – in response to what is termed as the

First Wave (FW) and those re-instituted and enacted in following the start of the Second Wave (SW) in August 2020 culminating in a second semi-lockdown in March 2021 following the record daily case record of 510 on the 10th of March.

5.3.2. Extraordinary Measures and their Consequences

The measures introduced were, as alluded to in the previous paragraph, diverse. In the section on the review of the effects of the securitisation of Covid-19 in other areas of the world, three sectors or dimensions were selected for evaluation; these were human rights, vulnerable groups, and health outcomes.

5.3.2.1. Human Rights

Initially opposed to a lockdown, the state Executive – supported internally and in public by the Health Ministry – mandated a lockdown that severely curtailed basic human rights. Public gatherings were banned, most facilities were shut down and only non-essential services and outlets, mainly food, fuel and healthcare providers were permitted to operate. The country's sole airport was closed, effectively shutting down the tourism industry, a major contributor to the state's economy. The measures enacted did not only address the health and safety of the Maltese population but also took into consideration substantial commercial interests; as will be evidenced later and as has been alluded to in previous chapters, economic factors are inextricably intertwined with social ones. In this context the state moved immediately to allay the concerns of the business sector by introducing a number of financial aid packages. A 'mini-budget' of €1.8 billion²²⁸ was announced together with – at various points throughout the course of the Pandemic - tax deferrals (Social security contributions; FSS Tax; VAT; and

²²⁸ To put this into context, the National Budget for 2020 was Eur5.3 billion.

Provisional Tax), bank guarantees, subsidies relating to special leave, rent, loss of employment and disability.²²⁹

In total 88 Legal Notices, Acts, Subsidiary Legislation, Chapters or Byelaws were enacted concerning, amongst other issues, the limitation of public circulation, the wearing of masks in public areas, the various financial measures described above, quarantine and Covid-19 testing regulations, travel restrictions and vaccine certificates²³⁰ (Table 7).

Table 7 - Selection of Legal Notices enacted during the Pandemic.²³¹

Valid	Expired	Repealed by	Date	LN	Description
No	30.06.2022	N/A	25.08.2020	345/2020	COVID-19 Temporary Support Measures Regulations, 2020
Yes		Active	10.09.2021	357/2021	Testing of COVID-19 Regulations, 2021
No		N/A	06.07.2021	283/2021	COVID-19 Temporary Support Measures (Amendment No. 2) Regulations, 2021
No	30.06.2022	N/A	18.06.2021	263/2021	COVID-19 Temporary Government Financial Support Measures Regulations, 2021
			28.05.2021	227/2021	Vaccination against COVID-19 Certificate Order (Amendment) 2021
			30.04.2021	203/2021	Vaccination against COVID-19 Certificate Order, 2021
No		N/A	01.04.2021	132/2021	COVID-19 Temporary Support Measures (Amendment) Regulations, 2021
No	10.09.2021	357/2021	18.03.2021	113/2021	Delivery and Testing of COVID-19 using Point-of-Care Rapid Testing (Amendment), Regulations, 2021
No	10.09.2021	357/2021	12.02.2021	49/2021	Delivery and Testing of COVID-19 using Point-of-Care Rapid Testing, Regulations 2021
No	31.12.2023	N/A	11.10.2022	247/2022	Tax Credit (Malta International Airport plc)(COVID-19 Damage Compensation) Rules, 2022
Yes		Active	11.04.2022	118/2022	Testing of COVID-19 (Amendment) Regulations, 2022
	10.04.2022	115/2022	08.02.2022	71/2022	Valid Certificate of Recognised Vaccination against COVID-19 Requirement (Amendment No. 2) Regulations, 2022
No		N/A	08.02.2022	70/2022	COVID-19 Temporary Support Measures (Amendment) Regulations, 2022
	10.04.2022	115/2022	02.02.2022	48/2022	Valid Certificate of Recognised Vaccination against COVID-19 Requirement (Amendment) Regulations, 2022
	10.04.2022	115/2022	13.01.2022	008/2022	Valid Certificate of Recognised Vaccination against COVID-19 Requirement Regulations, 2022
			13.01.2022	007/2022	Vaccination against COVID-19 Certificate (Amendment) Order, 2022
N/A	N/A	N/A	10.04.2022	115/2022	Repealing Regulations, 2022
N/A	N/A	N/A	05.06.2020	232/2020	Repealing Regulations, 2020
N/A	N/A	N/A	30.06.2020	243/2020	Repealing Regulations, 2020 (Enforcement)

²²⁹ ‘COVID-19: Financial Incentives Announced By Maltese Government - Financing - Malta’.

²³⁰ <https://legislation.mt/Search>

²³¹ By author.

In the interim, the discourse of ‘a new normal’ began to surface. This was not restricted to the lay public but appeared also in peer-reviewed literature by Maltese academics:

*“Two months following the first case of COVID-19 in Malta, the Islands moved into the first transition phase towards a new normality.”*²³²

*“COVID-19 in Malta: a new normal in Valletta’s Republic Street”*²³³

*“Malta’s new normal”*²³⁴

This period of relative stability led to the end of the FW in May 2020, with a gradual relaxation of the Extraordinary Measures. The sense of false security was rudely interrupted in mid-July 2020 (Figure 15). The opening of borders to allow the tourism industry to restart operations, combined with numerous social gatherings and religious feasts brought about a significant increase in infection numbers and a concomitant tightening of measures, though not to the extent seen in the FW.²³⁵ Mask wearing and a limit on the number of persons in a public gathering were mandated.

5.3.2.1.1. Vaccination

Malta exhibited one of the highest rates of population vaccination in Europe and the MENA region, together with Israel.²³⁶ This can be attributed to a low rate of vaccine hesitancy in the

²³² Cuschieri, ‘COVID-19: The Transition towards a New Normal—Experiences from the European Country of Malta’, 2641.

²³³ ‘COVID-19 in Malta: A New Normal in Valletta’s Republic Street’.

²³⁴ ‘Malta’s New Normal – Kristina Chetcuti’.

²³⁵ Cuschieri et al., ‘Mass Events Trigger Malta’s Second Peak After Initial Successful Pandemic Suppression’.

²³⁶ Cuschieri et al., ‘The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mediterranean Region over 18 Months’.

local population, timely procurement of vaccine supplies²³⁷, efficient and easily accessible public vaccination centres, and a well-structured implementation strategy. The target subjects were divided into four groups with the vulnerable and essential workers in the first and so on in order of human and national interest.²³⁸ Whilst vaccination was not mandated *de jure*, the publication of Legal Notice 203/21²³⁹ requiring a valid Covid-19 Vaccination Certificate for entry into the majority of public institutions gave it *de facto* status.

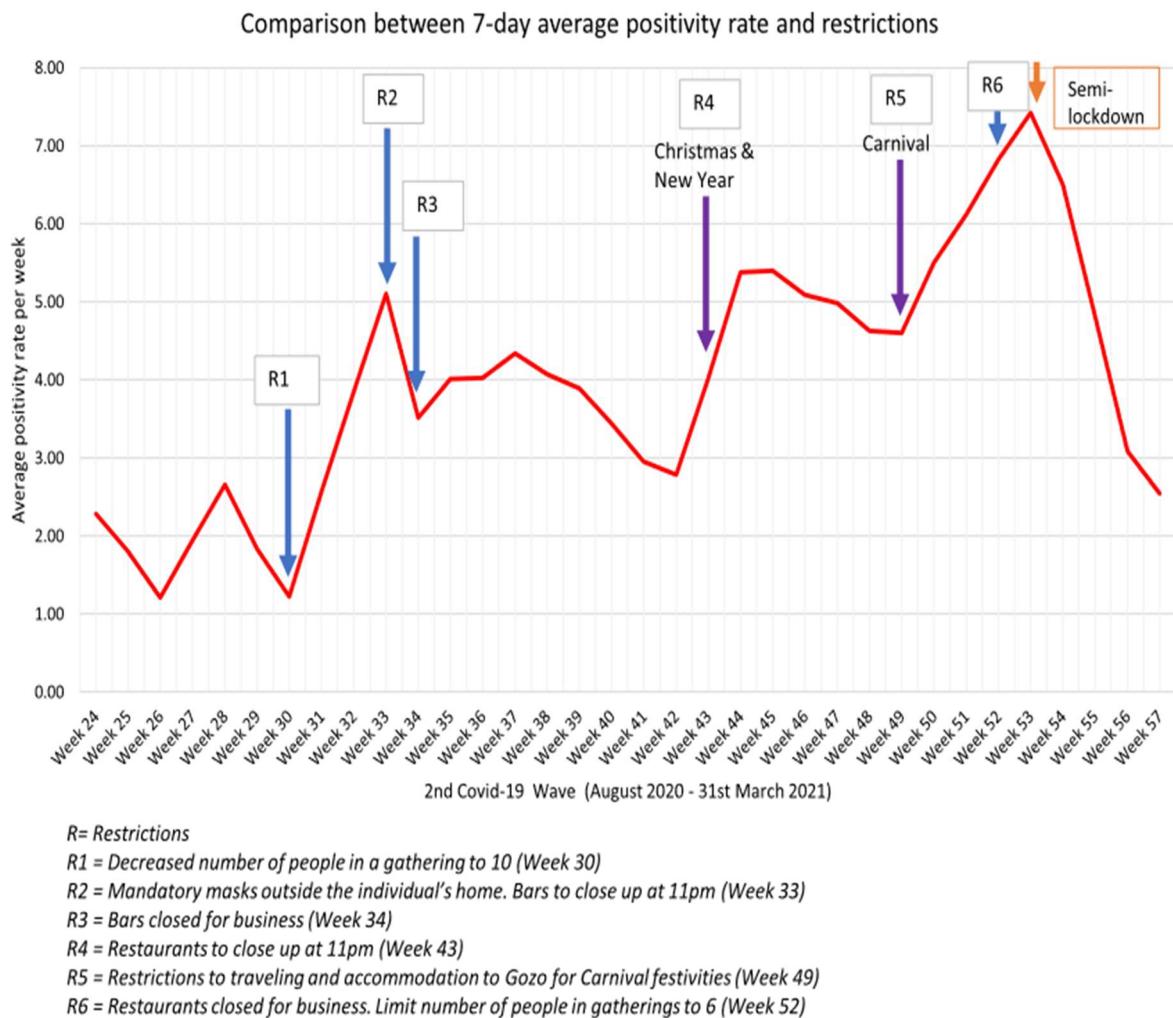


Figure 15 - Timeline comparison between restrictions and infection rate - Second Wave²⁴⁰

²³⁷ In concordance with the season Malta received its first consignment of the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine on Boxing Day 2020!

²³⁸ Cuschieri, Grech, and Grech, 'A Year of COVID-19 Pandemic Roller-Coaster: The Malta Experience, Lessons Learnt, and the Future'.

²³⁹ 'Legal Notice 203 of 2021, Public Health Act Cap 465, Vaccination against Covid-19 Certificate Order, 2021'.

²⁴⁰ Extracted from Cuschieri et al., 'Mass Events Trigger Malta's Second Peak After Initial Successful Pandemic Suppression'.

5.3.2.2. Vulnerable groups

5.3.2.2.1. Third Country Nationals

The quote below was not the result of evidence that TCNs or other ‘foreigners’ were in any manner connected to the Pandemic, but a simple comment pulled from below the news article recording the first case of imported Covid-19 in Malta.

“The government should stop the strangers begging for work here and send them to their countries. The health of the Maltese people should come before everything including business. The public transport should be disinfected every day.”²⁴¹

As revealed by the literature review, an unwanted consequence of the securitisation of the Pandemic was a deleterious effect on the rights and dignity of vulnerable groups. In Malta, one can consider irregular migrants and TCNs licensed to work as those groups to be evaluated. The tone of discourse was further degraded by comments such as the below by the Minister for the Economy, Silvio Schembri, words for which he later apologised:

*“Charity begins at home. Our primary focus are Maltese and Gozitan workers....Malta will no longer accept applications for work from unskilled third-country nationals ‘with immediate effect’”.*²⁴²

These comments are taken from the early days of the Pandemic and its securitisation. One can immediately discern a xenophobic instinct within the Maltese population to blame the reason for the unknown onto those considered to be outsiders. The creation of a link between existential threats to a state and those not considered to be core members of the ‘national’

²⁴¹ ‘Malta’s First Coronavirus Cases Are Girl and Parents’.

²⁴² ‘Robert Abela Announces €1.8 Billion Rescue Package to Mitigate Coronavirus Crisis’.

population is not a novel instance. Xenophobia is a reaction common to societies in general in times of stress and unquantifiable threats.²⁴³ Securitisation appears to have made this worse in another states – as we saw in Greece – and repeated in Malta. This ‘scapegoating’ of a disease onto a specific and vulnerable population sub-group was clear in the United States with President Trump creating a link between the coronavirus and individuals of Chinese descent.²⁴⁴ Locally, staff at Identity Malta refused to serve clients – mainly TCNs applying for, or renewing residence permits – on the 11th of March, ostensibly because the same clients could be carriers of Covid-19.²⁴⁵ Interestingly, this did not occur in other government entities whose clientele was mainly composed of Maltese or Caucasians.

5.3.2.2.2. Irregular Migrants

With respect to irregular migrants, the attitude of the state was realist in nature and did not address human security concerns. Irregular migrants were denied entry to Malta and marooned onboard vessels based on national health security. There are cases where the principle of non-refoulement appears to have been broken. Though Maltese authorities have adopted a hard-line approach to irregular migrants since 2013, the securitisation of the Pandemic appears to have both hardened their approach and provided them with an opportunity to further reduce arrivals in the name of the national interest. Borders and harbours were closed – the designation according to the Law of the Sea as a ‘place of safety’ was unilaterally ignored by the Maltese (and Italian) governments, considering their harbours as ‘dangerous’ to those risking their lives

²⁴³ See Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul for theories of pollution and bio-immune reactions and Aaroe, Lene, Michael Bang Petersen, and Kevin Arceneaux. 2017. “The Behavioral Immune System Shapes Political Intuitions: Why and How Individual Differences in Disgust Sensitivity Underlie Opposition to Immigration.” *American Political Science Review* 111: 2: 277–294 for Behavioral-immune-system (BIS) theory.

²⁴⁴ Daniels et al., ‘Has Pandemic Threat Stoked Xenophobia?’, 890.

²⁴⁵ ‘Updated (2) - Identity Malta to Remain Open but Customer Care Services to Be Provided Online - The Malta Independent’.

crossing the Mediterranean!²⁴⁶ This reversal discourse was employed to justify the clear infringement of the various legal instruments governing this area of International Law – all in the name of ‘protecting’ migrants from the dangers posed by the Maltese population infected with Covid-19.²⁴⁷ Pushback of migrants also occurred. In April 2020, at the beginning of the Pandemic a boat with 63 migrants was guided back to Libya, during which a total of 12 died, with the rest being handed back to the Libyan authorities – in full breach of the principle of *non-refoulement*.²⁴⁸ The practice of preventing the landing of irregular migrants by confining them aboard tourist ships in the early months of the Pandemic – ostensibly for their own protection – was also a feature of Maltese state policy.²⁴⁹

The irony of the direct targeting of irregular migrants was that the Pandemic was leveraged as an excuse to further discriminate against them, basing the rationale for this on ensuring their own safety. The securitisation of Covid-19 allowed several actions – in the same lines of those above – to go unnoticed by the general population. When these did reach the public eye, *force majeure* was touted as the driver for the necessary actions of the executive. Though this discrimination in the application of measures against vulnerable groups may be considered a consequence of securitisation, securitisation itself was not the root cause. The issue of migration – beyond the scope of this work – has long been subject to much polemic in Malta. The securitisation process presented as the perfect opportunity to execute certain unpalatable actions that would have been unacceptable, if not for the extraordinary circumstances at the time.

One cannot review the consequences of the securitisation of Covid-19 and not dedicate a few lines to the case of the Maersk Etienne. The latter merchant vessel picked up 27 refugees in the

²⁴⁶ Government of Malta, ‘Statement - Covid-19 and Malta as a “safe” Place’.

²⁴⁷ Schöfberger and Rango, ‘COVID-19 and Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean’, xxv.

²⁴⁸ Kingsley and Willis, ‘Latest Tactic to Push Migrants From Europe?’

²⁴⁹ Stierl and Dadusc, ‘The “Covid Excuse”’, 1460.

Maltese SAR and was refused permission to disembark. The standoff lasted as record 38 days – only resolved when Italy allowed them to be transhipped to its shores – albeit to floating detention centres created by the Italian government using the ‘Covid excuse’.²⁵⁰

Ashraf, raises relevant concerns in an eloquent paper in the July 2022 issue of the Migration Letters journal. He draws attention to the Libya- Malta nexus with respect to the control of irregular migration:

“It is worth mentioning that Malta, for a while, has been secretly collaborating with the LCG²⁵¹ to curb irregular movements towards the Island. However, seeing the aftermath of the Pandemic Maltese Government realised that this is high time to conclude a MoU with Libya to curb the arrival of asylum seekers on the Island. Under the MoU, Malta established two Coordination centres – one in Libya and the other in Malta to monitor the movement of asylum seekers in the Mediterranean.... Following the establishment of the Centres, real-time information is sent to the LCG, whose responsibility is to intercept and pull back the asylum seekers.”

He further stresses that the Pandemic and the concomitant measures associated with its securitisation have enabled a stricter and harsher approach to irregular migration in other European states, with Italy and Hungary being singled out.²⁵²

5.3.2.2.3. The Economy

Earlier on reference (Section 3.3.3. of this dissertation) was made to a World Bank 2020 publication that indicated the benefits of short, sharp lockdowns with respect to economic activity. This policy was adopted in Malta. The consequences of the country-wide lockdown

²⁵⁰ Stierl and Dadusc, 1462.

²⁵¹ Libyan Coast Guard.

²⁵² Ashraf, ‘The Confluence Between COVID-19 and Informal Externalisation Agreements and the Precarious State of the Right to Seek Asylum’, 431.

mandated at the end of March were dramatic. In certain sectors – tourism and entertainment are two prime exemplars – economic activity ground to a standstill. In others the impact was significant but easily weathered – supermarkets and pharmacy retailers come to mind.

Restrictions did not only affect the internal mechanisms of the Maltese economy. Global volumes for the shipment of goods decreased by up to 9.6% to the end of August 2020, equating to 206-286 million tonnes in absolute volume and USD 225-412 billion in monetary terms.²⁵³

Malta was one of the states disproportionately impacted by the extraordinary measures, since its geographical context meant that it was isolated from the rest of the world. Its reliance on maritime routes for a continual flow of commercial traffic meant that securitisation would have a significant deleterious effect on the economy. Exports dropped by 27.2% and imports by 25.7% placing 7th in a global comparison of the largest trade losses on a country level.²⁵⁴

The effects of the lockdown restrictions in Malta were the most severely felt in the second quarter of 2020, when they were at their most stringent. Economic activity declined by 13 percent; this impacted the rate of inflation which decreased to 0.64 percent, down a whole percentage point from 2019. The contraction in the Maltese economy inevitably led to a decrease in nominal Gross Domestic Product of Eur13 billion – 6 percent less than the previous year. The negative impact of the securitisation was exhibited in the primary reflection of societal activity – the economy. The impact was not as dramatic as feared – the government played a central role by instituting a raft of measures that mitigated the negative consequences of the securitisation: Eur384 million were disbursed in relation to the Covid-19 Business Assistance Program, Eur45 million on the voucher scheme and Eur14 million on Social

²⁵³ Verschuur, Koks, and Hall, ‘Global Economic Impacts of COVID-19 Lockdown Measures Stand out in High-Frequency Shipping Data’, 1.

²⁵⁴ Verschuur, Koks, and Hall, 8.

Security support. This expenditure was reflected in a 27 percent increase in state debt which totalled Eur7 billion at the end of 2020.²⁵⁵

As the narrative in the previous section has demonstrated, these generous subsidies did not stop the business community from advocating the relaxation of measures and a return to ‘normalcy’ in order to restart economic activity and initiate a forward momentum. The choice of approach to the economic conundrum and the security dilemma appears to have been optimal under the circumstances; without commenting on the long-term strategic visions for the Maltese economy, the measures put in place to mitigate the consequences of securitisation have had a short-term benefit. In 2022 GDP grew by 6.9% and is forecast to expand further by 3.9% and 4.1% in 2023 and 2024 respectively. This indicates a healthy rebound from the Covid-19 and securitisation consequences, based mainly on resurgent tourism and export of services.²⁵⁶

The case study selected the narrative and interpreted it through a security studies lens and the conceptual framework derived from the literature. The consequences of the securitisation were considered, and some aspects expanded upon. The next section analyses the results of this process and frames them in view of the objectives proposed in the rationale and methodology section of this dissertation.

²⁵⁵ National Statistics Office, Malta, ‘Social and Economic Impact of COVID-19: 2020’.

²⁵⁶ ‘Economic Forecast for Malta’.

5.4. Analysis and discussion

The case study set out to examine the process of the securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta. The work divided its focus into two areas:

- (i) an analysis of the process of the securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta and
- (ii) an analysis of the consequences of this securitisation.

To do so, five objectives were derived from the research question. This section will deal with each objective and assert whether the findings of the work have answered them competently.

5.4.1. *Revisiting Objectives*

The case study had clear, identifiable endpoints. This section will re-examine these aims and evaluate whether their initial objectives were achieved, in part or in full.

- a) What path did the process for the framing of Covid-19 as a security issue follow?
- b) Can a clear period of securitisation be identified?
- c) What measures were implemented within the legal, social and health dimensions and were all sectors of society affected equally?
- d) Have these measures all been withdrawn or suspended, that is, has Covid-19 been de-securitised?
- e) What were the consequences of this securitisation? Can adverse or unforeseen effects be documented as a direct result of the securitisation of Covid-19?

The work appears to have answered the first two questions clearly. The securitisation of the Pandemic occurred following the identification of the index case in Malta on the 7th of March

2020. After this, the narrative in the previous Chapter illustrated the manner which the threat posed by the virus was presented to the audience and framed in the context of national security and human safety.

The prime, visible actor in the securitisation process in Malta was the Prime Minister, Robert Abela. His public pronouncements laid the ground for the public's receptiveness to the extraordinary measures that were deemed necessary. The MFH and SPH provided legitimacy for his statements based on their standing in the public eye as leading healthcare professional experts – apart from their roles within the health arm of the executive. Simultaneously, they also acted as a counterfoil in certain instances, by reining in overly enthusiastic utterances by the PM that appeared not to be completely in line with medical opinion at the time.²⁵⁷

The PM, in the opinion of the author, should be interpreted as the front facing instrument of the state, and by rationale, the administration of the time. The review of the narrative in Malta has clearly demonstrated that all utterances of significant importance were delivered through him. Nonetheless it is proposed that this should be classified as a collective administrative decision of the government at the time.

The actions of the PM do not appear to exhibit an individual agenda, but rather that of the governing party. At no time does there seem to have been a divergence between members of the government on policies with respect to the restrictions imposed on vulnerable groups. This may suggest that the PM was utilised to project these policies and provide them with legitimacy in the eyes of the public, leveraging the Pandemic as a convenient excuse to further discriminate against specific sectors of the Maltese population.

²⁵⁷ In retrospect it is debatable whether most of the 'expert' opinion at the time – this is not a reference to local events specifically – was based on evidence as opposed to educated guesswork. In the opinion of experts in the medical field it is still too early to be able to accurately gauge the long-term effects of the Covid-19 coronavirus infection and that of the various vaccines developed in extraordinarily short time frames and administered in the millions. The Pandemic was a learning process for many disciplines, health, and security studies amongst the many.

Was the PM an individual actor? Did the actions and consequences of securitisation reflect a personal agenda driven by his own convictions? Did the government adopt the PM as an instrument to leverage the Pandemic and garner further public support to persist with policies commenced prior?

Securitisation has thrown up these hypothetical constructs. They cannot be ignored, as mechanisms have the potential to become ingrained into state and executive practice. The process has created the potential for establishing key securitising posts or actors that could be utilised to introduce or increase state and party policies that would otherwise face significant opposition if it were not for the extenuating circumstances.

The audience – the Maltese public – was a passive one in the mould that Wæver et al proposed in their initial visualisation of the CS model. Though pandering to the audience, more specifically a specific sector – the business community – the PM did not develop a bi-directional relationship with the public. The framing and subjective projection of the threat was firmly in his hands and any notion of interpreting the process in the manner of the Welsh School, with a degree of inter-subjective evaluation and the possibility that actors could reverse roles and threat directionality dismissed. Regular updates by the PM, the MFH and SPH were broadcast live daily, and the public was kept reassured that the situation was under control.

Through the identification and interpretation of trends drawn from the case study and Maltese narrative it is immediately apparent that the nature of social discourse is not one of opposition or rebellion but one of acceptance and adaptation. This may have a paradoxical interpretation. On the one hand the public's acquiescence to the extraordinary measures aided greatly in the maintenance of low infection rates and demonstrated an admirable sense of unity and common purpose. On the other hand, a lack of questioning and oversight by the general population – at least beyond what could be termed a slew of generic low-level social media posts – may be the

sign of a weak democratic culture and political mindset. Whether this can be attributed to a devolution of social obligation or a deep-seated subservience emanating from the Islands' colonial past is arguable and up for discussion.

Once the danger had been established in the mind of the audience – the Maltese public – the enactment of EM was met with muted opposition, if not acceptance, as described earlier.

The period of securitisation can be traced from the first statement of the PM on the 7th of March to the repealing of all measures on the 2nd of May 2022. The level of securitisation was not constant throughout and is thus debatable if one should consider the whole period as being securitised or solely those timeframes where the EM were at their most restrictive. It is the opinion of the author that, in accordance with the literature and the model adopted for interpretation, securitisation is proposed by the securitiser and accepted by the audience. In this context both the securitiser and the audience released their focus and evaluation of the Pandemic as a threat upon the repealing of the EM in May 2022.

What is not up for discussion is the fact that the extraordinary measures were not within the remit of the Executive as envisaged ordinarily. Engler et al propose that Covid-19 extraordinary measures had a direct impact on what one can consider to be ordinary democratic principles in two main contexts. The first principle is that of individual freedoms; several of the measures designed to limit the transmission of infectious disease inherently restrain or restrict the free movement of citizens and their right to assembly. This can further be extended to be a restriction on freedom of expression and political opinion. The second principle proposed by Engler is that of the concentration of power. The measures introduced to reign in the Pandemic involved the transfer of power from the legislative arm of the state (parliament) to the executive arm (government). Although based on legislation itself which allows sweeping powers in the event of national interest and emergencies, such a situation could be conducive to action that

is not subject to the ordinary checks and balances presented by a separation of power and its definition.²⁵⁸

The Pandemic in Malta led to the previously mentioned introduction of extraordinary measures, some of which consisted of the temporary restriction of basic human rights. Amongst these were the right to move freely in public spaces, the right to aggregate and enjoy oneself amongst acquaintances, and the right to travel freely within those states bound by a regional agreement. In a number of countries these actions further exacerbated already fragile democratic environments with the executive body in power reluctant to roll back measures which strengthened its hold on the governed population. This was the case in Russia, Belarus and the ‘stan’ republics, where the coronavirus provided the perfect excuse to introduce draconian and illiberal measures in the name of public safety.²⁵⁹ China merits special mention here, with entire cities being locked down and walled off to prevent the spread of the virus. Whilst none of this remotely took place in Malta, and the securitisation process was a smooth one from the perspective of the securitising agents, particular comment must be made regarding the sweeping power granted to the SPH. Whilst this constituted a public vote of confidence in the right direction, the general population was not aware of the extent of the powers ceded by the executive to a single individual. Who is to say that in a future, hypothetical crisis such powers are not to be granted to a member of the elected executive, resulting in an almighty ‘presidential’ figure? And what of accountability in the period of hegemony? The parameters of such a step need to be transparent and acceptable to all; setting them in place prior to a crisis would ensure that the probability of this occurring is minimised.

TCNs were treated as secondary residents; sent back home upon the expiration of work contracts and subject to delays in renewal due to refusal of state employees to deal with them

²⁵⁸ Engler et al., ‘Democracy in Times of the Pandemic: Explaining the Variation of COVID-19 Policies across European Democracies’.

²⁵⁹ Lamberova and Sonin, ‘Information Manipulation and Repression’.

directly. An argument can be made that the Pandemic was utilised as an opportunity to further policies of ‘pushback’ and a closure of borders with respect to irregular migrants. The issue of migration has been a contentious one in Malta and variations in state policy have been observed that re parallel to changes in government. Adjudicating on the morality or correctness of action taken is not the author’s call, but adherence to existing obligations under international law was not maintained and state behaviour in the period of Covid-19 extraordinary measures was modified and appears to have been discriminatory towards irregular migrants, as examined through the literature and data available.

The discussion in the previous pages answered the fourth objective of determining whether the Pandemic had been de-securitised. All measures were withdrawn, with the wearing of masks in public health centres and hospitals remaining mandatory up to a month ago (June 2023). Both the tangible measures and the public discourse are prime evidence that Covid-19 has been de-securitised; it no longer features in public fora or news items. In the minds of most one might suggest it appears to have been an aberration or simply a bad dream.

This is not to say that an intangible legacy is not present – in response to the fifth objective. The smooth progression of the process of securitisation in Malta and the consequent ease with which the state introduced the measures it deemed necessary, is troubling. The strong democratic credentials of the country should play a major role in providing checks and balances by means of which the executive is denied unilateral power. This was not the case, with the only vocal opponents of the state being the HCPs, albeit in favour of more draconian measures. The consequences of securitisation were not given sufficient prominence, with the dangers of the Pandemic eclipsing all other concerns. As we have seen, unforeseen or unpublicised consequences had deleterious and lasting effects on specific sectors of the population.

Chapter Six – Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusions

The initial research question challenged the author by asking:

“What were the consequences of the securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta?”

The review of the advent of Covid-19 in Malta and its elevation to the level of high politics has established beyond discussion that the securitisation process occurred. What is arguable, and certainly a point of discussion is the manner of interpretation of this securitisation process in the light of the conceptual frameworks outlined in the previous chapters. The salient conclusions of the research that justify its novelty are:

- (i) The study is the first to analyse the securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta from the perspective of IR and the sub-field of security studies. It has clearly established that the securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta took place and within a definite period. The Prime Minister, Robert Abela, acted as an agent of the primary securitising entity – the state. As a result of securitisation, extraordinary measures were introduced and repealed once the existential threat had receded. The process appears to have achieved the primary aims of minimising the loss of life and preserving the economic viability and eventual survival of the nation. The interpretation of the process was based on a derivation of the socially constructed nature of the Copenhagen, Paris, and Welsh Schools’ view of securitisation. Socially derived constructs enable a deeper and more nuanced interpretation of past events as do the theories of securitisation discussed and the conceptual frameworks adopted for the

case study. The liberal and constructivist approach to interpreting security is still developing. Solely adopting this perspective and completely abandoning the realist focus on national security comes at the price of ignoring the obvious, in line with the current state of IR and the evolution of what can be termed a New World Order as proposed by Zartmann.²⁶⁰ States, Malta included, are governed by a political elite which is deeply embedded into the major economic and commercial players in the country. The priorities of these players were evidenced in the number of instances that economic factors were the primary thrust of the Prime Minister's interventions. The process was tinged by realist undertones: the state reacted by protecting its national interests and at all times attempted to balance the moral requirement to protect life with the economic necessities at stake. One could argue that the Maltese state's reaction can be interpreted purely on the lines of viewing the Pandemic as an objective threat to national economic security and containing it. This would render null the concepts of socially constructed threats and their introduction to the arena of high politics.

- (ii) The securitisation process had consequences. This study is the first to consider these at a theoretical and empirical level. As alluded to earlier, it is undeniable that in times of existential threats to the core of state and national interest, human nature reverts to a realist and ego-centric survival mindset. The Maltese executive was faced with Hobbes' (ons) choice – prioritise the individual or the many? Minimise mortality to the maximum in the short-term and pay the price with a deep recession once the Pandemic passed? Securitisation negatively impacted the economy, but the choices taken appear to have been the optimal ones as the numbers of direct deaths

²⁶⁰ See footnote 37.

attributed to Covid-19 were low – in absolute terms – and the economy recovered within a short time frame to rebound in 2022 and is on track to continue to do so in 2023. Extraordinary measures were arbitrary and mandatory and human rights were curtailed and democratic practice suspended in favour of unilateral action. Vaccination was compulsory, at least *de facto since* admission to several key locations was restricted only to the vaccinated. The ease with which the population accepted all restrictions may be cause for concern; if an analogous event would occur in the future one can argue that similar or more weighty restrictions could be imposed. This cession of civil and human liberties is not to be taken lightly, all the more so in the context of a mixed background of democratic governance and a lack of social engagement in political affairs. Vulnerable groups were singled out for discriminatory treatment as a consequence of the securitisation with TCNs and irregular migrants being unjustly impacted. There is disconcerting evidence that the ‘Covid excuse’ was adopted as a lever to co-securitise migration and non-EU nationals. This conflation is a concern.

6.2. Observations and Points of Discussion

Key points drawn from the analysis of the securitisation of the Pandemic in Malta that merit note and potentially a furthering of discussion and/or investigation are summarised below:

- (i) The selection of a case study as the focal point of the work was a successful implementation of this quantitative research modality. The interpretation of the Maltese experience through the conceptual framework developed in the first chapters allowed for a clear and logical illustration of the theoretical principles in play. Such a vivid contextual explanation would not have been attainable through an approach limited to the development of abstract concepts derived from the extant literature.
- (ii) Notwithstanding that – as has been pointed out in the limitations of the study – there are no tangible or comparable metrics for the measurement of a successful outcome for a securitisation process, the sequence of events that constituted the securitisation of Covid-19 in Malta can be deemed to be successful. That is, if success is to be measured by a minimisation of preventable mortality and damage to the state’s economy and infrastructure.
- (iii) In common with other countries the main thrust of the Securitising Act was the projection of a ‘fight for survival’ and the immediate reaction of the state was to escalate the situation to a ‘war-like’ scenario. The language selected by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health left the public in no doubt of the perceived severity of the coronavirus.
- (iv) Holistic, cross-disciplinary consultation with all stakeholders was visibly minimal. Whilst there definitely appears to have been discussion behind closed doors with the medical components of government – and these were appropriately leveraged to provide support for the securitisation and measures introduced - none

of this was adequately transparent.²⁶¹ The public was not consulted in any manner and was restricted to being fed daily updates from the Minister and the Superintendent of Public Health.

- (v) Healthcare professionals were consulted – not across the whole spectrum of professions - but political undertones in MAM-state communication shaped an adversarial rather than a symbiotic relationship. Unity in public utterances was only observed at the level of securitisation at the initial phases, and even then, there was still no agreement regarding the objective, quantifiable nature of the threat - only on the validity of the threat itself. Here one observes the subjective construction of the threat as varying from actor to actor. Pursuing this further one might argue that the MAM proposed – in the manner of the Welsh School – the state as the derived threat when it refused to immediately introduce drastic restrictions “*Such behaviour puts thousands of people’s health at risk in this capricious manner.*”²⁶²
- (vi) A post-mortem was not held, or at best the results of one not published. Once the WHO had declared the end of the Pandemic, the first step should have been to put in motion a thorough review of the executive and health arms of the state within the context of the Pandemic. The results of such a review could then be made public and discussed in professional and lay fora. Following this – and avoiding any semblance of the apportionment of blame – points of failure or contention in the process could be identified. In turn suggestions could be collected and collated and form the basis of the preparation for a plan for the next health crisis on the Maltese Islands.

²⁶¹ The author can attest to this as a board member of the Pharmacy Council and the Chamber of Pharmacists.

²⁶² ‘Coronavirus: Government Failing to Protect Health of Population – MAM’.

- (vii) At the level of government and policy-making fora, at no time was the concept of securitisation raised whether in a formal, academic sense or otherwise. In the dimension of public policy and healthcare this is an alarming non-event. As highlighted in (v) above, a lack of consideration of this will lead to a lack of insight by those involved in both past, present and future national administration. To use the words of Professor Buzan, both a *widening* and a *deepening* of the Maltese approach to security issues – with specific reference to health – are required.
- (viii) The study focused on the state and the medical professions to a lesser extent. There is no doubt, as stated, that the primary securitising actor was the state executive, with the Prime Minister Robert Abela, as its agent. His speech acts were the main proposals which propelled the Pandemic to the level of a security threat in the public mindset. His utterances were however, supported by those of numerous supporting actors which undoubtedly reinforced the framing and the context of his messages. This study, not taking off from the point of view of a sociological investigation, does not address these factors. Thus, one can state that the study supplies a perspective limited by its wide brushstrokes, providing an authentic and reliable impression of the process but not capable of opening to a granular and detailed level.
- (ix) On a theoretical level one must pay attention not to get entangled in a counterfactual philosophical loop. Kirk argues this point eloquently taking the example of the securitisation of Covid-19 in the US. In this instance, then President Trump and his Republican allies proposed this rationale to the public: Covid-19 may be dangerous, but it is being beaten. What is an existential threat is the actual securitisation of Covid. This can be defined as “a qualified de-

securitisation underpinning a ‘securitisation of securitisation’.”²⁶³ The same can apply to the analysis in the context of Malta. If excess emphasis is placed on elevating an issue to the realm of high politics and consequently extreme measures enacted, then the measures themselves might be the eventual danger. The attitude of the HCPs for immediate and drastic action could be construed as such.

- (x) The scope of the work has been limited narrowly to the manner of securitisation and the interpretation of the process in the light of the literature on the same process. Focus was maintained on the main players and generalisations were made. As an example, analysis of the securitisation was limited to the ‘conversion’ of the public to the PM’s point of view, via examination of his public utterances or speech acts. Adopting a holistic analytical lens, the Maltese population did not exist in an idyllic Mediterranean bubble and was subject to information and utterances by other entities and other states’ leaders. As a caveat, this is a limiting factor for studies in other countries, even though it is arguable whether any speeches emanating from a Maltese PM would carry enough weight to influence much larger and more powerful nations.
- (xi) Health reaction protocols – and it is almost certain that this is the case – need to be amended to adapt to infectious emergencies without unintentionally decreasing access to other sectors of healthcare.

²⁶³ Kirk, ““The Cure Cannot Be Worse than the Problem””, 143.

6.3. Suggestions for Future Work

It is the opinion of the author that a deeper investigation of the securitisation of Covid-19 is required. It is not a question, as stated earlier, of the apportionment of blame for what could have and what did, go wrong; much went extremely right, and Malta had some of the best outcomes at a global level.²⁶⁴ People would have died whichever way we jumped. Rather the concern of the author lies with the lack of transparency inherent to the process. As is the case with humanitarian intervention, one cannot judge the outcome of the extraordinary measures against what would have happened if none were implemented. The following are a few areas that may benefit from further theoretical and empirical research application.

6.3.1. *Jus Securitas?*

The 'justness' of what took place in Malta can only be measured in subjective, social terms by the survivors. This is not intended as a critique of the actions of the executive; a look at other states has revealed worse and exceedingly more authoritarian actions. The aim of a detailed analysis and deconstruction of the process would result in the development of ideas for a framework that could be put in place for future use. This could act as a safeguard in the event of an executive with unilateral intentions and the objective of ultimate dominance and the suppression of democratic rule of law.

Rita Floyd has laid the groundwork for a potential draft concept²⁶⁵ that could eventually be integrated into the structures of Global Health Governance. This could take two routes, either that by which adopting a framework for the securitisation process would be a step at norm-

²⁶⁴ Cuschieri, Grech, and Grech, 'A Year of COVID-19 Pandemic Roller-Coaster: The Malta Experience, Lessons Learnt, and the Future'; Cuschieri et al., 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mediterranean Region over 18 Months'.

²⁶⁵ See p26 of this dissertation.

setting,²⁶⁶ or failing this, the framework could be codified into Treaty or Convention, on the lines of the Geneva Conventions. There are several arguments against this happening:

- (i) Generating enough political momentum to create a global call that succeeds in persuading sufficient numbers of states of the inevitability and moral necessity is an enormous enterprise.
- (ii) The enormity of the task of calling a Conference at a global level and reaching agreement is not to be underestimated.
- (iii) States could argue that there are more pressing matters to be tackled at an international level.
- (iv) States could argue that securitisation is an issue of national security and interest, and external interference is not acceptable or welcome.
- (v) Authoritarian regimes have no interest in becoming accountable or increasing transparency and ceding control over security issues.

The idea of Just Securitisation could also hold water if accordingly amended and customised to fit the idiosyncrasies of the local context. In this case, there are similar aspects to the above that argue against it being successfully integrated into a legally binding and executable tool:

- (i) There must be the political will to develop and table the relevant legislation.
- (ii) The political will must be cross-party to ensure mechanisms that are accepted *a priori* and not subject to contestation.

²⁶⁶ The first states to adopt it would be the norm entrepreneurs and if sufficient states followed suit in a consistently similar manner, then one would have the grounds to claim that the process had been inured into Customary International Law (CIL), based on practice. For a practice of states to become CIL, that is only one of two requirements. The second is that of *opinio juris* or a valid legal basis for the practice. Keeping in mind the consequences of securitisation discussed in this dissertation, it is extremely probable that legal arguments can be made for such a basis.

- (iii) There must public awareness regarding the importance of the issue. This will allow for a constructive discussion in public fora that will result in a comprehensive and inclusive instrument.
- (iv) The latter is of importance as studies have shown that minorities and third-country nationals were disproportionately impacted by exceptional measures introduced. This was the case in Malta and in other European states.
- (v) The healthcare professions must be given a role proportional to their social import, both when developing the tool and in the actual procedures to be adopted.

6.3.2. Healthcare Governance

The scope and timeframe of the work did not allow for a deeper investigation of the literature. The Pandemic has brought about a cathartic process of soul-searching and evaluation of the securitisation of health. The analysis of this necessitates a thorough review of the structure and organisation of health governance, both at a national and at a global level. Such a review was touched upon in Chapter Three but not in sufficient depth to draw out the idiosyncrasies of the field that distinguish it from ordinary security threats such as meteorites or nuclear annihilation. Even though the Pandemic clearly posed a mortal danger to all citizens, it still vied for attention with economic and human right interests – the security dilemma. One hypothesises that it is unlikely that the same would be observed in the event of a pending meteorite strike. Hence, a deeper investigation of healthcare governance system, and the manner in which it played a decisive role in Malta, is required to provide more competent answers to the questions that surround the securitisation of Covid-19.

6.3.3. Vulnerable Groups

The policies adopted towards vulnerable groups, and their concomitant actions deserve review and justification. As a result of the securitisation, the work has highlighted the discriminatory treatment meted out and the potential infringement of precepts of International Law. A deeper investigation of state policies and unilateral executive action and their societal consequences – in times of exceptionalism – is warranted. Past extraordinary action may become future policy if not held to account. Hence, future instances of securitisation would profit from specific oversight in this area to avoid, the unintentional or otherwise, consequences of the securitisation of issues of national interest being confounded with issues of human security and dignity.

6.3.4. Geo-Securitisation?

The possibility that the measures adopted by Malta were influenced by the geographic nature of the state was not considered in depth. The idea of ‘islandness’ is not new, and the Pandemic offered the opportunity to evaluate these characteristics in the context of global health security and in comparison, to other continental states. The ease of border closures – sea and air – aided in the speed of application of the initial lockdown, preventing further imported infections and possibly allowed the resources of the state to regroup before the larger second wave. This may not have been possible in a state with porous land borders and hence the ‘islandness’ or geographical property of Malta appears to have conferred a potential advantage in the successful securitisation of Covid-19.²⁶⁷ This area requires further work; the impact of ‘islandness’ and the associated consequences of securitisation due to geo-economic variables was touched upon in Section 5.3.2.2.3. of this dissertation.

²⁶⁷ Roberts and Kelman, ‘Global Health Security and Islands as Seen through COVID-19 and Vaccination’.

6.4. Final Words

Hannah Arendt is quoted as stating the following, towards the end of her illustrious and productive life: “*we all have only one real thought in our lives, and everything we then do are [sic] elaborations or variations of one theme*”.²⁶⁸ Whilst possibly not open to widespread generalisation - after all a considerable segment of the population will not have the privilege accorded to academia to be able to dedicate time to contribute to the body of knowledge of humankind – Arendt had a valid point to make here. This work aims to have made the same point.

Throughout the work the constant and consistent theme was the development of the concept of the rationalisation of the politics of exceptionalism in the context of healthcare issues. By rationalisation the author visualises the transparent and equitable evaluation of a perceived threat through a pre-established and pre-determined process with the application or introduction of extraordinary measures only after extensive but expedient consultation, with ultimate balance being achieved between the advantages of promoting the issue to the level of high politics and the adverse consequences of the measures and actions taken, as a result of this securitisation.

This dissertation set out to use the lens of securitisation to analyse that same process for the Covid-19 Pandemic in Malta. It sought to draw conclusions regarding the consequences of this process, framing them in the context of the main schools of thought in the field. Analysis of these schools led the author to develop the conceptual framework adopted; the conceptualisation revolved around the main points of divergence of the schools: the role and nature of the audience, the role and weight of the speech act and the objective-subjective dichotomy of the nature of the threat.

²⁶⁸ Hannah Arendt, quoted in Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt, for Love of the World*.

The author humbly concludes that current schools of thought in the field of securitisation are coloured and biased by their roots; the Copenhagen School is based in political science and security, the Paris School leans heavily on Foucault and his institutional paranoia, whilst the Welsh School levers social constructivism as the means to develop its inter-subjective perspective on the actors and security issues. Williams and Aradau argue for the route to human security to be taken via the emancipation of the human will and the freedom to exist in a *natural* form. Conflicting and contrasting perspectives describing and attempting to apply a normative approach to the same concept, without intersecting at any one point can be frustrating and circular. As Edward Kolodziej posits in his introduction to *Security and International Relations*

“Much like the parable of the blind men and the elephant, partisans of each paradigm or approach explain security (the elephant) by way of selective observation of what they “see.” Some seize on the tail and proclaim the beast a snake or rope. Others fall against its shoulders and call it a wall. Still others, feeling the elephant’s curling trunk or drenched by water issuing from its end, conclude that the object is a fountain. In evaluating these several paradigms of security we can conceivably rise above them to “see” the whole elephant – an integrated understanding of the relation of security”²⁶⁹

The author also suggests that current securitisation literature has not yet made up its mind on the epistemological nature of the field. Is securitisation a descriptive process, that is utilised solely for interpretative purposes *a posteriori*? Is it, on the other hand, prescriptive suggesting a way forward for future action? Even more so, is it normative? Does it and may it delineate behaviour that is now accepted as a ‘norm’ and common practice by states and institutions? It appears that all the schools have taken their own, nuanced academic starting point and moved

²⁶⁹ Kolodziej, ‘Security and International Relations’, 2005.

on from there. The author suggests an alternative route for others to develop, basing on Floyd's proposal for just securitisation, but with allowances. This route involves the drafting of legislation that would embed the securitisation process into a state's legislature and firmly establish a novel norm at national level. It would constitute a massive conceptual step from the theoretical to the practical. Based on the case study for Malta in Chapter Five, enabling this transition could ensure a more transparent, equitable and just application of the process of dealing with issues that transiently venture into the realm of high politics and social security. The embedding of such an idea into the practice of securitisation could not only create a barrier to those seeking the politics of exceptionalism for their own nefarious ends but would also allow for the evaluation of the consequences of securitisation *a priori*. As this study has demonstrated, the process is not without negative effects on the actors involved.

This work does not simply purport to be an academic piece; it aspires to be the stimulus for further engagement and pragmatic application. That said, the evolution of academic discourse into societal application is not a facile task. Human nature is innately programmed to resist change and retain current practice and heuristics. The role of the academic is not restricted solely to the objective analysis of fact and the consequent peer approval of such works. A societal benefit must be drawn from academia and applied to, and for the good of, all members of humankind. The privilege endowed on academia simultaneously obliges it to be at the forefront of policy incubation, ideation, realisation, and execution.

In this respect, Gandhi's words are as relevant today as they were the moment they left his lips,

"We must be the change we wish to see in the world".

So be it.

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Appendix

The Appendix contains Tables I, II and III which are the condensed results of the searches conducted for the securitising Speech Acts as part of the research. The actors selected were the Hon. Prime Minister of Malta, Dr. Robert Abela, the Hon. Minister for Health, Mr. Chris Fearn and the Superintendent of Public Health, Professor Charmaine Gauci.

Table I

Search String: “covid press release malta gauci march 2020”

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>Economy</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>War</i>	<i>TCN</i>
2		18/03/2020	TMI	Coronavirus briefing - 10 new cases, total of 48	“If people have symptoms and stay home then we are going to limit how they are spread”	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-03-18/local-news/Live-Coronavirus-briefing-6736220964		1	1		
1		19/03/2020	TMI	Coronavirus briefing - Five new cases, total of 53; 'worst still to come' - Gauci	“These are small numbers and it is important to keep following the measures in place – the worst is yet to come.	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-03-19/local-news/Live-Coronavirus-briefing-6736221014		1	1		
4		24/03/2020	TMI	Coronavirus briefing - Only three cases, but curve still going up - Gauci	we must stick to the measures and social distancing.”	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-03-24/local-news/Live-Coronavirus-briefing-6736221223			1		
	7	28/03/2020	DOI	PR200570 - The Government announces seven decisions regarding schools, educational institutions and examinations		https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Pages/2020/March/28/pr200570en.aspx		1			
	2	30/03/2020	Chamber of Advocates	Covid updates - Chamber of Advocates		https://www.avukati.org/2020/03/30/30-03-20-covid-19-update/	1	1			
6	4	31/03/2020	The Legal 500	PARTIAL LOCKDOWN IN MALTA TO HAVE EFFECT FROM 28 MARCH 2020		https://www.legal500.com/developments/press-releases/partial-lockdown-in-malta-to-have-effect-from-28-march-2020/		1			

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>Economy</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>War</i>	<i>TCN</i>
3		31/03/2020	TMI	Coronavirus briefing - 13 new cases, total reaches 169; 'stay indoors', Gauci says	“We are currently in discussion and assessing the situation to see what the risk would be in this case,”	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-03-31/local-news/Live-Coronavirus-briefing-6736221480		1	1		
	10	03/05/2020	Transport Malta	Coronavirus: VRT stations re-open with new rules		https://www.transport.gov.mt/news/coronavirus-vrt-stations-re-open-with-new-rules-3742	1		1		
9		07/08/2020	TMI	15 cases of Covid-19 in hospital, one in poor state of health - Charmaine Gauci		https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-08-07/local-news/LIVE-Charmaine-Gauci-to-address-press-conference-6736225899			1		
10		28/08/2020	TMI	'The measures we implemented are working', Charmaine Gauci says	“It is important that we continue working together in order to reduce transmission.” - immigrants are being constantly monitored in order to ensure that they recover successfully and do not risk further transmission.”	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-08-28/local-news/LIVE-Charmaine-Gauci-to-address-press-briefing-on-Covid-19-6736226464		1	1		
	3	16/09/2020	JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY HEALTH	Mass Events Trigger Malta’s Second Peak After Initial Successful Pandemic Suppression				1	1		
	5	16/09/2020	JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY HEALTH	Mass Events Trigger Malta’s Second Peak After Initial Successful Pandemic Suppression				1	1		

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>Economy</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>War</i>	<i>TCN</i>
	6	21/02/2021	Journal of Public Health	COVID-19: the transition towards a new normal— experiences from the European country of Malta				1	1		
	9	01/04/2021	OPM	COVID -19 Bulletin Publications		https://publicservice.gov.mt/en/Documents/COVID-19_BulletinPublications.pdf					
8		11/06/2021	TOM	Charmaine Gauci's weekly COVID-19 briefings are 'no longer needed		https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/charmaine-gaucis-weekly-covid-19-briefings-are-no-longer-needed.878561			1		
5		03/12/2021	MT	Charmaine Gauci grilled on the witness stand in court case challenging COVID restrictions	“The well-being of a person is important, and we are taking measures that are very much needed, and when they are no longer needed, are withdrawn,”	https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/court_and_police/113641/charmaine_gauci_grilled_on_the_witness_stand_in_court_case_challenging_covid_restrictions		1			
7		18/02/2022	SCHENGEN VISSA	Malta to Lift Some of Its COVID-19 Restrictions in March		https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/malta-to-lift-some-of-its-covid-19-restrictions-in-march/		1	1		
	8	11/12/2023	TOM	COVID: three years on and the dread has finally died	The population has been sensitised to the importance of respiratory hygiene, staying away from others when sick and protecting the vulnerable and the elderly - “The longer-term effects of having lived through the COVID crisis on a global level need to be evaluated over the coming years, particularly the impact on mental health,”	https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/covid-three-years-dread-finally-died.1018566	1	1	1		

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>Economy</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>War</i>	<i>TCN</i>
	1			Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU Fundamental Rights Implications	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)	https://www.google.com/search?q=covid+press+release+malta+gauci+march+2020&authuser=1&sxsrf=AB5stBhTKikOguMTz_uw8dtGBJtn8L9vmw%3A1689762109059&ei=Pbm3ZMH9ApaOxc8Pg8qwmAs&ved=0ahUKEwiBki-yxpqAAxUWR_EDHQMIDLMQ4dUDCA4&uact=5&oq=covid+press+release+malta+gauci+march+2020&gs_l=ip=Egxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAiKmNvdmlkIHByZXNzIHJlbGVhc2UgbWVsdGEgZ2F1Y2kgbWFyY2ggMjAyMDIFEAAyogQyBRAAGKIESMtlUO0GWOW_cAZ4AJABAJgBmwGgAdAPqgEEMC4xNrgBA8gBAPgBAcICBBAjG CfiAwQYASBBiAYB&sclient=gws-wiz-serp	1	1	1		

Table II

Search String: "covid press release malta abela march 2020"

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	
3	1	18/03/2020	TMI	Coronavirus: €1.8 billion package to safeguard business, employment - PM Abela	"no need to panic"	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-03-18/local-news/Live-Coronavirus-Prime-Minister-press-conference-6736220990	ECONOMY
1	2	24/03/2020	TMI	New economic measures - government to pay €800 per month for employees of worst hit sectors	Abela spoke of the 'war chest'. "We are at war, a different kind of war than the traditional sense. Every country has a war chest - the funds available for use that they can use in the war to bring their country out from the pandemic. We have this war chest and we must be prudent in its division. We could have been populist and said that we would use the whole chest in the first set of measures, but we would have risked a moment where we would require more financial incentives but not have the funds to do so."	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-03-24/local-news/Live-Coronavirus-Prime-Minister-Robert-Abela-announces-new-economic-measures-6736221239	ECONOMY
	3			Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU Fundamental Rights Implications	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)	https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/malta-report-covid-19-april-2020_en.pdf	HUMAN RIGHTS
	4	18/03/2020	MT	Robert Abela announces €1.8 billion rescue package to mitigate coronavirus crisis	Schembri also announced that Malta will no longer accept applications for work from unskilled third-country nationals "with immediate effect."	https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/101127/Robert_Abela_to_announce_budget_to_mitigate_coronavirus_crisis	ECONOMY TCN

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	
	5	03/04/2021		Restaurants shut, limited gatherings, new measures as COVID cases surge			HEALTH
	6	16/07/2020	TOM	Government substantially raises its aid to businesses hit by COVID-19 slowdown	The main aim of this aid package is to save jobs and keep businesses alive and ready to return to full activity	https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/government-substantially-raises-its-aid-to-businesses-hit-by-covid-19.780743	ECONOMY
	7	13/03/2020	REUTERS	Malta imposes 14-day quarantine on all arrivals in bid to stop coronavirus	“The ban applies to all arrivals, from whichever country,” Abela	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-malta-quarantine-idUSKBN2101XI	HEALTH, HUMAN RIGHTS
	8	30/03/2020	NEWSBOOK	Malta will free itself from the pandemic – Abela	“This is modern day freedom. Freedom from this pandemic which once achieved will allow us to achieve and dream more. It’s a victory which will be marked as a victory of Maltese and Gozitans as one people,” said Abela.	https://newsbook.com.mt/en/live-message-by-pm-and-pl-leader-robert-abela/	FREEDOM WAR
	9	16/03/2020	NEWSBOOK	Plan for a possible lockdown set – PM Abela	Abela also said that this is a situation where the government has the responsibility to assist the business community	https://newsbook.com.mt/en/live-pm-abela-addressing-the-media/	ECONOMY
	10	03/09/2020	LOVINMALTA	Prime Minister Robert Abela To Address Press Conference At Midnight After Fourth Confirmed Coronavirus Case And Italy Lockdown		https://lovinmalta.com/news/prime-minister-robert-abela-to-address-press-conference-at-midnight-after-fourth-confirmed-coronavirus-case-and-italy-lockdown/	ECONOMY

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	
2		03/10/2021	TMI	Schools, gyms, non-essential shops to close; travel to Gozo restricted, government announces	“It is clear that the vaccine is working and the rate of vaccination is very strong. More than 100,000 doses administered so far. But, while we attack with the vaccine, we need to defend with measures that stop the spread.”	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2021-03-10/local-news/Government-to-announce-new-measures-tonight-Abela-6736231710	HUMAN RIGHTS
5		03/10/2021	TOM	Malta enters month-long shutdown as schools, services close, amid virus spike	recent statements that the Maltese were living in "heaven on earth" and that the battle against the virus had been won, ...Abela in his press conference said there was no need to shift the burden fully to the superintendent for public health by declaring a public health emergency.	https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/watch-prime-minister-announcing-new-covid-19-measures.857200	ECONOMY TCN
		14/03/2020	MT	Malta PM: Coronavirus lockdown not yet necessary, announces economic measures for business	“They have given us simple reasons: this would be a house arrest except for the acquisition of food and medicinals... for weeks on end. It could be a populist measure, but also a dangerous one.	https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/101014/robert_abela_press_conference_20200314_2	HEALTH
6		18/05/2020	TOM	Fact check: Busting Abela's 'best in the world' COVID-19 claim	Recent announcements about lifting certain restrictions put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 has attracted criticism that the government is now prioritising the economic recovery over people's health.	https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/fact-check-busting-abelas-best-in-the-world-covid-19-claim.792881	ECONOMY
				DOI PRESS RELEASE - NO LONGER AVAILABLE			HEALTH, HUMAN RIGHTS

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	
8		27/04/2021	TOM	€20m in new COVID-19 assistance to businesses	The curfew isn't perpetual and will eventually be reviewed,	https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/abela-holding-press-conference-on-new-covid-19-assistance-to.867766	FREEDOM WAR
7		01/05/2020	TMI	Some shops to re-open, Malta-Gozo travel to resume; masks in public places now mandatory	"BBQs, parties, and dinners are still dangerous", Today does not mean that everything has passed, but that normality is slowly coming closer"	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-05-01/local-news/Live-Prime-Minister-Robert-Abela-addresses-a-press-conference-6736222657	ECONOMY
9		18/05/2020	TMI	Restaurants, hair and beauty salons to reopen on Friday	"We are strong enough to never accept an emergency becoming the normal. That restaurants would be closed, people be stuck at home, not going to work... that is not a normality that gives people quality of life. People are designed to celebrate life."	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-05-18/local-news/Live-Prime-Minister-Robert-Abela-to-address-a-press-conference-6736223279	HEALTH
		29/03/2022	BIG NEWS NETWORK	Malta's new PM pledges to lift all COVID-19 restrictions		https://www.bignewsnetwork.com/news/272430400/maltas-new-pm-pledges-to-lift-all-covid-19-restrictions	HEALTH
		03/04/2021	REUTERS	Malta orders restaurants closed as virus cases surge	The Malta College of Pathologists complained in a statement that Malta has "the highest number of cases per capita in Europe and the fewest restrictions."	https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/malta-orders-restaurants-closed-virus-cases-surge-2021-03-04/	WAR
4		03/10/2020	TMI	Coronavirus: All passenger travel between Malta and Italy suspended, PM announces	We will take all necessary measures, even if drastic, to safeguard the wellbeing of the Maltese.	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-03-10/local-news/Coronavirus-All-flights-to-and-from-Italy-suspended-Prime-Minister-announces-6736220586	HUMAN RIGHTS

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	
10		08/07/2020	TMI	Covid-19 situation under control as number of cases in hospital remains low - PM	There shouldn't be the attitude that it's like nothing is happening, but at the same time let us not say that a catastrophe is coming because it is not the case.....keeping in mind all the necessary precautions as have been announced and as may be announced in the future"	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-08-07/local-news/Prime-Minister-addresses-press-conference-after-MCESD-meeting-6736225892	ECONOMY HEALTH

Table III

Search String: “covid press release malta fearne march 2020”

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>Economy</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>War</i>
	3	06/03/2020	DOI	PR200412 - Extraordinary Health Minister Council meeting in Brussels today	EMERGENCY MEETING	https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Pages/2020/March/06/pr200412.aspx			1	
	5	07/03/2020	NEWSBOOK	“No reason for alarm” – Fearne following first coronavirus case in Malta	No reason for alarm	https://newsbook.com.mt/en/first-coronavirus-reported-in-malta/			1	
	7	07/03/2020		First COVID-19 case confirmed in Malta		https://www.xinhuanet.com/english/europe/2020-03/07/c_138853345_2.htm			1	
	2	22/03/2020	DOI	PR200539 - STATEMENT BY THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTRY FOR HEALTH	CLOSURE	https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Pages/2020/March/22/pr200539en.aspx		1	1	
	9	26/03/2020	LOVNMALTA	Chris Fearne To Give Latest COVID-19 Updates In Press Conference Live From Valletta		https://lovinmalta.com/news/chris-fearne-to-give-latest-covid-19-updates-in-press-conference-live-from-valletta/		1		
	6	07/04/2020	NEWSBOOK	52 new COVID-19 cases; Total 293	“We were not taken by surprise,”	https://newsbook.com.mt/en/live-deputy-pm-to-address-a-press-conference/			1	
	8	26/04/2020	TOM	No new COVID-19 cases reported in 24 hours	Fearne cautioned that despite the good news, the epidemic was still very much ongoing and not all measures would be eased immediately.	https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/watch-health-minister-to-address-press-conference.788150		1	1	

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>Economy</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>War</i>
9		30/07/2020	MT	Festa marches stopped, venues to have numbers capped	“The secrets to our successes have been social distancing and wide spread testing. We intended to keep this up,”	https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/103900/covid19_chris_fearne_to_give_press_conference_at_7pm		1	1	
	10	16/09/2020	JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY HEALTH	Mass Events Trigger Malta’s Second Peak After Initial Successful Pandemic Suppression						
3		20/10/2020	TMI	COVID-19 vaccine expected in Malta in January, Fearne says; Grech criticises PM on virus	“I appeal the nation to take the shot as we need to understand the importance of this vaccine.”	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-10-20/local-news/COVID-19-vaccine-anticipated-to-be-available-in-Malta-in-January-Chris-Fearne-6736228005			1	
3A		20/10/2020	TMI	COVID-19 vaccine expected in Malta in January, Fearne says; Grech criticises PM on virus	“What we are facing is extraordinary for the world and Malta, a situation which no one could ever imagine and now we are all facing difficulties and worries.			1		
5		20/10/2020	MT	Deputy PM says COVID-19 vaccine will be available by end of 2020	“We are not on the doorstep of spring but of winter. We also have better knowhow on how the COVID-19 works,”	https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/105430/deputy_pm_says_covid19_vaccine_will_be_available_by_end_of_2020			1	
10		25/10/2020	TMI	COVID-19 cases expected to increase in winter – Health Minister	The best weapon we had against this virus was social distancing, so we have to keep avoiding crowds. We also have strengthened our measures at the airport as well to reduce risks of imported cases without having to close the airport.	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-10-25/local-news/COVID-19-cases-expected-to-increase-in-winter-Health-Minister-6736228108			1	

<i>Duck Duck Go Search Ranking</i>	<i>Google Search Ranking</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Quote</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>Economy</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>War</i>
7		10/11/2020	TOM	Malta to receive COVID-19 vaccine 'within days' of release - Fearné	vaccine	https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/malta-to-receive-covid-19-vaccine-within-days-of-release-fearne.830785			1	
6		06/01/2021	TMI	'If Covid-19 cases remain high, we will have to take more measures', Fearné warns	"we may have to take more measures to safeguard the health of the public and to make sure our hospitals can continue to function."	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2021-01-06/local-news/WATCH-LIVE-Chris-Fearné-to-address-press-conference-6736229927		1	1	
	4	24/02/2021	MT	COVID-19: Bars and band clubs to remain shut in March, Chris Fearné says	The health minister said that while Malta is doing well, in regards to the vaccine rollout, it was important to continue to follow health guidelines.	https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/107931/covid19_bars_and_band_clubs_to_remain_shut_in_march_chris_fearne_says		1		
4		15/10/2021	TMI	Covid-19: Restrictions to ease for fully vaccinated events, public transport from Monday	"we can continue with the gradual easing of restrictive measures."	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2021-10-15/local-news/Covid-19-Restrictions-to-ease-for-fully-vaccinated-events-from-Monday-6736237559		1		
2		18/02/2022	SCHENGEN VISSA	Malta to Lift Some of Its COVID-19 Restrictions in March		https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/malta-to-lift-some-of-its-covid-19-restrictions-in-march/		1		
1		22/05/2022	TMI	Almost all Covid measures to be removed on 2 May; Fearné pledges 'normality with responsibility'	"normality with responsibility."	https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2022-04-22/local-news/Chris-Fearné-Charmaine-Gauci-address-a-press-conference-6736242367	1	1	1	

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8			N/A	WIKIPEDIA						
	1			Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU Fundamental Rights Implications	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)		1	1	1	