Uyghurs’ Suffocating Cycle of Silence

The Effect of China’s Transnational Repression through Coercion-by-Proxy that Targets the Securitized Uyghur Community in the Netherlands Today

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Abstract

This thesis looks at how securitization affects the Uyghur community targeted in the Netherlands today by China's policy of coercion-by-proxy that was reinforced by the shift in China's domestic security strategy from selective to collective repression, between 2017 and 2018. The Uyghurs are an indigenous Turkic-speaking, predominantly Muslim, ethno-religious minority who are being repressed and have to face severe human rights violations in their homeland East Turkestan: the officially termed Xinjiang province, situated in the People's Republic of China. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, China has framed the Uyghur situation as their own legitimate "war on terror" by labelling Uyghurs terrorists, with the aim to legitimize its repressive actions. By labelling Uyghurs as a terrorist threat, Uyghurs are being securitized. This securitization has transcended to other places in the world where Uyghurs live, a process I term transnational securitization. One of these places is the Netherlands, where Uyghurs today are still being harassed and intimidated by China, despite having fled their homeland. This is done through a variety of "extraordinary" transnational repressive measures, among which coercion-by-proxy. Since 2017, these "extraordinary measures" have intensified, following China's domestic security strategy shift. During this shift, China changed its repression approach from selective to collective. This has affected the Uyghur community in the Netherlands by creating an atmosphere of fear and control. This thesis has found self-censorship being the most crucial effect, supported by feelings of anxiety, suspicion, and alienation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Everybody has probably heard about the Uyghurs by now, as they are increasingly gaining attention from media and the international community because of the severe human rights violations they have to face in their homeland East Turkestan: today's officially termed province of Xinjiang in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Uyghurs are an indigenous Turkic-speaking, predominantly Muslim, ethno-religious minority with their own language, culture, religion, and belief system – distinct from the PRC's majority Han Chinese (Seytoff & Szadziewski, 2018: 75).

An increasing amount of evidence in recent years[1] shows that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been structurally repressing its Muslim population, among whom primarily these Uyghurs. Forced labour, sterilizations, and mass internment in what the Chinese Government calls "re-education centres" – in which these people are being tortured and even murdered according to witnesses – are some of the most recent examples brought to light. The CCP denies it has committed human rights violations. Instead, it frames all Uyghurs as (potential) terrorists, and argues their contentious politics are "counterterrorism" policies being applied in their own legitimate "war on terror". This way, the CCP aims to legitimize their human rights violations and repressive measures against the Uyghurs. In other words, they are *securitizing* the Uyghurs and their homeland (i.e., constructing them as threat in order to legitimize their repressive measures against them). This "securitization" is the analytical frame of this thesis and will be outlined in the next chapter.

Due to the long-running Uyghur repression, many Uyghurs have migrated or fled to other countries, including the Netherlands (Amnesty International, 2004; Bonnenfant, 2018). Since 2017, the number of Uyghurs seeking asylum abroad has increased. Though fleeing has been made nearly impossible, those who were already abroad, for example for work or study, were compelled to seek asylum, as returning to China (either voluntarily or coerced(-by-proxy)) often meant disappearing or facing internment. That year, the CCP started a *domestic security strategy shift*, due to which the CPP's repressive measures exacerbated between 2017 and 2018. The shift moved China's repressive approach from selective to collective repression in the forms of mass ideological and political re-education, increased surveillance, and coercion

[1] There are NGO reports (e.g. from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch), numerous academic articles mentioning the violations (recent examples are Greitens et al., 2019; Holder, 2021; Roberts, 2018; Seytoff & Szadziewski, 2018; Smith Finley, 2019a & 2020), testimonies of camp survivors or their family members (e.g. Amnesty International, 2020; Phipps, 2020; Sauytbay & Cavelius, 2021; Xinjiang Victims Database, n.d.), and even some leaked information from the Chinese Party-State (Al Jazeera, 2020; Ramzy & Buckley, 2019).

toward Uyghur transnational networks[2] (Greitens et al., 2019). Consequently, the securitization process transcended China's borders, and, as a result, the CCP's Uyghur repression approach became *transnational*, too.

This is palpable in the Netherlands, where one of the CCP's most commonly employed transnational repression strategies to target the Uyghur community is *coercion-by-proxy*: i.e. (threatening to) use (physical) sanctions against relatives living within the CCP's territorial jurisdiction for the purpose of repressing Uyghurs residing in the Netherlands. Consequently, Uyghurs in the Netherlands have still not escaped China's metaphoric "long arm". They receive threats and harassments on a daily basis. This makes these Uyghurs reluctant to speak up as they are scared to either face repercussions themselves, or to endanger the lives of their relatives still within China's borders.

1.1. Research Question

Looking at *how securitization affects the Uyghur community targeted in the Netherlands today by China's policy of coercion-by-proxy that was reinforced by the shift in China's domestic security strategy from selective to collective repression, between 2017 and 2018*, this research has found self-censorship thus being the most crucial effect, supported by feelings of anxiety, suspicion, and alienation the securitization's coercion-by-proxy policy has produced. The aim of this thesis is not to ascertain the quantity of people self-censoring, but rather to understand what discourses and practises are utilized by the CCP with the aim of achieving this.

The transnational repressive measures that have resulted from the (transnational) securitization of Uyghurs are not restricted to Dutch Uyghurs. In various countries around the world, the coercion-by-proxy method has been identified as a (transnational) repressive measure employed by the CCP to target overseas Uyghurs, living in Australia, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Sweden, and the United States (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020; Amnesty International, 2020; Sauytbay & Cavelius, 2021; UHRP, 2019).

Though this aspect of the CCP's repression of Uyghurs is now also increasingly gaining attention in the media and international community, from an academic perspective, the transnational repression of Uyghurs (through coercion-by-proxy) is still a scarcely studied topic. There are a few useful NGO reports which outline some of the CCP's transnational

[2] A note on terminology: I consciously avoid the term "diaspora" to discuss the CCP's strategies of transnational authoritarianism, because 'exiled communities often may not wish to be identified as "diaspora" […] because they view the term "diaspora" as indicating government sponsorship or approval' (Tsourapas, 2020: 7).

repression practises affecting Uyghur communities abroad (Amnesty International, 2020; HRW, 2021; UHRP, 2017 & 2020). However, these reports are largely descriptive rather than analytical. They will therefore be useful in providing empirical validation of this thesis, but fail to analytically assess and explain how China's securitization policy has led to self-censorship.

By answering my research question, this thesis will provide the analytical assessment often missing in NGO reporting. Hereby, I will look at 1) the context of the securitization: who securitizes and why, what *speech acts* are being employed, to legitimize what "*extraordinary measures*" and what these measures entail, which *audiences* the speech acts are directed to, the role this audience plays in the securitization process, how and why the domestic security strategy shift occurred, and what effects this shift has had on the securitization process and the affected audience; 2) the transnational context of the securitization since this shift: why Uyghurs abroad are a perceived threat that needs to be securitized, how are they being securitized, by whom, enforcing which "extraordinary measures", and how the security strategy shift exacerbated these measures; and 3) the Dutch context of this securitization process: the features of the Uyghur community in the Netherlands, the experiences they have of being harassed by the Chinese state, in particular through coercion-by-proxy, why and to what extent self-censorship is occurring among the community, and to what extent coercion-by-proxy is effective in generating this self-censorship.

1.2. Outline Thesis

The outline of this thesis logically follows from this. In Chapter 2 I will begin by outlining the analytical frame I have used for this research: securitization. Here, I will specifically focus on the primary units of analysis used for this study: speech act, audience, and "extraordinary measures". Next, the research method I applied in order to answer my research question will be explained in Chapter 3. Following this, the thesis will set the context for the securitization of Uyghurs in Chapter 4, outlining which discourses and practices are employed by the CCP as securitizing actor, and why; describing the domestic security shift from between 2017-2018, and its effects on the securitization process; and illustrating how far the securitization process reaches, and how this affects Uyghurs living abroad. I will then turn to the transnational repression of Uyghurs in the Netherlands as part of the securitization process in Chapter 5, focussing on Uyghurs' experiences, coercion-by-proxy, and the creation of an atmosphere of fear. Following this, it will be illustrated in Chapter 6 how this atmosphere of fear has resulted in self-censorship among the Uyghur community in the Netherlands, and how this is a strategy

of the CCP that follows from the securitization process and its subsequent transnational repression tools (among which coercion-by-proxy). Finally, in the conclusion in Chapter 7, the significance of this thesis will once more be highlighted by also presenting possibilities for future research.

Chapter 2: The Analytical Frame

Researching *how securitization affects the Uyghur community targeted in the Netherlands today by China's policy of coercion-by-proxy that was reinforced by the shift in China's domestic security strategy from selective to collective repression, between 2017 and 2018*, my aim is to understand what security *does*. Looking through a securitization lens, I hope to reach an understanding of what China's securitization policy of the Uyghurs *does*– i.e., how it *affects* – Uyghurs living in the Netherlands.

This chapter will define and outline this analytical framework (securitization) and its key analytical concepts that will be used to answer the research puzzle: *audience*, *speech act*, and "*extraordinary measures*". Discussing these key concepts, also some important points of criticism on the securitization theory will come to light, such as the (Western) bias towards democratic decision-making, the under-theorization of the audience, and the territorial limitation of the theory.

2.1. Securitization

Securitization can be defined as the *securitizing actor's*[3] (speech) act of labelling something (a *referent subject*)[4] as an existential threat so that distinctive policies can be created that provide the securitizing actor with the right to use "*extraordinary measures*" to secure the entity (the *referent object*)[5] that is being threatened (Balzacq et al., 2016; Buzan et al., 1998). This implies that an issue is being shifted out of the realm of "normal" political debate into the realm of emergency politics. The presenting of the referent subject as an existential threat is key to achieving this shift.

According to Buzan et al. (1998) and Wæver (1995), the *audience* that the securitizing actor directs their *speech act* (i.e. the act of "saying security" in relation to an issue) to is therefore vital to the process of securitization, as the aim is to persuade the audience of the salience of the defined threat and of the need to use "extraordinary measures" to address the

[3] The securitizing actor (actors with enough authority to convince the audience, e.g., the government/political leaders, the military, lobbyist/pressure groups or civil society) securitizes by declaring referent objects to be existentially threatened by a certain referent subject that they themselves present as a threat (Emmers, 2007). Through their speech act, securitizing actors try to create support for the implementation of distinctive policies (that give them the right to use "extraordinary measures") by trying to convince the (enabling) audience.

[4] A referent subject is a securitized entity (e.g., thing(s), individual(s), group(s), or issue area(s) like the environment) that is being portrayed as an existential threat by the securitizing actor (Balzacq et al., 2016: 495).

[5] A referent object is, thus, an entity with a legitimate claim to survival (e.g., individual(s), group(s), or issue area(s) such as the state/national sovereignty, collective identity, or economy) that is seen to be existentially threatened (Balzacq et al., 2016: 495).

threat (as legitimacy needs to be argued and cannot be forced) (Balzacq et al., 2016; Trédaniel & Lee, 2018; Vuori, 2008). Hence, according to Buzan et al. (1998: 30) in essence, the process of securitization (constructing threats) is an intersubjective one between securitizing actors and audiences.

The notion of securitization is predominantly associated in security studies with the Copenhagen School (CS), where securitization theory originated (Buzan et al., 1998; Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010). The CS' securitization theory looks at how security threats are being constructed and how such construction can legitimize the "extraordinary measures". *Construction* implies that what, thus, really matters in securitization is how an issue is *framed* and not how an issue *occurs*. Framing (i.e., "sense-making") is therefore an important tool to be used by securitizing actors. It fixes meaning and enables action, as it entails 'selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, […] and/or treatment recommendation' (Entman, 1993: 52, in: Watson, 2012: 283). Framing helps the securitizing actors in convincing the audience that a certain issue is an existential threat and, therefore, strongly relates to speech acts.

Another fundamental approach to securitization theory stems from the Paris School (PS), where the focus is on the *process* of constructing a threat (Maguire et al., 2014: 10). Instead of focusing on speech acts, the PS emphasizes practices, audiences, and contexts (C.A.S.E. collective, 2006: 457-8). Here, the power of both the audience and the securitizing actor is recognized.

Both the PS's securitization approach – which focusses on practices and recognizes the agency of the audience – and the CS's securitization through speech act are relevant to this study of the Chinese transnational repression of Uyghurs in the Netherlands. I have taken both approaches into account when conducting my research, as 'taken individually, neither of these approaches can help us fully understand the contents of and variations among securitization processes' (Balzacq et al., 2016: 517).

2.1.1. Operationalization: Key Concepts (and Critiques)

Consequently, I identify *audience* (PS) and *speech act* (CS) as the key analytical concepts of securitization that will be used to answer the research puzzle, accompanied by the concept "*extraordinary measures*". Briefly, the (traditional) logic of securitization holds that through a

speech act, an *audience* can be convinced of the existential threat that is out there, who can then legitimize the "*extraordinary measures*" that are or will be taken to address the threat.

Speech act, thus, frames an issue as an existential threat. This speech act – "security utterances" – is a linguistic expression and often political decision made intentionally by the securitizing actor who holds the discretion to determine what a security threat is. Speech acts change shape during the securitization process, and they can have various functions as the process goes on (Vuori, 2008: 93). They are not only informative, but also perform an action: namely, persuading the audience of the salience of the defined existential threat and the need to use "extraordinary measures" (Coşkun, 2011: 9; Trédaniel & Lee, 2018). Positioning an issue as an existential threat, means the issue is framed as an emergency – which, in turn, legitimizes the "extraordinary" state responses (Buzan et al., 1998: 24).

These "extraordinary measures" involve whatever means those who are authorized to handle the issue (predominantly political actors) deem most appropriate (Balzacq et al., 2016: 495). They are policies that are 'breaking the established rules' (Floyd, 2020: 1) to ensure security – i.e., the survival of the referent object (which is often the state), as security is fundamentally about survival (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010). Examples are repression and restricting civil liberties. Such "extraordinary measures" can also be enforced to reproduce the political order or controlling society and the political order, for example (Vuori, 2008).

Counterterrorism is commonly seen as a policy wherein such measures are being taken in order to ensure security. Framing people as terrorists, and "extraordinary measures" as counterterrorism policies can help legitimizing both the securitizing actor's speech act and responses, as terrorists are the ultimate existential threat and (extraordinary) counterterrorism measures are necessary to curb/prevent the threat (Jawad, 2015).

Although academics have paid a significant amount of attention to the implementation of anti-terror laws and their impact on human rights in the West, relatively little attention has been paid to this issue in non-Western contexts, like China (Clarke, 2010). China's counterterrorism policy contributes not only to (further) human rights violations in the Uyghur region, but can also criminalize dissent throughout the PRC, via the application of an expansive and ambiguous definition of terrorism (ibid.: 27-28).

Moreover, generally, securitization theory has a Western focus, which has widely been criticized as a limitation by numerous scholars (Hafidh & Mehmood, 2019; Neo, 2020; Vuori, 2008). Securitization theory fails to challenge normative assumptions underlying the conceptions of "state" and "society", using the Westphalian notion of statehood as the norm

(Hafidh & Mehmood, 2019: 681). The argument goes that non-democratic political systems do not need political legitimacy in the way democracies do, whereas *all* governments must exercise some amount of coercion and persuasion in order to survive (Vuori, 2008: 68). Even authoritarian regimes like China have to legitimize their use of "extraordinary measures".

The audience, as the addressee of the speech act, plays a key role in the legitimization. The audience holds power to accept or reject a securitizing move. In other words, they are the *enabling* audience: they can enable those who are authorized to handle the issue to use "extraordinary measures" (Buzan et al., 1998: 41). Their agency, however, is not recognized in the traditional view of the audience in securitization theory. They are perceived as essentially passive.

There are often several audiences,[6] but they are difficult to identify within securitization theory. According to Côté (2016: 546) 'the identity of securitization audiences is often dependent on the context of the securitization process in question, as well as the differential capacity of groups to authorize security speech and legitimize the actions sought by the securitizing actor.' Hence, he argues, 'any definition of audience identity requires confronting the audience's contextualized nature while, at the same time, delineating its universal legitimizing character' (ibid.). Yet, within securitization literature, the exact nature of the audience and its role has often been neglected (ibid.: 547; Balzacq et al., 2016). Therefore, a gap in the literature exists in terms of both the identity of the audience and its capacity for engagement.

As several audiences may exist within a single securitization process, so can different audiences hold distinct powers on the securitizing actor(s). Hence, audiences are defined by both their connection to the authorization and legitimization of security speech and action, and by their position within different settings or phases of securitization processes (Côté, 2016: 547). It also implies that audience identification is a case-specific consideration (ibid.). For the case of the CCP's securitization of Uyghurs multiple audiences exist, too, with the most important two being the Han Chinese and the Uyghurs themselves.

Floyd (2020) argues that a securitizing speech act is either a warning and/or a promise, and that, therefore, there are at least two possible audiences: '1) agents at the identified source of the threat who are being warned off by means of the speech act; and 2) referent objects who are promised protection with the same' (ibid.: 6). This makes sense, as both the Uyghurs are

[6] E.g., the international community, a certain ethnic/demographic/religious group (like the Han Chinese), or a class/caste.

the securitization audience, who can be categorized under Audience 1, and the Han Chinese, who can be categorized under Audience 2 as key audience. Consequently, the Uyghurs can be identified as the "affected" securitization audience.

In order to accurately capture the role of these audiences, it is important to view them as 'active agents, capable of having a meaningful effect on the intersubjective construction of security values' (Côté, 2016: 541). This thesis problematizes the traditional securitization theory's actor-audience dichotomy that characterizes audiences as passive agents without agency, by using the affected securitization audience (in this case the Uyghurs in the Netherlands) as the primary unit of analysis whilst recognizing their agency. It looks at how they react to and engage in the securitization process both in terms of feelings (anxiety, suspicion, alienation) and behaviour (isolating, spying, mistrusting, and committing self-censorship). In other words, they do not only *enable* the use of "extraordinary measures", they also *execute* some of these measures themselves by spying and (self-)censoring.

This recognition of the affected audience and their agency has been widely overlooked in the securitization literature, which is another limitation of the theory. Audiences are central to the securitization process and its outcome. Yet, within securitization theory the audiences' capacity of active engagement in the process is nearly non-existent (Côté, 2016). By characterizing the audiences as agents without agency, the intersubjective nature of securitization is being marginalized.

Finally, the theory has a "territorial limitation", which this thesis sought to overcome by studying the transnational aspect of securitization. Securitization processes and practices within the borders of the securitizing state have been the dominant focus within securitization theory. This territorial limitation 'confines the study of social processes to the political and geographic boundaries of a particular nation-state' (Adamson, 2016: 21). By analysing the effects of China's securitization beyond its borders (in the Netherlands), securitization theory's limited territorial focus will be broadened. The transnational repression strategies the CCP employs that target the Uyghur community in the Netherlands are, then, the "extraordinary measures" of the securitization process.

2.2. Concluding Comments

In conclusion, the analytical concepts of the selected analytical frame of securitization: *speech act*, *extraordinary measures*, and *audience* – as defined and outline above – are the units of analysis in this thesis. By focussing on Uyghurs in the Netherlands as the affected audience,

this thesis surmounts three securitization limitations: the “territorial” limitation, the “audience” limitation, and the “Western/democratic” limitation. This thesis looks at how the securitization of Uyghurs in China (i.e., the speech act) affects the Uyghurs residing outside of China, in order to understand the lived experiences of these victims of the securitization process, from a bottom-up approach.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the design of my research project, and the logic by which I have gone about answering my research questions, explaining which methods I have used for this and why. I will first outline the research design. Next, I will discuss my data collection techniques. This will be followed by an explanation of my data analysis methods, specifically how I have come to formulate the arguments in this thesis. The few limitations of the research will be highlighted next, including how I sought to overcome them.

3.1. Research Design

The question of how China's securitization *affects* the Uyghur population targeted in the Netherlands today by China's policy of coercion-by-proxy is a processual puzzle[7] with a predominantly ontological approach of "processes and interaction". Its ontological nature is both structural (focussing on the securitization process) and individual (focussing on the affected audience). "Meanings and symbols" and "action" are also relevant ontological approaches for this research. These approaches fit the securitization framework, as securitization is an intersubjective (speech) act, where the focus is on how groups are constructed as security threats, and on the discourse, practices, and audience(s) related to this.

This research has taken a qualitative, bottom-up approach of what security *does*, by viewing the world through the eyes of the affected audience, concerning itself with the lived experiences of people affected by the securitization practices. The research is based on qualitative interviews and secondary data. Furthermore, my approach is transnational in that the affected audience resides outside of China's nation-state borders, and the effects of the securitization process thus transcends borders. Hereby, the concepts "transnational authoritarianism", "transnational repression", and "coercion-by-proxy" are central. Employing this transnational perspective suits my ontology of "processes and interaction".

Epistemologically, both the "symbolic interactionalist" and the "(critical) realist" approaches suit my ontology and puzzle statement best, as the focus of this research is on understanding and interpreting (inter alia through interviews with Uyghurs and "China-experts") how the Uyghurs are being constructed as a(n) (extraterritorial) security threat; which discourses and practices enable this; and how this affects the Uyghurs transnationally. Broadly

[7] Processual puzzles look at how things influence each other (Mason, 2018: 12).

speaking, this research has thus taken an interpretative (understanding) epistemological approach.

3.2. Data Collection

For my research, I relied on academic literature, governmental and institutional documents, human rights and NGO reporting, interviews conducted by me and by others (e.g., interviews in NGO reports, podcasts,[8] or news articles), journalistic accounts, and TV programmes.[9]

The first stage of my research entailed gathering data from the sources outlined above.[10] I began reading ample literature using purposive sampling. I started looking for sources discussing minority repression, focussing on authoritarian regimes, and for securitization literature. I combined these two topics by searching for securitization of minorities.

Taking a transnational approach, I also looked for information on transnational securitization, but not much has been written about this. Transnational repression and transnational authoritarianism were more useful topics. These topics are essential theoretical features of this thesis and therefore meaningful and relevant for my research puzzle.

I refined my sampling during my data collection: I began relating it to China and the Uyghurs specifically, which also led me to digging into coercion-by-proxy and the relation between counterterrorism and human rights violations. After interviewing China-experts and Uyghurs, I refined my sampling again by selecting literature on self-censorship (in combination with “China”, “authoritarian regimes”, and “repression”).

In selecting theoretical literature - mainly about securitization and transnational repression – I did not specifically take publication dates into account, only to a certain extent as I wanted to include recent theoretical articles to be aware of recent theoretical debates. For empirical articles, however, I was specifically looking for articles and books from 2009 on, as then the Urumqi riots/protests took place which caused a hardening of the securitization practices. Also, using this time scope, the information would not be too outdated. Especially articles from 2017 on were of interest for my research, due to the time period my research

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[8] One podcast episode from De Balie, one from China Podcast BNR, one from VICE Nederland, and two from Politicast.

[9] Two in particular: *De lange arm van Beijing met o.a. Qelbinur Sedik, Alerk Ablikim, Thijs Reuten & Ruben Brekelmans* from De Balie (TV), on YouTube, and *Pak de Macht* from BNNVARA, on NPO 3.

[10] In addition to the podcasts and TV programmes identified above, some examples include NOS and NRC articles; parliamentary letters; publications from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, and Uyghur Human Rights Project; and reports from the (Dutch) National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV) and the (Dutch) General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD).

focusses on. Yet, I have not excluded articles from 2001 on, as then the 9/11 terrorist attacks took place, which led to the CCP's "terrorist framing" of Uyghurs.

For the interviews with relevant "China-experts" I used a purposive, non-probability sampling method, whereby I intentionally selected informants from different universities and institutions, based on their ability to elucidate on China's securitization process and (transnational) repression of minorities/Uyghurs, China's reasons behind all this, how this all relates to the Netherlands and its Uyghur citizens. I ended up interviewing 3 different experts from 3 different institutions or universities.[11] To prepare them, I sent each informant a topic-list.[12] Having conducted literature research before interviewing these experts, I have tried to minimize the risk of interpreting something wrong and of data collection errors caused by missing information. I also had sinologist Geor Hintzen read bits of this thesis to see if there was any missing information.

It became apparent that not many of the "China-experts" I interviewed knew much about the specific situation in the Netherlands, regarding the transnational repression of the Uyghurs.[13] This is mainly due to the lack of information available on this topic because of the secrecy of the CCP's practices and because Uyghurs themselves do not dare to speak up about their experiences.

Researching how Uyghurs in the Netherlands are affected by China's securitization process, I nevertheless did want to try to interview this affected audience. These interviews also took place after the initial literature-based research. Fortunately, my friend knew one Uyghur willing to be interviewed, who has spoken on the radio and TV before about the situation and his experiences. His name is Alerk Ablikim. His Dutch and English are extremely good, so there was no language barrier. He was my key informant, as through him, I was able to find more Uyghurs to interview. I, thus, used a network/snowball sampling method, which was useful especially because of the sensitive nature of the topic. Due to the fear and mistrust among

[11] Including Ardi Bouwers, a sinologist from China Circle (neutral position, cultural focus); Frans-Paul van der Putten, a China-specialist from the Clingendael Institute (China Centre) – though his answers are his and not Clingendael's (neutral position, international relations focus); and a China-specialist from a human rights organization (more critical position on China, human rights focus).

[12] Though this runs the risk of steering the interview, it helped me gain access to informants, in the first place, by coming over as serious and well-prepared, and secondly, by helping them in getting to the point more easily (as there is a risk with experts not getting to the point simply because they have "too much" knowledge on the topic).

[13] This might also explain why not many experts I initially asked to interview, were willing to be interviewed about this topic. The sensitivity surrounding the topic could have also been a reason. Therefore, the ones I did interview either requested anonymity or asked me to let them know which quotes I wanted to use for this thesis so they could then decide whether I should make their name public.

the Uyghurs, they were not likely to respond to my interview requests without having confirmation from their friends that I could be trusted.

The interviews I conducted with Uyghurs were in-depth and semi-structured (and either online or face-to-face). Semi-structured, because not much is known about the transnational effects of China's securitization of Uyghurs in the Netherlands, meaning there was not a prescriptive set of data to guide my interviews questions. I did have an idea about what to ask the Uyghurs however, as I started interviewing them after most of the literature-based research I had conducted. I mainly asked them about why they fled, about the Uyghur community in the Netherlands and the prevailing self-censorship, and their experiences of intimidations and harassments – especially through coercion-by-proxy. I let the respondents decide how/where they wanted to be interviewed, because I wanted them to feel comfortable and safe enough to speak freely. The aim of these interviews was to understand and to check my data, and thus not to generalize, therefore the snowball-sampling method also fits my research.

After interviewing 4 Uyghurs, of whom 2 requested anonymity,[14] a TV programme entitled *Pak de Macht*[15] aired, of which the first episode discussed China's transnational repression of Uyghurs in the Netherlands, with Uyghurs talking about their experiences of intimidation. Additionally, I found 2 podcast episodes in which Uyghurs were being interviewed about this. Sometime later, 27 May 2021, De Balie[16] broadcasted a short documentary about the intimidation of Uyghurs in the Netherlands, having a few Uyghur speakers. Amnesty International has also interviewed several Dutch Uyghurs about their harassment experiences (2020 & 2021). Having access to all these interviews, and having difficulties finding respondents myself – due to 1) the Covid-19 pandemic; 2) the atmosphere of fear among Uyghurs in the Netherlands; and 3) their subsequent self-censoring – I decided to stop looking for respondents. This decision was also based on the amount of time I had for this research, and, partly, because I felt like I already reached a saturation point: the Uyghurs I interviewed shared the same intimidation and harassment experiences as the Uyghurs who were

[14] Anonymity was requested due to the sensitivity of the topic and concerns – either for themselves or for their relatives within the borders of the Chinese nation-state – about possible repercussions for speaking up about the issue.

[15] The episode in which my thesis' topic is discussed is entitled *De lange arm van China* [China's long arm],and can be watched on NPO Start (in Dutch): De lange arm van China gemist? Start met kijken op NPO Start (accessed on 13 June 2021).

[16] This episode is also in Dutch, entitled *De lange arm van Beijing: Intimidatie van Oeigoeren in Nederland* [Beijing's long arm: intimidation of Uyghurs in the Netherlands], and can be watched on: De lange arm van Beijing - De Balie (accessed at 13 June 2021).

being interviewed by others, with coercion-by-proxy standing out as transnationally utilized repressive tool.

3.3. Data Analysis

After having gathered all my data, I started the analysis of my data. First, by transcribing the interviews I conducted[17] and the interviews from the podcasts I have consulted for my thesis. I used the qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo to organize and code these interviews and all the other sources I utilized (which I have mentioned before). I began with open coding to categorize my data after having become familiar with all the data. I inductively added some more codes while going through my data, using the words of my respondents and other interviewed Uyghurs, for example. Then, I identified relationships between categories and grouped those together ("axial coding"). Based on the named categories of these groups, including their sub-codes, I was able to break down my data into its constituent parts and therefore to structure the outline of my thesis. Hence, the coding process can be seen in most of my chapters' and sub-headings' titles.

3.4. Limitations

Researching such a sensitive topic, methodologically a few limitations – or challenges – of this thesis are worth mentioning. Firstly, the data collection on this topic. The heightened security environment of the Uyghur region and its limits on international journalism and scholarship bring the reliability of those sources into question. The secrecy of the transnational repressive practices (e.g., espionage) also makes that not all information is known. Regarding reliability, however, the variety of academic, journalistic, and human rights organization/NGO documents that are out there, all correspond to each other. Moreover, leaked documents from the Chinese government confirm some of the findings (Al Jazeera, 2020; Ramzy & Buckley, 2019). Additionally, the Uyghurs and other repressed minorities who have spoken up about the situation in the Uyghur region (including testimonies from camp[18] survivors or their family

[17] Three of the total of 8 respondents preferred that I did not record the interview, but they allowed me to take notes which I immediately transcribed after finishing the interview. Those three were Uyghurs who did not feel comfortable having the interview recorded. The other 5 interviews have all been fully recorded and fully transcribed.

[18] Another important methodological note is on my decision to use the term "camp". Academics use the term (mass-)internment camps (e.g., Greitens et al., 2019; Smith Finley, 2019a; Smith Finley, 2018), Uyghurs I (and others) interviewed use the term "concentration camps". In China, they use the terms "transformation-through-education" or "vocational training" centres (Amnesty International, 2021: 3). By using "camp" I stay away from

members), substantiate the stories that are out there (Amnesty International, 2020; Phipps, 2020; Sauytbay & Cavelius, 2021; Xinjiang Victims Database, n.d.).

Secondly, it is important to mention that 'the people who *do* want to talk with you, do not represent the people who do not' (Alerk, personal interview, April 9, 2021, my translation).[19] Since only a select number of Uyghurs dare to speak up about the issue, mainly voices of the affected audience fail to come to light. The global Covid-19 pandemic during the time of my research also hampered finding Uyghurs. It made it more difficult to meet Uyghurs in the Netherlands, as usually they can be found protesting on Dam Square in Amsterdam. This thesis, thus, cannot claim to be portraying information that is entirely complete or thoroughly accurate (also due to the secrecy of transnational repressive practices and China's denial of their (transnational) repression of minorities). However, having consulted a substantial amount of various sources confirming the (transnational) repressive practices as a result of China's securitization process (and the experiences from Uyghurs), I have tried to verify my data as much as possible.

Finally, my choice of (politically charged) words is important to mention. If you would present this thesis to the CCP, for example, they will, firstly, deny all accusations of repression, and secondly, disagree with terms I use, such as 1) China being "non-democratic" and "authoritarian" – as officially China has a multi-party system; 2) "repression", as they see their practices as necessary for state security/countering terrorism and economic growth/prosperity; 3) "Uyghur region",[20] which China views as tantamount to separatism, having entitled the

continuing and legitimating the Chinese discourse, but also abstain from being too subjective as this thesis should not get intertwined with moral justifications.

[19] All interviews I have conducted were in Dutch, as both the experts and the Uyghurs felt most comfortable talking in this language. Dutch is also my first language, making it easy to translate scripts for this thesis. The Uyghur respondents told me that they did not think there was a language barrier, as they felt they could express themselves good enough. When they did not know a Dutch word, they were able to use an English one to express themselves correctly.

[20] I had to carefully choose how to name the province of Xinjiang that used to be an independent state entitled East Turkestan between 1911 and 1949. Most Uyghur exiles, including the ones I interviewed and the ones interviewed in secondary sources, refer to the region as East Turkestan, because "Xinjiang" – meaning "new territory (Seytoff & Szadziewski, 2018: 75) – is a colonial name, reflecting the relatively recent Chinese colonization of the Uyghur homeland, and "East Turkestan" is the original name of their home country. Though this thesis separates empirical explanation from moral justification, as an academic you do have the power to change discourses. Even though my Uyghur respondents have asked me to use "East Turkestan", my aim is not to participate in the discussion on independence. Using "Uyghur region", I stay close to the original Chinese name "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region", whilst taking into consideration the true, hurtful (for Uyghurs) meaning behind the name "Xinjiang". One of my China-expert respondents also pointed out to me that "Uyghur region" a name is sinologists and other scholars are gradually beginning to consider using. One note I would like to add to this, however, is that I want to emphasize that the Uyghur region is not only home to Uyghurs, but also to other ethnicities including Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, other Muslim communities, and now also Han Chinese of course. Yet, the Uyghurs are largest group of ethnic inhabitants (originally, as Han in-migration has led to the Han Chinese being the largest group there now too).

region Xinjiang instead; and 4) “camp”, as the CCP claims they are “transformation-through-education” or “vocational training” centres (Amnesty International, 2021: 3), or, for children, “welfare” or “protection” centres (Smith Finley, 2019a: 8). I choose such wordings not to criticize China, as the aim of my thesis is not to be evaluative. I do it, instead, because they are either my respondents’ words, or because the other data I gathered (especially the academic literature) use these terms.

Chapter 4: Context — Securitization of the Uyghurs

In this chapter, I will set the context for the securitization of the Uyghurs. Context is an important aspect of securitization theory (Balzacq et al., 2016). The securitization of Uyghurs began in the Uyghur region, where not only Uyghurs but also other ethnic minority citizens are being perceived as a threat to China's state survival. Hence, this chapter will first discuss the securitization process of the Uyghur region, outlining the discourses and practices employed by the securitizing actor: the CCP. Next, the domestic security strategy shift that ensued between 2017 and 2018 will be outlined, being the focus of this essay, as this period marks a qualitative shift in the scale and intensity of the securitization policies' application to Uyghurs, also those abroad. Afterwards, this chapter discusses the transnational context of the securitization of Uyghurs, demonstrating China's metaphoric "long arm": how it is able to still exert control over Uyghurs far beyond its borders, and why, before closing with some concluding comments.

4.1. Securitizing the Uyghur Region

In China, the CCP is the securitizing actor, having authoritative positions from which official security issues are phrased – e.g., by Chinese president Xi Jinping. Regarding the securitization of the Uyghur region, the securitizing actors mainly direct their speech acts to the Han Chinese and other non-Uyghurs in China proper (Trédaniel & Lee, 2018). These audiences are therefore deemed the main audiences of the threat articulation of the Uyghur region.

Though it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the history of the region in full detail, it is important to highlight some events. Beginning with the year 1759, when the Manchu Qing Empire forcibly annexed East-Turkestan in order to enhance the dynastic empire's security against the Mongols, changing the region's name to Xinjiang. In the 1860s, the region experienced Muslim rebellions and Russian incursions. The indigenous people tried to escape Manchu Qing rule. The Russians tried to annex the region to their own empire. Consequently, the Qing decided in 1884 to elevate the region's status to a "normal" province, primarily to consolidate its direct control over the region. In 1911, their rule was overthrown by Chinese nationalists (Seytoff & Szadziewski, 2018: 75; Trédaniel & Lee, 2018: 180). Between 1911 and 1949, the region was de facto independent.

In 1949, the region underwent the communist Chinese occupation, who named the region the "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region" in 1955 (Seytoff & Szadziewski, 2018: 75). This Communist government was more determined than its predecessors to have the region

fully integrated, leading to extensive campaigns to promote Han Chinese migration into the region,[21] and the subsequent establishment there of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps: a Han quasi-military organization (Trédaniel & Lee, 2018: 181).

Since 1990, civil unrest and violent Uyghur nationalist movements have spread across the region. In reaction, regional authorities have mounted "Strike Hard" campaigns involving temporary or cyclical escalations of repression in the early 1990s (Greitens et al., 2019: 15). Since the turn of the twenty-first century, following 9/11 and the "Global War on Terror", the CCP has employed a speech act accusing "East Turkestan terrorist groups" of instigating civil unrest and violent incidents (Trédaniel & Lee, 2018: 183).

All these historical factors still serve to prioritize the governing of the Uyghur region through the army, and the use of hard power to assimilate Uyghurs into the Chinese nation (Trédaniel & Lee, 2018: 179). Non-Sinicized (i.e., not fully assimilated) people like the Uyghurs became portrayed as an existential threat to China. More specifically, separatism turned into an existential threat to the collective survival of the Chinese nation-state (ibid.). Non-Sinicized people (perceived as "less civilized" in the eyes of Communist Chinese) like the Uyghurs have therefore historically been perceived as an existential threat to China's state survival.[22]

The threat perception of the non-Sinicized Uyghur ethnic minority amplified since the early 2000s due to allegations of connections between global Islamic jihadist and radical Uyghur insurgents (Trédaniel & Lee, 2018: 179). Additionally, two violent conflicts in China exemplified the need to continue the securitization of the Uyghurs: the 2009 Urumqi riots/protests and the 2014 Kunming attack (ibid.: 185).

In July 2009, initially peaceful protests held by Uyghurs in response to a fatal brawl between Han and Uyghur workers, descended into violent clashes between Uyghurs, Han, and the police. Consequently, police congregated in the streets of Urumqi, forming mobs seeking out Uyghurs for retribution (Trédaniel & Lee, 2018: 186). Other clashes between police and protestors, or terrorist incidents, each resulting in fatalities, occurred in the Uyghur region throughout 2010–14.

Then, in March 2014, eight people, armed with long knives and allegedly from the Uyghur region, attacked the Kunming railway station in Yunnan Province, which was almost

[21] Stalin's use of economic and military assistance to extract oil and mining concessions in the region was one of the motivations for this (Trédaniel & Lee, 2018: 181).

[22] E.g., Qing China already launched offensive campaigns against these non-Sinicized tribes to secure or extend Chinese borders (Trédaniel & Lee, 2018).

free from ethnic unrest, leaving 29 employees and commuters dead and 143 injured (Trédaniel & Lee, 2018: 188). These incidents combined with the CCP's "terrorism" speech act led to the Han community living there proactively demanding securitization (ibid.: 190; Smith Finley, 2019b: 95).

Consequently, in Xi Jinping's China, the Uyghur body, mind, language, religion, and culture have been reconstructed as existential threat, so that "extraordinary" interventions into their lives are legitimized (Smith Finley, 2019a: 2). Nowadays, the Uyghurs region is fully securitized, bristling with military personnel, police, high-tech security cameras, checkpoints, and camps. Extreme surveillance and shutdowns of internet and mobile communication networks are commonplace (Potter, 2013: 73). This securitization also includes demographic securitization (i.e., the enhanced Han in-migration including the subsequent ethnic displacement of Uyghurs and other minorities), linguistic securitization (i.e., the imposition of Chinese-medium education), and religious securitization (i.e., the repression of Islamic practices) (Smith Finley, 2019a: 2).

Though China claims this securitization is necessary for national security and (thus) state survival (with national unity and full sovereignty – especially against hostile foreign forces – being essential in achieving this), numerous scholars have pointed out other, underlying reasons to securitize the region. It is a key strategic location facilitating transportation, (oil and gas) trade, production of cotton, and nuclear testing (Panda, 2010: 9; Potter, 2020; Trédaniel & Lee, 2018). Additionally, the region serves as a buffer between China and its neighbouring Central Asian countries. Moreover, the location is convenient for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),[23] as the region facilitates an important trade and transportation route that easily links China to Russia and eventually Europe. According to Smith Finley (2019a), numerous scholars agree that this is another reason to securitize the region.

4.1.1. Discourses

"State survival" or "national security" are one of the most prominent discourses utilized by the CCP to legitimize their securitization practices. The CCP's priority goals of their "national security policy" are to, first, defend the cohesion and integrity of the ruling elite (the CCP); second, to ensure China's territorial integrity; and third, to enhance Chinese economic

[23] The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is one of China's biggest global infrastructure development strategies of the New Silk Road, also known as "One Belt One Road" or "Silk Road Economic Belt" (its original name), that was launched in 2013 (Kaczmarski, 2017).

development and foreign influence (Blank, 2003: 127). Securitization is deemed necessary to obtain these goals. Much of China's official nationalist rhetoric today aims to unify the state and suppress any ideological legitimacy that might accrue to non-Sinicized, "separatist" minorities (ibid.: 125). Consequently, Uyghur ideologies are being delegitimized whilst Han Chinese ideologies are being normalized into state nationalist rhetoric. Therefore, Han-centric assimilation is an important securitization practice.

An economic development discourse also supports this assimilation practice, as "national unity" and "development" are inter-linked, according to the CCP (Clarke, 2007: 329; Greitens et al., 2019: 15). Economic development has since the 1990s become the primary tool of political assimilation (Trédaniel & Lee, 2018: 182). Within this discourse, ethnic minorities like the Uyghurs are portrayed as "backward" and "under-developed", who require the assistance of the more advanced ("modern") Han Chinese to overcome their backwardness (Clarke, 2007: 327). Economic development, according to the CCP's logic, should "cure" them, and will therefore serve as a "cure-all" in the context of China's "nationality problem" (ibid.: 329).

A final important discourse utilized by the CCP to mention, is the "War on Terror" rhetoric and what they call the "three evil forces": separatism, extremism, and terrorism (which did not enter into Chinese discourse until after 9/11). According to the CCP, these three evils pose potential threats to a wide range of national security interests, including economic prosperity, social stability, national unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity (Greitens et al., 2019: 14; Kaura, 2018: 21; Potter, 2013). The CCP's use of the term "terrorism" seems to be reserved almost exclusively for describing the Uyghurs and their region. China fears them linking up with Islamic radicals already operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and is especially concerned with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIP).

Labelling Uyghurs as "terrorists" – due to violent incidents that happened in the past, presumed links with Islamic jihadists, and Uyghur nationalism being perceived as "separatism" – China frames the securitization process as their own legitimate "war on terror". Employing a "terrorism-label" focusses public and political attention on the violence committed by this group, implying that the primary motives of this group were to cause damage and disturb the social order (Chagankerian, 2013: 3). This way, the securitizing actor also shifts the attention of the audience away from their own policies that could have caused the complaints of the so-called terrorists (ibid.). In other words, the terrorism-discourse can be seen as a strategic tool

used by the CCP in the hopes of obtaining a *carte blanche* to take whatever action it deems necessary in the region.

The CCP's concerns about the vulnerability of China's Muslim population to infiltration and "infection" from transnational jihadist networks have grown over the years. Hence, the threat perception of the Uyghurs heightened, gradually including Uyghurs abroad due to the lack of control over them and their increasing contact with militant groups abroad (Greitens et al., 2019: 11). These Uyghurs' transnational ties might provide ideological and material support, radicalize the population, and increase its capacity for resistance and violence (ibid.: 39). Those concerns were key to the consequent domestic security strategy shift that occurred between 2017 and 2018, during which the CCP's repression of the Uyghurs shifted from selective repression to collective repression (ibid.: 11, 37). This shift will be discussed later in this chapter, under sub-heading 4.2.

4.1.2. Practices

Based on the discourses previously identified, China's securitization approach to the Uyghur region is defined by: 1) a strategy of rapid economic modernization and development; 2) a zero-tolerance approach to expressions of ethnic minority autonomy or "other" ideologies that are being perceived as separatist (and therefore potentially terrorist) ideologies; and 3) a policy aimed at countering the "three evils" (i.e., separatism, extremism, and terrorism). The underlying discourse is one of national security/state survival. The CCP's securitization practices should ensure this security/survival.

To ensure rapid economic modernization, development programmes have been implemented, such as the "Great Western Development" programme that was launched in June 1999 (Clarke, 2007) and the BRI from 2013-2014 onwards (Kaczmarski, 2017). Economic development in the region has also been underpinned by strategies as rapid Han immigration, and, subsequently, Han-centric assimilation (i.e., Sinicization). This was reflected in Xi Jinping's speech of September 2014, where he emphasized the 'need to enhance the Four Identifications among the Chinese people (this including all 56 ethnic groups): identification with the Chinese motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, and the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics' (Smith Finley, 2019a: 11). In 2015, a fifth identification was added: identification with the CCP (ibid.).

Framing ethnic minorities with ideologies that are distinct from the state nationalism, as separatists and therefore terrorists, is another strategy, as this legitimizes the use of

"extraordinary measures" – as illustrated before. The counterterrorism legislation of December 2015 defines "terrorism" in a way that criminalizes virtually any Uyghur expression of dissent/separatism or religiosity (including cultural traditions), and it has given the state extensive powers of surveillance and censorship in its fight against terrorism (Roberts, 2018: 246). Efforts to locate and punish alleged extremists and terrorists were complemented by numerous other repressive strategies to control Uyghurs' beliefs, movement, and access to information (ibid.: 245). By focussing on terrorism, Xi Jinping has interwoven China's ethnic minorities policy with a counterterrorism policy (Blankesteijn, 2019).

In 2016, a new counterterrorism law was adopted that led to increased scrutiny of the work of ethnic Uyghur government officials. Targeting Uyghur government officials demonstrates how the counterterrorism policy has departed from its supposed goal of identifying and punishing potential terrorists towards targeting all ethnic Uyghurs. The on-going operation of mass extra-judicial detention camps exemplify this (Roberts, 2018: 246).

In addition to this new counterterrorism law, Chen Quanguo took over as Xinjiang Party Secretary in 2016. He had previously been Party Secretary of the Tibetan Autonomous Region and was expected to 'substantially deepen already draconian levels of securitization in Xinjiang' (Smith Finley, 2018). He was a feared man due to his reputation from this period in Tibet.

The CCP's repressive securitization practices in the Uyghur region have been studied extensively, despite the secrecy of these practices. Therefore, I will not go into too much detail about these practices. The Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights[24] have listed the known repressive practices in a report from March 2021.[25] Their list includes government-mandated homestays; mass birth-prevention strategy; forcible transfer of Uyghur children to state-run facilities; eradication of Uyghur identity, community, and domestic life; selective targeting of intellectuals and community leaders; and mass internment (ibid.: 3-4). Within this latter detention facility, much of the curriculum is 'patriotic education aimed at instilling ethnic unity and nationalist loyalty to the CCP' (Greitens et al., 2019: 18). Here, the Uyghur language is replaced with Mandarin Chinese and Muslim

[24] From now on in this thesis, I will refer to these names in short: "Newlines Institute & Raoul Wallenberg".

[25] Their report is based on 'all available evidence that could be collected and verified from public Chinese State communications, leaked Chinese State communications, eye-witness testimony, and open-source research methods such as public satellite-image analysis, analysis of information circulating on the Chinese internet, and any other available source' (Newlines Institute & Raoul Wallenberg, 2021: 2).

religious practice with Chinese cultural habits. This serves as deep preventive counterterrorism work, according to the CCP (ibid.: 43).

This patriotic education aimed at Han-centric assimilation and erasing Muslim religion corresponds with the identified discourse of state survival and national security that can only be reached when the "three evils" are fought and China is completely unified. Unification has succeeded when everybody speaks the same language, has the same ideologies, and are "developed". "Education" is seen as a key practice that should enable this. A speech act in 2002 by Wang Lequan, a previous Xinjiang Party Secretary, illustrates this clearly, stating that

> the Chinese language is now used as the medium of instruction from the third grade of primary school in Xinjiang, to overcome the language barrier and obstacles to development. This way, the quality of the Uyghur youth will not be poorer than that of their Han peers when they grow up (Wen wei po, 2 August 2002, cited in Clarke, 2007: 333).

In 2017, following the new 2016 counterterrorism law and Quanguo's takeover as Xinjiang Party Secretary, the campaign of "de-extremification"[26] was launched (Smith Finley, 2018). At the core of this campaign also lie calls for Sinicization: Sinicization of religion (i.e., erasing Uyghur religion – which is predominantly Islam – now, too) (Smith Finley, 2019a). This campaign means that virtually all Islamic matters, including the use of specific names and certain types of beards and clothing, have been criminalized (Newlines Institute & Raoul Wallenberg, 2021: 22). Alerk also mentioned how it was noticeable that religion played a key part in the Chinese government's attempt to make Uyghurs Chinese: by making Uyghurs 'as less Islamic as possible'.

4.2. Domestic Security Strategy Shift (2017-2018)

In that same year (2017), a domestic security strategy shift occurred in China, leading to an intensification of "extraordinary measures" taken in the Uyghur region. Authorities escalated the use of mass detention, ideological re-education, and pressure on Uyghur transnational networks, changing its repression from individually targeting to collectively targeting (Greitens et al., 2019). A variety of explanations for this shift that led to an increased repression exist in

[26] The Chinese government also calls this campaign the "People's War on Terror" (Smith Finley, 2018).

the literature. According to Greitens et al. (2019), typical explanations in media and literature stress factors such as the unrest among China's Uyghur population that escalated in 2008-2009; the CCP's shift towards a more assimilationist minority policy; and the global fear of terrorism since the 9/11 attacks, combined with the violent incidents within China's borders.

Another explanation mentioned by multiple sources is Chen Quanguo's leadership in the region (Greitens et al., 2019; Leijendekker, 2019; Smith Finley, 2018; UHRP, 2020). When assigned Party Secretary, he immediately launched an unprecedented expansion of security forces in the region; established thousands of "convenience police stations" in towns, villages, and major intersections across the region; ramped up the system of mass surveillance and tracking of Uyghurs in the region by collecting biodata through mandatory medical examinations; and digitized public security not only to amass intelligence on the minorities in the Uyghur region, but also on their links abroad (Greitens et al., 2019; Newlines Institute & Raoul Wallenberg, 2021).

Another explanation for the security shift has been widely overlooked, but plays a key role, too: the increased threat from Uyghur participation in transnational Islamic militant groups. Greitens et al. (2019) argue that this threat shifted from potential to operational in 2014-2016. Hence, 'the changing perceptions of China's international security environment, and related perceptions of vulnerability on the domestic security front, significantly contributed to the CCP's adoption of a new internal security strategy in Xinjiang' (ibid.: 45).

In order to prevent terrorist infiltration and possible terrorist attacks in China, the CCP deems it necessary to "re-educate" not individuals, but all possible separatists, terrorists, or extremists – which explains the shift from selective to collective repression (Greitens et al., 2019: 38). Since 2017, an estimated one to two million[27] Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in the Uyghur region have therefore been detained in re-education camps (Smith Finley, 2019a: 3; UHRP, 2020: 5). Alerk, whose father has been interned, complained in the interview how 'it has become a fishing net: […] it is a big fishing net catching everyone indiscriminatory.'

Smith Finley (2019a) has listed a range of eligibility criteria for internment, including possessing sensitive digital content on a mobile phone or computer (e.g. text messages containing "illegal" religious language, pictures of women wearing the niqab, or critical essays or lectures by Uyghur intellectuals); travelling or studying abroad (or planning to do so); and

[27] Due to the secrecy surrounding these camps, the numbers might even be higher.

links to relatives abroad (e.g. taking or making phone calls to friends and family abroad, or having a relative who has travelled abroad).

4.3. Transnational Securitization: China's "Long Arm"

This collective, "indiscriminatory" targeting of the CCP's repression thus also includes transnational Uyghur networks (Greitens et al., 2019). This was initially a (preventive) counterterrorism measure, discouraging Uyghurs having ties with (potential) terrorists[28] (ibid.: 38). After the 2009 Urumqi riots/protests, the CCP officially framed the Uyghurs as a transnational threat, stating it was the work of domestic and international separatists and terrorists (ibid.: 40). This meant that Uyghurs were being transnationally securitized, as the threat was now a transnational one, too.

Transnational securitization has seldom been evaluated. I understand transnational securitization as including transnational communities as referent subjects in the securitizing actor's speech act, and (subsequently) enforcing securitization practices on them that transcend the securitizing actor's territorial jurisdiction. This transnational analysis of securitization is a suitable approach for modern-day securitization policies, as, driven largely by security initiatives, states have increasingly begun to widen their border spaces projecting surveillance far from the border itself (Longo, 2017: 758).

As Uyghurs abroad are also being securitized, individuals within China's border have been forced to cut off contact with anyone considered politically sensitive (Smith Finley, 2018). Since the domestic security strategy shift between 2017 and 2018, this intensified, having Uyghurs still in China scared to communicate with anyone abroad (ibid.). As one of my interviewees explained: 'seeking contact with my relatives there is too dangerous, especially since the concentration camps… Having contact only brings me, and my parents, misery.' Most Uyghurs I and others interviewed have not had contact with anyone they know in China since 2017. Reports of Uyghurs being told never to text or call again by their relatives in China are commonplace, as are reports of Uyghurs being deleted from family chat-apps on social media (Smith Finley, 2019: 19).

[28] After 9/11, during the "Global War on Terror", China's rhetoric about Uyghur networks began to shift: instead of emphasizing pan-Turkic separatism, connections were being drawn between Uyghur organizations and jihadist networks, especially those in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Greitens et al., 2019: 30).

4.3.1. Uyghurs Abroad: (No) Return

According to the World Uyghur Congress an estimated 1–1.6 million Uyghurs live outside China, with significant Uyghur communities residing in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and smaller communities in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Russia, Sweden, the Netherlands, Turkey, and the United States, inter alia (in Amnesty International, 2020: 4). These communities have been placed under pressure by the CCP to return to China, especially Uyghurs studying or working abroad. Threats towards family members have been and are being used to obtain the students' compliance. This is a repressive tool called "coercion-by-proxy" which will be further discussed in Chapter 5. Several Uyghurs returned because their parents and siblings were being detained (UHRP, 2017: 21). Some governments have also been pressured to deport Uyghurs involuntarily if necessary.

Moreover, the CCP has required Uyghur expatriates to provide detailed personal information on not only themselves, but also others who remain abroad (Greitens et al., 2019: 19-20). One of my respondents shared with me that he was asked to share his NS business card with Chinese officials. 'They want to know how you pay your rent, they want your student card…' he added. This is called "dataveillance" (i.e., monitoring of multiple forms of data by security professionals with the aim of identifying potentially "risky" groups and individuals) (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010). Personal information facilitates repressive tactics (e.g., cyberattacks) (Armstrong, 2020: 5). This respondent also said that Uyghurs are being manipulated into providing such information about other Uyghurs. All Uyghurs I interviewed mentioned this.

Before 2017, going abroad was still possible – though these people were strictly monitored by Chinese officials. After the security shift in 2017, it has become nearly impossible to leave the Uyghur region for Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities. Since 2017, many of the Uyghurs studying or working abroad who did return to China 'have disappeared after being detained on their arrival in China without notice from the authorities of their whereabouts' (Roberts, 2018: 247). This did not go unnoticed and served as a warning for other Uyghurs abroad to not return. The China-specialist working for a human rights organisation, who I interviewed, also experienced a turning point from 2017 onward in the interviews they conducted with Uyghurs, my interviewee told me. 'People who originally wanted to return to China after their work or study abroad decided not to go back and began seeking asylum as they started to realize they could probably never go back.'

One of my interviewees told me that many of the young members of the Uyghur association he helped build up are children separated from their parents who are still in China, as they were studying abroad and were told not to return or did not dare to return for security reasons. 'This has often been the case in the last few years,' he explained, 'due to increased repression and because more and more people ended up in concentration camps'. In other cases, the parents were the ones being separated from their children because they themselves worked abroad (Amnesty International, 2021: 3).

4.4. Concluding Comments

This chapter has first discussed the securitization process of the Uyghur region, including a brief overview of some historical events demonstrating that China has a long history of dealing with the region from a security point of view. The securitization discourses and practices employed by the CCP have also been outlined, showing how the CCP tries to convince the predominantly Han Chinese audience of the good cause of the securitization process: providing national security and prosperity for all by unifying China; countering the "three evils" – especially terrorism; (re-)educating them; and bringing economic development. These speech acts have (had) appalling discriminatory effects on the Uyghurs, however, as it has resulted in "extraordinary" repressive measures. Especially the terrorism discourse is utilized to legitimize these measures.

The repression intensified as a result of the domestic security strategy shift which moved selective repression towards collective repression. This collective approach also targets transnational Uyghur networks, including the one in the Netherlands. The transnational securitization led to many Uyghurs being either detained for having been abroad (as it makes them a suspect for separatism and, therefore, terrorism) or becoming refugees, being too scared to return (which, in turn, endangers their relatives left behind). The transnational repression of these refuged Uyghurs will be discussed next.

Chapter 5: Transnational Repression of Uyghurs in the Netherlands

Having set the context for the securitization of Uyghurs, both within China's borders, and transnationally, it is time to dive into how the CCP's securitization process affects the Uyghur community in the Netherlands today. This chapter will illustrate how this Dutch Uyghur community is targeted by the CCP's transnational repression. The Uyghur community in the Netherlands, as affected securitization audience, will be described first. Then, their experiences of "extraordinary" repressive measures taken against them by the CCP will be outlined. Coercion-by-proxy as "extraordinary" repressive measure will be highlighted, being the focus of this thesis. Other complementary "extraordinary measures" will also be outlined, including espionage and other forms of intimidation. This chapter will also briefly touch upon how this affects not only the Uyghur community, but the entire Dutch state. So far, scholars have failed to acknowledge how transnational repression strategies threaten host states (Armstrong, 2020).

5.1. The Dutch Uyghur Community

The Netherlands is one of the countries hosting a Uyghur community. How big this community actually is, is unclear. Some Uyghurs think it counts 1.500 Uyghurs, others think 2.000. When discussing this with Alerk during the interview, he was surprised: 'oh, I have always thought we are with 3.000 Uyghurs in the Netherlands.' Even more so, Vely thought he heard, 'but also believes,' there are 5.000 Uyghurs, with the largest numbers living in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Den Haag. This uncertainty about the size of the Dutch Uyghur community could partly be explained by the fact that the Netherlands does not make a distinction between registering Uyghurs and other people with a Chinese passport when granting asylums (Leijendekker, 2019). The Uyghurs I interviewed have another (unanimous) explanation: because Uyghurs are coerced into keeping themselves silent, you do not hear or see (e.g., at protests) those people. Hence, Uyghurs do often not know the existence of one another.

Alerk explained to me that the Dutch community includes Uyghur refugees from different time periods. The eldest (mainly Imams) came mostly after 1989 and 1997, following the Tiananmen Square protests/massacre and the Ghulja uprising/massacre,[29] respectively,

[29] This uprising/massacre had begun as a peaceful protest about the arrest of religious students and demonstrations against state restrictions on Islamic practice. The protests were violently suppressed and the crackdown that took place in its aftermath was characterized by arbitrary arrests, disappearances, torture, and summary executions (Smith Finley, 2020: 3).

which led to many Uyghur arrests. Since then, people started fleeing significantly more so than before. After 2009, another large group of Uyghurs fled China, due to the Urumqi riots/protests and the subsequent arrests. Dutch Uyghur Ablet Bakir was one of those who had been targeted after the 2009 riots/protests. He had been detained without even having participated in the protests (Toksöz, 2020).

Alerk, now 22 years old, fled China with his family, excluding his father, in 2007. Now 25-year-old Vely fled with his parents and brother in 2010, when he was 14. The other two Uyghurs I interviewed (a 40-year-old and a 31-year-old) fled in 2003 and in 2011 (respectively). The Netherlands is a convenient and safe country to flee to, as the Netherlands does not easily send people back who are seeking asylum. Historically, Uyghurs specifically have only occasionally been deported to China. Additionally, Schiphol Airport often serves as a stopover for many flights, making it easy for many refugees to get on a plane, stop in the Netherlands, and seek asylum there.

Due to these different "layers" of refugee flows, the Dutch Uyghur community is not very cohesive. Moreover, widespread feelings of anxiety, suspicion and alienation among the Uyghurs add to this, too, as will become evident in this and the following chapters. Yet, there are some small Uyghur organizations with people who did unite (e.g., an Islamic association, youth association, and one primarily concerned with East-Turkestan's independence), but this only makes the community more fragmented. When the news came out about the camps, however, it resulted in a slightly more united community, as people shared feelings of fear for their relatives back home and grief for those who had been detained (Alerk, personal interview, April 9, 2021).

5.2. Transnational Authoritarianism

The Uyghur community in the Netherlands has always been a concern for the CCP, as they can speak freely and therefore openly criticize China, delegitimizing the CCP's power. Technological advancements have generally only made it easier for exiles to maintain close ties with the national public sphere, creating even more vulnerabilities for the sending state (Armstrong, 2020: 4-5). Therefore, the CCP monitors (digitally and by spying on them) and intimidates overseas Uyghurs, pressuring them not to do or say anything that could be interpreted as criticism. The CCP also coerces Uyghurs to return to their homeland, as illustrated in Chapter 4. These are strategies of transnational authoritarianism.

The Uyghur community in the Netherlands are, thus, not necessarily safe outside China's physical boundaries, as it does not remove them from the pressures and effects of this state authoritarianism. In other words, it does not remove them from the "extraordinary measures" the CCP enforces against Uyghurs as part of their securitization process.

Transnational authoritarianism can be described as 'any effort to prevent acts of political dissent against an authoritarian state by targeting one or more existing or potential members of its emigrant or diaspora communities' (Tsourapas, 2020: 6). Hirt & Saleh Mohammad (2018) call this phenomenon similarly "transnational authoritarian rule", Lewis (2015) dubs it "extraterritorial security practices", and Jorum (2015) defines it as "homeland repression across borders".

Moss (2016) opts for using "transnational repression" as overarching term, which encompasses all "extraordinary measures" taken against Uyghurs abroad. Transnational repression is a concept used to describe how countries like China silence their exiles abroad like the Uyghurs (Schenkkan, 2020: 1). It is a systematic effort to prevent political dissent (Armstrong, 2020: 2). It can be seen as a form of transnational authoritarianism: it is one of the strategies an authoritarian state can employ to coerce those living outside its legal borders (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020). Employing strategies of transnational repression as a state, entails coercing people living outside its legal borders, including not only prominent individuals (e.g., political exiles and journalists), but entire groups (e.g., students and refugees) (ibid.: 9). Such strategies can be used to monitor, harass, and intimidate these people.

These strategies are the "extraordinary measures" employed by CCP to target the Uyghur community in the Netherlands (but also other ethnic-minority communities and in other countries). They do this through pressure from its embassies abroad, as well as through messaging apps and threatening phone calls (Amnesty International, 2020).[30] The number of reports of Dutch Uyghurs experiencing this pressure from China has increased in recent years (Blok, 2020). In 2019, 58 Uyghurs in the Netherlands reported threats, intimidation, discrimination, and coercion(-by-proxy) by the Chinese government. The Netherlands' General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) acknowledged in its 2011 and 2012 annual reports

[30] This is common for strategies of transnational repression, because political authority is constituted through networked infrastructures that enable regimes to exercise "extensive power". Therefore, transnational repression is likely to operate through institutional outposts such as embassies, missions, and consulates (Moss, 2016: 482).

that the Chinese government continues to spy on, intimidate and influence the Uyghur community in the Netherlands.[31]

Stories about the Chinese embassy in the Netherlands being active as an operator of the CCP's transnational repression are also circulating. These include stories about the embassy being tasked with collecting information about Dutch Uyghurs; asking them unnecessarily to come to the embassy to sign some documents; and asking them to urgently go and collect packages that have been delivered to the embassy addressed to Dutch Uyghurs (Amnesty International, 2020; Leijendekker, 2019; van Raalte, 2020). There are also many reports of Uyghurs whose visa has expired or who lost their passport, who are told by the embassy that they must return to China as the embassy cannot arrange that for them in the Netherlands. In the past, this had also led to Uyghurs returning and disappearing back in China (Human rights interviewee, personal interview, April 13, 2021).

The aim of the embassy's engagement is to intimidate the Uyghurs in the Netherlands. Some Uyghurs do not even dare to answer unknown telephone number anymore, out of fear that it is the embassy (Leijendekker, 2019). Uyghurs are scared because Chinese officials are their oppressors, who still see Uyghurs as Chinese citizens, and embassies enjoy diplomatic immunity (Human rights interviewee, personal interview, April 13, 2021; Uyghur interviewee 1, personal interview, April 5, 2021).

5.3. Coercion-by-proxy

As illustrated, targeting relatives in China is used as a repressive tool to pressure Uyghurs in the Netherlands. It is called coercion-by-proxy: a form of transnational repression, which 'constitutes the actual or threatened use of physical or other sanctions against an individual within the territorial jurisdiction of a state, for the purpose of repressing a target individual residing outside its territorial jurisdiction' (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020: 10). These individuals within the state's borders can be anyone close to a targeted exile, such as family members, associates, or acquaintances. This form of transnational repression, wherein states use domestic forms of repression as a means of punishing, threatening, or controlling transnational networks, is characterized by its global scope.

[31] In August 2020, the Public Prosecutor's Office (OM) announced that it would not be prosecuting despite these reports, as China was not expected to cooperate with an extensive on-site investigation and contact details of suspects and witnesses would have to be handed over to the Chinese authorities, which could endanger them and their relatives in China (Botje, 2021a).

Coercion-by-proxy is the primary and most effective tactic employed by Chinese officials to silence Uyghurs (Armstrong, 2020: 9; Fay, 2015; UHRP, 2017). In 2014, this tactic was already increasingly common. It was used to coerce Uyghurs abroad to return to China – these Uyghurs were mainly activists (Fay, 2015; Smith Finley, 2019a). In 2017 – since the domestic security strategy shift – not just activists have been targeted, but all Uyghurs abroad, especially students. These students' family members were being held hostage by Chinese officials until they returned home (Tsourapas, 2020: 11).

Government agents may issue threats in person, but phone calls and online messages are now increasingly being used. Uyghurs in the Netherlands are receiving calls from family members in China who make clear to them that their words and deeds have consequences for the relatives left behind (Amnesty International, 2020; Hofman, 2021; Leijendekker, 2019; Toksöz, 2021). Recent reports from the outgoing Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs (2020) and Amnesty International (2020) demonstrate how local authorities in China have targeted Dutch Uyghurs' relatives still there, threatening the Dutch Uyghurs to detain their relatives if they do not return to China, or telling them 'they would never be able to see their family again if they refused to provide information about other Uyghurs living in their communities' (ibid.: 5).

The objectives of coercion-by-proxy appear to be versatile: 'to persuade citizens to return to China for re-education; to create mistrust among diaspora members and thereby limit collective mobilization; and to discourage Uyghurs from making appeals for host-country support or engaging in public advocacy' (Greitens et al., 2019: 20). Adamson & Tsourapas (2020) have distinguished four ways in which it operates: punishment, deterrence, compellence, and control. 'Punishment involves retribution for acts committed by targets abroad; deterrence involves using threats of punishment to prevent actions by targets abroad […]; compellence involves using threats of punishment in order to coerce targets abroad into specific behaviors or actions' (ibid.: 10).

"Specific behaviours or actions" may include demands to cease political activism, but also to provide information on other exiles. As coercion-by-proxy creates a climate of fear and control among those living abroad, people may feel compelled to share information about others in the community (fearing they or their relatives back home will suffer repercussions if they refuse) (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020: 11). Dutch Uyghur Ismayil Osman stated that in November 2014, Chinese policemen obtained his phone number from his relatives in China, and forced his brother to call him, after which 'they took over the phone call and told me that I had to provide information on other Uyghurs in the Netherlands. Otherwise they would take

my brother' (in ibid.: 11). Such stories are shared by other Uyghurs (UHRP, 2020: 37), including the ones I interviewed.

Qelbinur Sedik, who came to the Netherlands in 2019, is another Dutch Uyghur victim of coercion-by-proxy. In 2021, she received a videocall from China after she had spoken to the BBC about systematic rapes in camps. Her sister called, but a Chinese police agent spoke: '[r]ealize that all your relatives are here with us. Think carefully about this.' (in Botje, 2021a, my translation). Moreover, one of her brothers has been arrested and probably tortured as means of coercion-by-proxy (ibid.). Other Dutch Uyghurs who have experienced such coercion-by-proxy, and have spoken up about it, are Alerk, Ablet Bakir (in Toksöz, 2020), Yunus Tohti and Abdurehim Gheni (Amnesty International, 2020), and many who wish to stay anonymous (in Leijendekker, 2019) – including two of my interviewees. The Dutch government is aware of China's coercion-by-proxy activities (Blok, 2020; NCTV et al., 2021: 22).

5.4. Espionage

Coercion-by-proxy as a silencing tactic is complemented by espionage. Chinese security services seek to recruit members of the (Dutch) Uyghur community to carry this out against others, in order to replicate the system of control that exists in their homeland (UHRP, 2017: 31). As evinced, coercion-by-proxy is one of their primary tools to establish this. Uyghurs in the Netherlands, when refusing to cooperate with the Chinese state, are running the risk of endangering their relatives back home and never being able to see them again. A Dutch Uyghur had been told by his mother that he should obey Chinese officials when they ask him to cooperate (i.e., spy for them on other Uyghurs in the Netherlands), because 'otherwise we will lose your brother' (in Leijendekker, 2019, my translation). The AIVD's 2011 annual report stated that there is indeed evidence that the Uyghur community in the Netherlands is being monitored and targeted for recruitment for espionage by the Chinese government (UHRP, 2017: 11).

Uyghurs in the Netherlands claim to have many indications that China is using advanced technology against them, too, with phones being hacked or other forms of electronic espionage (Leijendekker, 2019). Alerk mentioned that 'it's happened a few times I thought my phone was tapped.' Moreover, his mother bought a new phone once 'because she's afraid her old one is tapped.' Vely also explained to me that 'another thing you notice about spies, is that if there has been a protest in which you took part, your family in China will hear about it.' According to the AIVD (2012), Chinese agents have attempted to infiltrate Uyghurs organizations in the

Netherlands, and China has detailed knowledge of their internal affairs, with the objective being to prevent them from organizing effectively whilst simultaneously maintaining a grip on the community.

Moreover, in 2012, two Uyghur spies have been unmasked in the Netherlands. They were both Uyghur translators, working for the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service. The AIVD revealed that they reported to the Chinese state (AIVD, 2012; Alerk, personal interview, April 9, 2021; UHRP, 2017: 11). These "spy translators" have also translated for Vely's father at that time, and he thinks possibly for his mother, too. Yet, the Monitoring Committee of the Dutch Intelligence Service found that the AIVD's report appeared to be insufficiently substantiated, and the AIVD therefore withdrew the report (ANP, 2017; UHRP, 2017: 11). It did, however, cause anxiety and suspicion among the Dutch Uyghur community. 'Not knowing who among them might be reporting back to Chinese security agents plants seeds of suspicion and mistrust that take root and further feed the sense of isolation and fear' (Amnesty International, 2020: 10).

5.5. More Intimidation

Other forms of intimidation have also been reported about Uyghurs in the Netherlands. For example, several Dutch Uyghurs have indicated to media (Botje, 2021a & 2021b; de Bruin, 2020; Leijendekker, 2019) and Amnesty International (2020) that the Chinese authorities use social media to monitor and intimidate them. Uyghur doctor Khasim, who came to the Netherlands in 2009, noticed that since 2017 things started to change, as she was barely able to talk with her family anymore, and in July that year the family chat-app was even deleted. From then on, she noticed she was being watched. While she was playing an online game, she spotted changes in the game she did not make herself. When all of a sudden a Chinese flag appeared in her game, she 'knew enough' (in Leijendekker, 2019). She has also been hacked on Twitter and Facebook, and receives threatening messages on WhatsApp.

Abdurehim Gheni, a well-known Uyghur activist in the Netherlands, told Amnesty International (2020) he was regularly followed and intimidated by unidentified persons he believes to be Chinese. Abdurehim also said he has received death threats by telephone and was 'photographed and threatened at the weekly one-man peaceful demonstrations he had held since June 2018 around Dam Square in Amsterdam' (ibid.).

Having received leaked Chinese state documents, Dutch Uyghur Asiye Abdulaheb is frequently being intimidated too – via phone calls and 'vague acquaintances' ringing her

doorbell – with threats like ‘you will end up in pieces in the black Kliko[32] in your front yard’ (in Vlaskamp, 2019, my translation).

Furthermore, my interviewee Alerk, being a public Dutch Uyghur speaker, also has been intimidated multiple times, both through phone calls (again stating things like ‘be careful, it is dangerous for your family’ and hearing screams, panting and cries); through Facebook (anonymously, something like ‘you are a maniac and a terrorist’); Instagram (anonymously, also stating that he is a liar or a spy and that everything is fine in the Uyghur region – remarkably, in Dutch as well);[33] and via emails. My other interviewees, including Vely and his family, who are not politically active have also received intimidating phone calls.

5.6. Threatening the Dutch State

All these transnational repressive strategies affect not only individuals but entire populations. In the Netherlands, they contribute to creating a climate of fear and control for Uyghurs. Yet, it also affects non-Uyghur citizens. The use of coercion-by-proxy presents how liberal and illiberal states are increasingly entangled (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020: 13). Even though China’s securitization policies – where these transnational repression tactics can be traced back to – are not directly aimed at the Netherlands, they can certainly harm the Dutch state’s interests (NCTV et al., 2021: 8). Espionage activities and foreign meddling, threatened and intimidated citizens, and foreign states’ long-distance coercive power (through proxies) pose a direct threat to the confidence in and functioning of the democratic rule of law, and is therefore ‘utterly undesirable’ for the Dutch state, according to outgoing Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Blok (2020). Moreover, the “insider-espionage” activities can lead to doubts about Uyghurs’ loyalty to Dutch society and, thus, to the undermining of social cohesion (NCTV et al., 2021: 22).

Moreover, recently in 2021, the European Union has placed four Chinese officials and one Chinese organization on a sanctions list for violating Uyghurs’ human rights. China struck back, however, placing – among others – Dutch Member of Parliament Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (D66) on a sanctions list, for tabling a motion passed by parliament that China is committing genocide against the Uyghurs. (Botje, 2021a; Human rights interviewee, personal interview, April 13, 2021). One prominent scholar who has been placed on a sanctions list by China is Joanne Smith

[32] A Kliko is a wheelie bin (a garbage container with wheels).
[33] These messages worsened after he had been on TV for the programme *Pak de Macht*.

Finley, to whom I have referred multiple times in this thesis as her articles on the Uyghurs and China's policies toward them are very useful.

5.7. Concluding Comments

This chapter has revealed how the affected securitization audience (i.e., the Uyghur community in the Netherlands) is targeted by the CCP's transnational "extraordinary" repressive measures. Having fled the Uyghur repression in China, Dutch Uyghurs are still not necessarily safe now that they live in the Netherlands. Due to China's "long arm", and what Adamson (2020) calls "diaspora authoritarianism" (i.e., being spied upon by other Uyghurs in the Netherlands), they still experience the pressures and effects of China's state authoritarianism.

In other words, the Uyghur community in the Netherlands is being transnationally repressed: they are being monitored, harassed, and intimidated. Phone calls and online messages are primarily being used to harass and intimidate Uyghurs. This fits the global trend wherein surveillance technology and the internet are increasingly being used by non-democratic regimes to facilitate transnational authoritarianism (Armstrong, 2020: 1; Tsourapas, 2020). Important players in the transnational repression of Uyghurs in the Netherlands are not just Chinese security officials, but also China's embassy, and non-state spies – including Uyghurs themselves. Coercion-by-proxy is one of the most effective transnational repression strategies employed by Chinese officials aimed to silence Uyghur communities abroad, as threats toward relatives back home create an atmosphere of fear among the Dutch Uyghur community. The next chapter will explain how this has led to self-censorship.

Chapter 6: Self-censorship

Uyghurs in the Netherlands have received many “warnings” by the securitizing actors (i.e., Chinese government officials, who can be traced back to the main securitizing actor: the CCP) in the forms of threats (also against relatives remaining within China), harassments, intimidations, and espionage activities, as outlined in Chapter 5. Getting back to Floyd (2020) who argues that there are at least two possible securitization audiences – one receiving a warning by the securitizing actor’s speech act (Uyghurs, the affected audience), and the other one being promised protection (Han Chinese) – the previous chapter has illustrated what effects these “warnings” have on the Dutch Uyghur community today. Hereby, I have not only looked at feelings produced (e.g., anxiety, suspicion, and alienation), but also at how this affects their behaviour – recognizing their agency. I have demonstrated that these behaviours include spying on others, mistrusting others, and isolating oneself – both from the situation entirely (e.g., political debate and activism), from the community in the Netherlands, and from relatives back in China. Additionally, previously, another effect on behaviour has been to return to China. Uyghurs committing self-censorship can also be identified as a form of behaviour resulting from the CCP’s “warnings” and “extraordinary measures”. This chapter will further outline this specific effect of China’s securitization practices, including its coercion-by-proxy policy, that target the Uyghur community in the Netherlands today.

Self-censorship is ‘a form of control imposed upon us by ourselves' (Leonardi, 2008: 84). The CCP’s “extraordinary” transnational repressive measures, with in particular China’s coercion-by-proxy policy, are aimed at bringing this self-censorship about, so that, consequently, Uyghurs in the Netherlands ‘intentionally and voluntarily [withhold] information from others in the absence of formal obstacles’ (Bar-Tal, 2017: 4).

6.1. Strategy of the Chinese State

The CCP’s securitization of Uyghurs is palpable in the Netherlands, due to China’s transnational authoritarianism. According to Michaelsen (2020), the knowledge (or at least assumption) of ongoing regime surveillance, combined with the uncertainty about the capabilities of monitoring authorities and the scope of their activities, pushes people towards self-censorship. Coercion-by-proxy is key in this, as Uyghurs abroad know about the camps and other human rights violations the people in the Uyghur region have to face, and are not able to contact their relatives there themselves. Together with other forms of transnational

repression, coercion-by-proxy can lead to high levels of self-censorship (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020: 11).

China's 2017-2018 security strategy shift resulting in collective repression left many Uyghurs reluctant to speak publicly, 'hoping that their silence would be rewarded with leniency for their relatives still in Xinjiang' (Churchill, 2018). Hence, Smith Finley (2018) argues, the camps and the threat of being disappeared into them are about intimidation for the CCP, to keep Uyghurs in a state of fear. This fear is induced by the knowledge that others have already been detained, and people are rarely released from the camps (Smith Finely, 2019a). They are, thus, intended to send a warning to the remainder of the (Turkic) Muslim population, both within and outside of China's borders (ibid.). Especially Uyghurs with relatives who have been harassed or imprisoned in China are reluctant to come forward and speak out (UHRP, 2017). The Uyghurs I interviewed all told me that within the Dutch Uyghur community 'everyone probably knows at least one person who has been interned.'[34]

This warning, combined with the use of long-distance coercion-by-proxy instruments against overseas Uyghurs, feeds into the creation of a larger climate of fear and control, which makes 'attending even the most banal public demonstration a potentially high-risk activity' (Moss, 2020: 17). Vely told me he was therefore also not allowed by his parents to join a Uyghur protest in the Netherlands. By censoring others like this, self-censorship is imposed among the whole Uyghur community.

Imposing self-censorship among dissidents 'is a basic feature of the Chinese system,' according to Ardi Bouwers (personal interview, March 22, 2021). Frans-Paul van der Putten agrees that 'it comes from a very long political-strategic tradition China has: seeking maximum effect with minimum effort' (personal interview, April 16, 2021). The human rights interviewee also argued that scaring people into self-censorship is a 'standard method of the CCP' (personal interview, April 13, 2021). This scaring is usually done by targeting a few prominent people to deter the wider community (ibid.). There is even a Chinese saying for this: "kill the chicken to scare the monkey" – attacking one person, for example Joanne Smith Finley as mentioned before, so that all other academics will abstain from writing critically about China and the

[34] Due to a lack of contact with family members within China's borders and the secrecy of the camps, no one knows for sure which Uyghurs (and others) have been or are being interned. The outgoing Dutch MFA has stated that, according to information he has received from people directly involved, about 440 Uyghur family members of Uyghurs in the Netherlands may be or have been in a camp – but that he also cannot confirm this number (Blok, 2020).

Uyghurs (ibid.). This has also happened through detaining prominent Uyghurs (functioning as "chickens").

These experts explained that what also adds to people censoring themselves, is that it is never completely clear what is and is not allowed to say or do in China. Therefore, people are constantly on the alert and, hence, begin to self-censor not knowing if they are allowed to speak their minds. Due to this vagueness of the rules, authorities like the CCP can easily blame people for violating them. The deliberate absence of explicit rules on what can and cannot be said also helps generating an atmosphere of fear (Mason, 2013: 43). Consequently, 'vague definitions make people shut down their thoughts even before they emerge' (Mishra & Polcumpally, 2021).

6.2. Atmosphere of Fear

The combination of different strategies produces an atmosphere of fear that prevents Uyghurs from escaping China's "long arm", 'whether this is real or imagined' (Tsourapas, 2020: 22). Practicing self-censorship for reasons of self-interest to avoid external negative sanctions, is underlined by fear (Bar-Tal, 2017: 9). As established, Uyghurs' worries for "external negative sanctions" are primarily about relatives in the Uyghur region who could suffer for their words and deeds. The fact that so many Uyghurs know at least one person who is or has been detained, adds to this fear. Consequently, Uyghurs abroad 'shield their families from the free speech that exists outside of China for fear of reprisal' (Fay, 2015).

Among many Dutch Uyghurs, not only the possibility of endangering their loved ones, but also the trauma they carry with them from having lived under oppression in the Uyghur region leads them to self-censor. Many Uyghurs have internalized the oppression they have been living under in the Uyghur region, because the CCP has been their greatest oppressor for as long as they know. They 'learn to live with it' (Uyghur interviewee 2, personal interview, April 12, 2021). Consequently, even when you have fled, 'you cannot and dare not resist your greatest oppressor. You do not dare to speak out about it' (ibid.). Living in constant fear, they act upon it by censoring themselves.

Alerk agreed that 'this trauma is still very much alive among us.' He explained that 'the trauma among the Uyghurs is so strong that there are Uyghurs here who cross the street when they see a Chinese person, because they are just so scared.' Another respondent said he thinks approximately 80% of the Uyghurs in the Netherlands are scared because they live 'with the Chinese police in their hearts'. They have been traumatized in the Uyghur region and brought the fear with them to the Netherlands.

This atmosphere of fear has also created feelings of alienation among Uyghurs residing in the Netherlands, resulting in isolation. Uyghur interviewee 2 explained that being relatively safe here and being granted opportunities to live a good life, people choose for a new start – 'they *need* a new start' – leaving their old life behind, or at least trying to by not speaking about it. Hence, many Uyghurs are not concerned with the Uyghur community in the Netherlands, and do not even consider themselves Uyghur anymore. They do not feel, nor wish to be, included. Vely thinks they do this out of fear, 'because everyone knows that when you talk, you could endanger your family members, and you do not want to make it even harder for them than it already is in China.' He knows some of these "Uyghurs" who have alienated themselves. He does not approach these people on purpose. He knows that getting into touch with them is dangerous, 'because they do not trust you. They trust no one.'

My interviewees have noticed that the older Uyghurs are most scared due to their traumas from having lived in the Uyghur region longer than most younger Uyghur refugees. How strong the transnational ties to the home country are, determines how likely it is for someone to dare to speak out (Moss, 2018). Alerk's mother is one of those older traumatized Uyghurs, Alerk said. Vely's father too, who 'does not even trust a Dutch police officer'. Likewise, he explained, Dutch courts and government letters can cultivate mistrust, too.

Yet, among the younger Uyghurs there are also a lot of suspicions and mistrust. 'Uyghurs won't share everything with other Uyghurs just like that, because there's always a fear for that Uyghur being a spy... That creates a lot of suspicion in relationships, a lot of fear and paranoia... Of course, that's also very prevalent here in the Uyghur community in the Netherlands…' (Alerk, personal interview, April 9, 2021).

The human rights China-expert also said that he has witnessed Uyghurs not trusting one another, afraid that 'if they came to a meeting or if they said something to another person, it would be reported back to the CCP and there would be consequences for them.' Younger Uyghurs also inherit mistrust from their parents. Alerk's mother, for example, has always told Alerk not to eat or drink anything when visiting Uyghurs you do not know.

There is 'an absurd amount of mistrust,' Alerk said, 'but that is almost inevitable… That is exactly what the Chinese state is aiming at.' The suspicion and mistrust among the Uyghur community has gotten worse after the "translator-spies" story (Vely, personal interview, April 19, 2021). This, still, keeps most of them silent. In addition to the "translator-spies" story, other stories circulate, too, that help generate an atmosphere of fear. Alerk told me one of these stories during the interview about a famous Uyghur musician somewhere in Canada who died way too

soon. ‘These are stories that give people fear – which is not necessarily rational, because people do die – but because there is a trauma, you always relate it to that,’ Alerk clarified. It has many Uyghurs, both young and old, firmly believing their own lives are also in danger in the Netherlands. He also told me about the story of Jamal Khashoggi who had been murdered at the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Istanbul. Alerk explained how this caused fear of visiting the Chinese embassy, as shortly after, the embassy increased their intimidation tactics as described in Chapter 5. This atmosphere of fear has kept most Uyghurs silent for so long.

What also contributed to Dutch Uyghurs committing self-censorship, is that the OM has reported that it was not going to launch a criminal investigation into the actions of the Chinese government against Uyghurs in the Netherlands, despite (about sixty) Uyghurs having taken the risk to report on it (24 reports). Again, this was for similar reasons of having to share the Uyghurs’ contact details, but also because criminal intervention was not feasible as ‘an extensive criminal investigation is necessary, which cannot be carried out without the cooperation of China’ (NOS, 2020). According to Alerk, this has hit the Uyghur community much harder than he thinks the Dutch state realized. ‘All the reports we had filed, which was already very difficult because we were very afraid to do it, were simply not being followed up on. So why would you do it ever again…?’ he complained. He was about to help another Uyghur file a report against the Chinese state, but that man cancelled after hearing the news. Consequently, people chose to self-censor again. In turn, the Dutch state does not have a clear picture of who is being harassed and in what way.

Yet, Alerk, and all the other Uyghurs who have been interviewed by me or others, have dared to break the cycle of self-censorship. Among those daring to speak up, the non-anonymous Uyghurs have experienced the highest level of intimidation, both by Chinese state-actors and by non-state actors. The embassy in the Netherlands, and relatives in the Netherlands – though most likely coerced – also dismissed Uyghurs telling their story in the media as “actors and actresses” who are only spreading lies (Botje, 2021b; URHP, 2020). This way “the chickens are being killed to scare the monkey”, so to say, keeping most Uyghurs reluctant to speak out, especially non-anonymously. However, with media increasingly covering the human rights violations of Uyghurs by China, and governments progressively acknowledging the genocide taking place in the Uyghur region, Uyghurs in the Netherlands feel gradually more free to speak out (Uyghur interviewee 2, personal interview, April 12, 2021). This is also noticeable as even testifying anonymously was not an option for Uyghurs in the past (Human rights interviewee, personal interview, April 13, 2021).

6.3. Concluding Comments

China has ominously exported its silencing techniques overseas, along with the securitization process, targeting Uyghurs who fear possible retaliation against either themselves or their relatives back home (Amnesty International, 2020; Mason, 2013: 45). In the Netherlands, the whole Uyghur community is being targeted. Uyghurs who speak out more so, but that is not only to silence them specifically, but all Uyghurs through employing the “kill the chicken to scare the monkey” tactic, creating an atmosphere of fear. This atmosphere has not only produced feelings of anxiety, but also alienation and suspicion – especially because Uyghurs are spying on their own community, too.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In conclusion, *how does securitization affect the Uyghur community targeted in the Netherlands today by China's policy of coercion-by-proxy that was reinforced by the shift in China's domestic security strategy from selective to collective repression, between 2017 and 2018?*

First, it was important to identify the key *speech act* that led to the *securitization* of Uyghurs outside of China's borders – where Uyghur culture can reside and survive. This key speech act portrayed them as being potential separatists, and therefore terrorists – i.e., an existential threat to the collective survival of the Chinese state. They are discursively depicted as trying to escape China's authority and direct control by going abroad, where they will be open to foreign influences, particularly Islamic extremism.

Heightened perceptions of domestic vulnerability to infiltration by a newly coalescing external threat explain the *2017-2018 domestic security strategy shift to collective repression*, especially the mass re-education (aimed at the "three evils": separatism, extremism, and terrorism) and targeting of transnational Uyghur networks – as they are perceived as 'vectors of potential terrorist infection' (Greitens et al., 2019: 44). These are the "*extraordinary measures*" of the securitization which have been enforced by the CCP.

The aim of the "extraordinary measures" targeting Uyghurs abroad is to "warn off" the affected securitization *audience*. Hence, whether they are politically active or not, Uyghurs in the Netherlands risk being targeted by China, either through monitoring, or through harassments and intimidations – i.e., through strategies of *(collective) transnational repression*. Transnational repression is, thus, one of the *effects* of China's securitization of Uyghurs. Being positioned as a threat, and accepted as such by the Han Chinese (i.e., Floyd's (2020) "other" audience: the one promised protection), these "extraordinary" repressive measures are being legitimized.

China's *coercion-by-proxy policy* is one of the most common and effective "extraordinary measures", being a strategy of transnational repression that targets the *Uyghur community in the Netherlands today*, with the aim of silencing them. It breeds anxiety (receiving threats against family members), suspicion/mistrust (being forced to spy on others – knowing others might spy on you, too), and division between Uyghurs (limiting their ability to form a united front against China). This coercion-by-proxy, supported by other forms of intimidation, and in combination with the "extraordinary measures" employed within China's borders, has therefore created an atmosphere of fear in which choosing to self-censor feels like the safest

option for Uyghurs. Hence, this thesis argues that self-censorship is the significant effect of China's securitization measures for the Uyghur community in the Netherlands, principally its policy of coercion-by-proxy.

7.1. Significance and Future Research Possibilities

The fact that intimidating people into committing self-censorship is a standard method of the CCP, shows the relevance of this thesis. Imposing self-censorship among dissidents has long been a basic feature of the Chinese system – rules and laws are even on purpose vague to establish this – but by "killing the chicken to scare the monkey(s)", everybody gets scared into silence. Imposing self-censorship is not a specific Chinese tactic, however. It is a common way for authoritarian regimes primarily to extend the influence of their security apparatus and to counter political opposition, also outside their borders (Lewis, 2015: 140; Michaelsen, 2020: 6).

Moreover, China's treatment of the Uyghurs is not exceptional either. As mentioned before, Uyghurs are not the only ethnic minority residing in the Uyghur region. So are other "non-Sinicized" minorities who are being transnationally repressed (e.g., Kazakhs and Kyrgyz). Additionally, a variety of sinologists, Uyghurs, journalists, academics, and politicians – among others – see similarities with Tibet (where Chen Quanguo ruled before his transfer to the Uyghur region). Here, the CCP has pursued a comparable securitization policy with practices of assimilation turning into preventive counterterrorism policies in the same way as in the Uyghur region (Blankesteijn, 2019; F. van der Putten, personal interview, April 16, 2021). 'Tibetan areas, however, do not seem to have experienced the dramatic expansion of detention and re-education that marked the 2017–18 policy turn in Xinjiang' (Greitens et al., 2019: 21).

Moreover, the CCP has maintained an interest in influencing and observing members of overseas Chinese communities in general since it took power (UHRP, 2017: 3). China has a deep fear of separatism and opposition to the government and deems fully controlling its population (also abroad) essential for collective state survival, especially in its fight against the "three evils".

The CCP's labelling of ethnic minorities as terrorists is a generative phenomenon, also beyond the Chinese context. As demonstrated, whenever individuals are labelled as terrorists by state actors and are treated as such, states can use the pretext of counterterrorism and/or national security as a cover-up in order to enforce rights-violating measures against them

(Margariti, 2018: 183).[35] "Terrorism", therefore, is a political label, and the lack of a common, comprehensive definition of "terrorism/terrorist" makes it a strategic securitization tool, too (Clarke, 2010; Duffy, 2018; Jawad, 2015: 105; Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010; Vultee, 2010). This thesis has illustrated how the CCP utilizes this terrorism label and a counterterrorism discourse, or "war on terror" rhetoric. The naming of Uyghurs as terrorists is one of the CCP's key political tools (i.e., "politics of naming") to create a fertile ground for their gross human rights violations of Uyghurs (Bhatia, 2005; Newlines Institute & Raoul Wallenberg, 2021; Smith Finley, 2019a & 2020). The cases in this thesis, but also those like America's politics of naming in Iraq or Afghanistan[36] and Turkey's "terrorism" discourse on the PKK, emphasize the dangers in terms of (unjust) gross human rights violations resulting from the application of the ambiguous and expansive definition of terrorism/terrorist (Barrinha, 2011; Clarke, 2010).

Furthermore, the thesis adds to the securitization literature, in which the transnational approach of securitization policies is quite new. Looking at how transnational securitization is practised and achieved may be a useful lens for future studies. As states are increasingly widening their border spaces, projecting surveillance far from the border itself – driven largely by security initiatives, a likely growing trend is that illiberal authoritarian practices "at home" influence diaspora politics "abroad", threatening liberal regimes (e.g., in the Netherland as this thesis has shown) (Longo, 2017).

With the growing global interconnectedness today, it may, thus, be necessary to think more in terms of "authoritarian practices" that transcend state borders, like transnational repression (via coercion-by-proxy). There is still a gap in research which entails a failure to recognize extraterritorial uses of state power, especially by authoritarian regimes (Armstrong,

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[35] The issue of violating human rights of people being labelled "terrorists" is being widely debated upon both politically and academically. Some restrictions and derogations of human rights may be permitted when fighting terrorism, with the main grounds usually being national security, public safety or order, health, morals, and the human rights and freedom of others (Jawad, 2015: 108). Yet, various abuses have been reported in the recent history regarding the violations of human rights during the conduct of counterterrorism operations – violations that are often as serious in nature as the act of terrorism themselves, resulting in a situation where terrorism is being fought with state terror (ibid.: 104). This is happening in China, under the guise of securitization. The full discussion on human rights violations and the war on terror is beyond the scope of this thesis. For more information about this, see for example: **Duffy**, H. (2018). "Foreign Terrorist Fighters": A Human Rights Approach? *Security and Human Rights*, *29*(1-4), 120-172; **Hoffman**, P. (2004). Human rights and terrorism. *Human Rights Quarterly*, *26*, 932; **Jawad**, S. (2015). Terrorism and Human Rights. *Sociology and Anthropology, 3*(2), 104-11; **de Klerk**, P. (2020). Respecting Human Rights While Countering Terrorism: An Impression. *Security and Human Rights*, *30*(1-4), 39-55; **Margariti**, S. (2018). Defining International Terrorism to Protect Human Rights in the Context of Counterterrorism. *Security and Human Rights*, *29*(1-4), 173-198.

[36] China capitalises on this American terminology to fight Al-Qaeda and ISIS, so that China can say it is doing nothing different from the Americans.

2020: 11). It falls short of explaining the continuity of autocratic rule in the area of globalization, where the spatial politics of authoritarian regimes frequently spill over into transnational space (Dalmasso et al., 2018; Lewis, 2015; Hirt & Saleh Mohammad, 2018; Tsourapas, 2020). The use of coercion-by-proxy in specific 'presents a more complicated blurring of how authoritarian practices "at home" relate to diaspora politics "abroad"' (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020: 13).

This thesis is generative for studying this transnational authoritarianism and the effects on the targeted people of transnational authoritarian practices. Transnational authoritarianism, similar to the CCP's, can be witnessed in multiple countries, ranging from Turkey (Adamson, 2019 & 2020) to Russia (Kosmarskaya, 2011) and Syria (Moss, 2018) to Egypt (Tsourapas, 2015). Moreover, it ranges from 'the adoption of spyware software to monitor digital activism across Latin America to enforced disappearances of East Asian émigrés' (Tsourapas, 2020: 3). Therefore, perhaps future studies can conduct comparative research on transnational authoritarianism in order to get a better understanding of the causal processes involved in the creation of transnational authoritarian strategies and of its effects on the targeted people. This could be fruitful for policymaking, too.

As technological advancements make communication between exiles and remaining family members easier, it also means authoritarian states can quickly identify these ties (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020: 10). With an increasing ability of states to engage in long-distance surveillance and harassment, greater attention to the use of coercion-by-proxy as a transnational repression strategy is needed (ibid.: 12). Transnational digital repression in specific also requires further attention with the recent proliferation and improvement of communications and transportation technology and the internet having become a key vehicle for international communications (Al-Jizawi et al., 2020; Armstrong, 2020; Dalmasso et al., 2018; Glasius, 2018; Tsourapas, 2020).

Despite overcoming the "territorial" limitation of the securitization theory, this thesis has also filled in two other significant identified gaps of the theory – relating to the "Western/democratic focus" of the theory, by studying China's securitization process, and to the "audience", by focussing on the affected audience and their agency. For future securitization studies, there is need to factor into consideration the agency of agents and all audiences (both intended and unintended) that are involved, as by understanding who they are, we can accurately capture the role of these audiences and get a better sense of how and why securitization is occurring (Côté, 2016; Hafidh & Mehmood, 2019: 680).

This thesis is not only academically valuable, it is also valuable for the Uyghurs and other targeted ethnic minorities. Self-censorship has a negative impact on the outside world's knowledge of the region, undermining efforts to improve the human rights situation there (UHRP, 2017). Fortunately, because the transnational repression of Uyghurs progressively receives attention in media and the international community, Uyghurs today increasingly dare to speak up. Simply by talking about these matters openly, 'the suffocating cycle of silence, to which far too many of us have been accomplices at the nexus of censorship and self-censorship, will ever so slowly be broken' (Carrico, 2018). This thesis, as an attempt to give voice to those who are unable to speak, also contributes to this.

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