

# Can We Ever Fully Secure "My" Spaces?

Written by Lucia Lucchini

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## Can We Ever Fully Secure "My" Spaces?

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LUCIA LUCCHINI, SEP 30 2017

The quest for security has been at the centre of modern debates animating the discipline. With the advent of critical perspectives, new challenges have raised questions on the role and effectiveness of security on different sectors. The question under scrutiny presents the challenges of security in its spatial turn; meaning the recognition of the spaces and their importance within which life is uttered. However, defining the key principles that constitute this question seems to equate to answering the question in itself.

My central argument pertains as follows: we can never fully secure "my" spaces because, even if we are able to establish the beginning and the end of a space, thus reducing it into a fixed place, the role that imagination plays in the production of knowledge, hence the development of new regimes of truth, does not allow us to fully ever secure anything.

Nevertheless, seeking a clearer understanding of this essay's attempt, a set of sub-questions are deemed necessary. What does securing something and/or someone mean? How far does the "my" go? In what ways does the "ever" represent the impossibility of achieving security? These sub-questions will constitute the main structure of this paper, thus representing the three main sections among which the argument will develop.

The first section will be interested in untangling what it means to secure something, in this case, "my" spaces. In order to do so, the essay will firstly present a caveat on the jargon of exceptionalism (Huysmans, 2008) in order to move the discussion into the politics of protection. By examining what protection, interpreted as a synonym of security, entails, the essay will be able to enter the discussion of what constitutes the "my" of spaces. After much consideration, I would argue that the notion of situated agency is emblematic in delineating the "my" of spaces. Although much reflection was invested into the role that the body has in constituting the physical claim of an individual to a space; a more in-depth analysis of what shapes normatively the body is deemed essential for the sake of the argument. Here, to facilitate the discussion, the notion of situated agency will be also reinforced and complemented by part of the body of literature on autoethnography. The third section will assemble the elements examined in the previous two sections in order to tackle the temporality section of the question. Here, the "ever" will be analysed through the perspective of the politics of catastrophe (Aradau, van Munster, 2011), and the role that imagination plays in framing quests for security far more customised (Balzacq, 2011) and uncertain on the long run.

Ultimately, by looking at imagination as emblematic for the establishment of panic politics and the rhetoric of (in)security, the essay will be able to show how the "ever" is necessarily approached as a "never".

### **Securing as protecting? Inserting the everyday**

This section is interested in better comprehending what securing something and/or someone means. Appreciating that notions are relational, seeking a clearer understanding of this essay's attempt, it is important to note that speaking about security necessarily entails a discussion on securitisation. This claim is informed by the understanding that to secure something and/or someone automatically comprises the securitisation of some other.

Securitisation is a conceptual and analytical framework firstly introduced by the Copenhagen School, represented by Buzan, Waever and de Wilde in 1998. When taking the first generation and traditional concept of securitisation, the

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notion can be said to refer to security as being more than just the labelling of something fixed, but rather, speaking security is a performative speech act. This means that the speech act concerning security utters something in real life. Consequently, security retains an illocutionary force that is able to frame something as an existential threat to a group and/or a community that needs to be secured. It is important to note that to be successful, the securitising move requires the acceptance of the new framing by the audience. (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, 1998:25)

Furthermore, the call for existential threats moves the discussion on a realm of action distant from the ordinary realm of the political. More precisely, "security is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics" (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, 1998:22). Consequently, two bodies of literature become inherent to the discussion on securitisation and thus on security: Schmittian exceptionalism and Agambean exceptionalism. These two forms of exceptionalism, despite being extremely different from each other in their specificities, can be briefly defined as "a conflict between the role of law and executive, arbitrary government and/or the direct exercise of governing power over biologically, in contrast to politically defined life" (Huysmans, 2008:165).

Nevertheless, the essay will now introduce a caveat that is deemed necessary in order to better understand the argument here proposed. Although the paper has acknowledged the intrinsic connection between securing and securitising, for argument's sake, only the former will be analysed. This decision was informed by the writing of Huysmans who has noted that "structuring politics around exceptionalist readings of political power tends to politically neutralise the societal" (Huysmans, 2008:166). Here, however, the question presents the specification of the "my", which is interpreted to be intrinsically dependent on the realm of the political. Therefore, the "my" is here read and understood to be settled in the everyday political of individuals, which is automatically deemed to refuse the exceptional. This can be further understood by assuming the ways in which the jargon of exceptionalism seems to eliminate "one of the constituting categories of modern politics, hence producing an impoverished and ultimately illusionary understanding" (Huysmans, 2008:166).

Having acknowledged the relationship between securing and securitising, having introduced the concept of securitisation and having established the caveat on the reasons why the jargon of exceptionalism seems inappropriate to the specifics of this essay; the paper will now proceed by focusing on the concept of security.

Seeking a clearer understanding of this essay's argument, it is important to note that the predicative of security – to secure- has an active connotation that is here interpreted to also mean *to protect* and/or *to safeguard*. In particular, protection "expresses the idea of a route to not being harmed" (Bigo, 2006:90), hence representing the process of achieving security. It is important to understand the disambiguation between the two insofar as the essay attempts to re-frame part of the body of literature concerned with the politics of protection. Henceforth, for the specifics of the question under scrutiny, protection is understood as a valid synonym of security. Ultimately, the two will be used interchangeably hereafter.

First and foremost, it is necessary to understand that the logic of security strictly relies upon the identification and establishment of vulnerabilities insofar as these represent the hub of all threats. Vulnerabilities, in turn, can be essentialised and pinned down to one specific element: the body. This can be the physical body of the individual in its singularity, as well as the "political body of the nation when sovereignty is transferred from the individual to a collective body" (Bigo, 2006:90). The specific way in which the body is constructed and then safeguarded can be defined as the politics of protection.

Security can be interpreted under a multitude of ways and approaches. However, for argument's sake, security is here taken from a thick signifier approach. This means that security is not an empty and neutral concept, but rather, it has a history of meanings that intrinsically define the socio-political context in which it is uttered. Furthermore, security retains in itself an active performative force that is capable of re-ordering the societal according to its own logic, and I would argue, its own politics. Indeed, actions motivated by security are considered extremely political. More precisely, if we were to interpret security as "a strategy of survival, which consists of trying to postpone death by countering objectified threats" (Huysmans, 1998:242), then security becomes one of the driving forces behind the grouping of people into political communities. In other words, security, under a thick signifier approach, "positions

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people in their relations to themselves, to nature and to other human beings within a particular discursive, symbolic order" (Huysmans, 1998:232). This specific approach is able to enhance the ways in which security, and thus protection, are notions naturally shaping and framing the spaces in which they are performed, hence, the set of subjects it affects.

Within a political community centred on security, it seems natural to assume that the logic of protection rotates around a trilogy of actors: the enemy (threat), the protector and the protected (Bigo, 2006:93). The political aspect of security is exactly the ability to construct the body of an individual into these three peculiar subjectivities.

The role of the protector is traditionally embodied by the state, which naturally retains the sovereign power. This understanding can be traced back to the whole body of literature regarding social contract theories and the creation of state authority. More pragmatically, individuals live and operate within a state system that retains the power to denominate itself as the ultimate guarantor of security as well as the supreme entity that "claimed ownership of the means of protection [*conferring to itself*] an authority that derives from the term security" (Jabri, 2006:146). Therefore, the uttering of security as re-ordering principle and constructor of new subjectivities is performed by the state.

The sovereign state, however, ought not to be conceptualised in an abstract and distant way, as some sort of underlying entity swaying upon us, but rather as a political body that has the authority to enact an array of practices that "cumulatively constitute a social/judicial/political matrix of regulation" (Jabri, 2006:141). This set of practices, therefore, is institutionalised and works within "matrixes of power" that shape intersubjective relationships between authorising powers and subjects. (Butler in Jabri, 2006:139) However, within the logic of protection, these are re-iterated according to the pronouncements of threats and dangers, which are disguised in the ordinary life of ordinary processes (Huysmans, 2006:14). For this reason, these practices require a subsequent process of internalisation and normalisation so as to render them banal, pre-given, and at times both unchallengeable and inconsequential. These practices can be sub-divided according to which subjectivity they aim at creating and thus targeting.

On the one hand, those who are deemed dangerous and a threat to a valid referent object to be protected become the target to specialised devices that intrude into their lives through constant monitoring. Practices engaging in monitoring and surveillance are used as deterrents. Under this spectrum, "protection continues of course to involve help, a duty of assistance, aid, support, care in the medico-religious connotation [...] but [...] it is turned towards groups to monitor" (Bigo, 2006:98).

This set of practices has arguably been heightened by the contemporary shift from "threats of identifiable enemies" (Huysmans, 2006:13), traditionally external to the territory, to internal risk management. The alleged blurring of the lines between a clear-cut out "us" and "them" has virtually created a persistent re-iteration of threat that combines the domestic to the global into an incessant search. (Jabri, 2006:136) This practice allows for the creation of subjectivities connected to notions of threat and danger. Their mundane lives are under strict monitoring because intrinsically constructed as potential evidence of a crime; their movements, therefore, become key signifiers under the pronouncement of the threat they represent. Ultimately, this process is justified under the understanding that "security as the absence of movement would result in death via stasis" (Campbell, 1992:12).

On the other hand, there are those subjectivities that are constructed as worth recipients of protection. They are deemed to have a claim to security and as such, they are positioned to a higher moral standpoint upon which temporal untouchability is taken for granted. The claim for protection by the protected becomes the substance of a tacit pact to which individuals subordinate their lives; "once the agents enter relationships defined by protection, their capacity to determine the modalities of that protection is limited" (Jabri, 2006:139). Their security, therefore, still works within the framework provided by the logic of protection and the enactment of institutionalised practices that are interpreted as necessary. More precisely, we see at play a "disciplinary technology" (Bigo, 2006:92) that tends to alienate the protected by creating strict avenues in which freedom can be performed. (Bigo, 2006:92) Subjects are then governed according to what the sovereign deems best in order to achieve protection. Therefore, these subjectivities operate in the everyday upon the understanding that through governance and domination their lives will be protected.

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However, it would be wrong to automatically assume that the entirety of their political agency is stripped off under the logic of protection. The complexity in which individuals' identities are established and constructed socially should not be undermined. Rather, the politics of protection tells the story of the creation of a subjectivity whose political agency is arguably diminished because of the predominant narrative claiming that ordering and policing lead to security. It is important to notice that, "the subject protected retains a capacity to question, to dissent, within the discourse of protection" (Jabri, 2006:148). Compliance to these practices, however, is here understood as a far subtler and long term process of indoctrination that tangles together subjects' lives in their banal. Ultimately, therefore, disciplinary practices to secure individuals can also be re-phrased as slow, persistent "pastoralisation of the individual, which follows the biopolitical of its conduct" (Bigo, 2006:98).

Ultimately, this section has managed to briefly introduce the notion of security in its motion. It was this section's attempt to show how, to secure something and/or someone is a complex notion that comprises an array of complex practices that consequently construct complex subjectivities. The next section will attempt to bring this analysis further by looking at the ways in which these subjectivities influence or are influenced by the spaces in which they are performed.

## The "my" of spaces

This section is interested in examining how far the "my" go and, subsequently, what it is here understood to mean to have a personal claim to a space. This section is considered pivotal when attempting to answer the question insofar as "my" spaces are here interpreted to represent the object of security.

Surely, the notion of private property could be the answer to our search for a clear definition of what constitutes the "my". However, this essay acknowledges this route of thinking, yet attempts to explore another. Indeed, in order to answer this question, I argue we need to put aside the claim of private property and we need to take into consideration spaces that are not private and that, as such, define the realm of free motion and interaction, for instance streets, museums, airports, as well as virtual spaces, such as cyberspace. This decision is informed by the understanding that private property is a notion that inherently marginalises individuals. Although segmentation and categorisation is proper of the ordering process that the essay has briefly mentioned above, private property is interpreted here as the entrance to a discussion on the benefits (and demises) of a capitalist subjectivation of the societal. Consequently, the paper attempts to find another route: more precisely, a biopolitical route.

It is my personal understanding that the closest physical entity that is able to fully represent the "my" is the body. As previously mentioned, the body constitutes the hub of all threats exactly because of its centrality in the physical world. A body is here; it is present, it occupies space, it interacts with space. So, the real question becomes one of rights: does physical occupation make something your own? I argue that yes, to some extent, it does. In order to substantiate this claim, the notion of situated agency is introduced and examined.

The concept of situated agency can be briefly defined as the understanding that "agency is not externally given" (Huysmans, 2006:10) but rather, it is intrinsically embedded in the set of societal practices informed by the matrixes of power the essay has identified above. This means that an individual's identity is subsumed into a constellation of elements and shades that collaborate in creating one's individuality. This, in turn, is shaped and framed according to the historical socio-political context in which it is enacted. In other words, once nature is given, nurture relies itself in a multifaceted way that relevantly constitutes individuals' identities, agencies and specific subjectivities. According to the specifics, an array of different practices and intersubjective relations engage together in order to enfranchise individuals into a political context. Ultimately, therefore, the concept of situated agency highlights the understanding that individuals' lives are deeply interlinked with the surrounding spaces and the world more broadly. (Bender, 2002)

In addition to that, I would argue that the notion of situated agency allows the discipline to also make arguments in favour of individuals and their relevance in being, and thus framing, the political. Indeed, by identifying, combining and examining forms and processes, the notion of situated agency allows the discussion to enter into an in-depth analysis of more than just the physical body, but of the deep-rooted nexus between subjectivities, practices and social relations. Finally, all of these are contained, enabled, influenced and active influencers of the spaces in which

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they are enacted.

From this perspective, therefore, space can be conceptualised as socially constructed insofar as its significance is relational to and a function of power as well as a complex "intersection of mobile elements" (de Certeau, 1988:117). It does not simply represent the frame within which life is enacted, but rather it "is shaped by social interactions and at the same time it shapes these interactions" (Bjorkdahl and Buckley-Zistel, 2016:3). Consequently, analysing it from a broader perspective, "space and the spatial are also implicated in the production of history – and thus, potentially in politics" (Massey, 1993: 146) exactly because "space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation" (Massey, 1993: 155-6). For this reason, space is an "enabling site" (Puggioni, 2006:73) because it is not simply a fixed geographical framework, but rather an "important dimension of sociality" (Jiménez in Puggioni, 2006:75). Hence, it can be seen and examined in multiple ways in which differently positioned agents (Bjorkdahl and Buckley-Zistel, 2016:5) inform and are informed by political and institutionalised practices. (Munn in Puggioni, 2006:75)

Mundane practices of the everyday can show how institutionalised practices of power symbolically embedded in spaces inform individuals' subjectivities and vice versa. For instance, de Certeau (2014) conceptualises walking as a political practice and a form of speech act. In its banality, the body walks in different ways according to different spaces. For example, going back to the previous section, the constructed subjectivity of the protected walks in streets of a city in an orderly manner, e.g. walking on a side walk, respecting traffic lights, etc. Arguably, however, she also walks in a calmed-paced manner exactly because her subjectivity reflects the being protected and simultaneously the seeker of protection. Those subjectivities that are deemed a threat, on the other hand, may walk "suspiciously" and in a frightened manner.

Spaces too might be constructed as "safe" or "dangerous" and often the subjectivity of spaces reflect the demography of those who live in it. Consequently, in cities, one can find the "good" and "safe" neighbourhood inhabited by those who are constructed to be worth recipients of protection, thus enabling institutionalised practices to maintain such standard. On the other, one can find "bad" and "dangerous" neighbourhoods inhabited by respective constructed subjectivities. (Massaro and Mullaney, 2011). Ultimately, the urbanization of a city becomes a highly entrenched political mundane practice that enacts a specific matrix of power. This, in turn, informs and shapes other specific subjectivities.

Having acknowledged the nexus between individuals and spaces, therefore, I argue that the "my" is partially inherent of all the spaces. Lacan wrote that:

what is realised in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming (Lacan, 1977:64).

I take this quote to mean that, throughout time, there is a continuous mirroring process of the individual in the space and the space in the individual, which ultimately manifests the intimate relationship between the two. Consequently, it is exactly this process that allows the recognition of a space as mine. In her writing, Lowenheim asks us to question the "assortment of power technologies, mentalities and institutions" (Lowenheim, 2010:1028) in order to challenge the relationship that we, as individuals, have with the spaces we interact with. I argue, therefore, that in what is identified as a process of autoethnography, we are asked to "deconstruct the process through which one become a governable person" (Lowenheim, 2010:1028) and thus achieving a better understanding "on the relationship of the self to the world that is investigated" (Dauphinee, 2010:806). Ultimately, in this section the essay has managed to bring together a set of different bodies of literature in order to challenge the banality of space and uncover its social aspect. Finally, this was achieved by showing how individuals inherently belong to spaces and this consequently entails the right to make a personal claim on them.

## The temporality question: analysing the (n)ever

This section is interested in investigating the temporality section of the question. This section is considered extremely

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important insofar as it will use the elements analysed in the two previous sections and it will combine them in order to finally answer the question.

Claudia Aradau and van Munster's work on the politics of catastrophe (2011) is considered emblematic in order to show how "my" spaces cannot ever fully be secured. Although they do not particularly tackle the specifics of the question, the paper has attempted to reframe her discussion on the notion of catastrophe and the role of imagination into the specifics of the question under scrutiny.

The politics of catastrophe is one centred around the understanding that "the potential catastrophic event [...] cannot be prevented, neutralised or contained but [...it...] needs to be inhabited" (Aradau, van Munster, 2011:2). The unexpected, therefore, is embedded into the notion of catastrophe and it is constructed in a way that disrupts any sense of temporality. As Beck noted:

the concept of risk reverses the relationship of past, present and future. The past loses its power to determine the present. Its place as the cause of present-day experience and action is taken by the future, that is to say, something, non-existent, constructed and fictitious (Beck, 2005:214).

This, in turn, is arguably enacted through the use of imagination. Imagination refers to the creative force that enables individuals to produce images, ideas as well as enacted scenarios which may or may not be directly connected to an aesthetic sensorial experience. Imagination, because of its prolific force, is not "just indispensable to knowledge production, but [it is] problematized as modes of knowledge sui generis" (Aradau, van Munster, 2011:8). When it is combined to the notion of unexpected futures, imagination is used to create what Aradau and van Munster translate as the politics of catastrophe: "Through imagination, a range of apparently disparate details, perceptions, ideas and assumptions can be brought together in a seemingly coherent whole" (2011:70). This, in turn, can be seen as an active performative set of practices that subsumes the future- with its potentiality- into institutionalised practices, some of which connected to the politics of protection. In other words, catastrophe becomes "an anticipatory regime of organising the social, with its attendant forms of power, knowledge and subjectivation" (Aradau, van Munster, 2011:9).

Therefore, working within the framework of the possible and the probable (Clarke, 2005), imagination nurtures the politics of catastrophe by producing and tackling the known unknowns. In particular, when imagination is incorporated in security knowledge production, then the politics of catastrophe through its imagination become "a governmental technology of futurity which could project undesirable expected events and help find ways to tame them" (Aradau, van Munster, 2011:76). I argue that imagination and the production of catastrophic thinking have become routinized and normalised in the matrixes of power that inform the institutionalised practices of the politics of protection.

However, I also argue that in the specificity of the production and maintenance of the politics of catastrophe combined with the ways in which we tackle security issues, one can never fully achieve security. This is because catastrophe, through imagination, always already entails the possibilistic nature of the future and it forces it to the subjectivities of the present. This, in turn, informs and enacts the trilogy of the politics of protection that the essay has previously analysed and thus actively perform and shape the present according to a rhetoric of future (in)security. In other words, the politics of catastrophe assists the production of security knowledge and new regimes of truth and in this way, it becomes a self-referential and self-reproducing mechanism on the present.

In addition to that, I sustain the claim that "even in a state of considerable peace there will still be plenty about which to complain and worry: the catastrophe quota will always remain comfortably full" (Mueller, 1994: 372). This means that the quest for security through the enactment of potentially catastrophic scenarios inherently means that no equilibrium will ever be reached because something and/or someone will never fully be secured. Otherwise, the politics of catastrophe, as well as the faculty of imagination from a security perspective, would be made redundant. This, however, is here considered impossible exactly because of the presence of frenetic thinking orientated towards the avoidance of potential catastrophe and the maximising of present-security. Consequently, the role and the importance that the essay recognises of imagination in being a prolific instrument in the production of new regimes of

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truth should not go unnoticed.

Nevertheless, both of the reasons briefly analysed above lead to the understanding that the “ever” presented in the question indubitably needs to be understood as a “never”. Looking back at the question, therefore, the essay was able to tackle the “my” of spaces as well as understanding what it meant to secure them. However, the precise practices that inform the logic and the politics of protection of these spaces are customised for a strict present, without necessarily being able to provide any insurance for the future.

In other words, imagining the future as a catastrophe might be able to prepare spaces to sustain the speculated threat, yet it also leads to the creation of a rhetoric of (in)security. This (in)security, in turn, informs the matrixes of power at play in the array of practices that constitute the logic of protection and thus the framing of the subjectivities that the politics of protection produce.

However, it is here understood to also mean that the securing process relies on the volatility of an invented future, exactly because only possible to be imagined. Consequently, this allows the creation of subjectivities that can alter through time, or refuse the position they have been given and thus initiate dissent. Ultimately, imagination foments the politics of catastrophe that is here connected to security knowledge. This, in turn, operates within a liquid framework able to produce customised policies of protection that are merely sustainable in the short run. Consequently, under this perspective, we can never fully secure “my” spaces.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the essay has attempted to investigate whether we can ever fully secure “my” spaces. The paper argued that “my” spaces can never fully be secured given the role that imagination plays in the production of security knowledge.

In order to do so, the essay sought to organise the structure of the essay by challenging the key principles that were interpreted to be constituting the nature of the question. Therefore, the paper proceeded by briefly presenting the notion of security and the ways in which the logic and politics of protection operate. Here, the production of security subjectivities was necessary in order to move the discussion into the notion of situated agency. This, in turn, allowed us to define the “my” of spaces. Finally, the essay presented the notion of the politics of catastrophe and the role that imagination plays in informing security knowledge. This was emblematic insofar as it showed how the “ever” can merely be approached as a “never”.

Ultimately, the introductory quote from Rancière was read under the light of the various potentialities that mundane spaces contain. These, in turn, have been challenged in the ways they are constructed and operate in a security framework.

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