# Securitisation of space and time

## Sari Nauman

*Abstract:* This article introduces the concept of securitisation for early modern studies. It identifies security studies' implicit state-centric approach as one of the main culprits for early modern scholars' hesitance to use the concept and argues that, for historians, there is a twofold problem with placing the state at the centre of research. The problem pertains to how scholars have dealt with the interactions between time and space when approaching the state. First, the definition of state is space- and time-centred; it is built to accommodate the system of 19th- and 20th-century Europe, with the idea of the sovereign state at its centre. To fit the early modern period, we need to acknowledge the role of other entities and varieties in securitisation processes. Second, the concept of the state needs to be problematised by acknowledging the changing nature of its space—that is, by temporalising its spatiality.

The second part of the text focuses on two interconnected areas especially prone to securitisation, where historians have much to offer those studying securitisation processes: migration and border making. Questions of how to control the future and how to secure it are most often translated into a spatial problem: as long as the border is secure, change will not enter. By focusing on local responses to perceived security threats and studying the effects that measures taken had on local communities, historians can seek not only to understand the underlying assumptions made about the future by our objects of investigation, but also to gain considerable insight into de-securitisation processes.

*Keywords:* securitisation, migration, border making, temporality, spatiality, early modern history, threats, state formation, sovereignty, security studies, de-securitisation.

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# Introduction

Whenever we feel threatened, we react. We try to deal with the threat by either mini-
mising it, eliminating it or escaping from it. Without going into detail of the physiolog-
ical responses—the activation of the autonomic system, the release of hormones—the
fight-or-flight mechanism helps us shorten the deliberation process, saving us precious
seconds and allowing us to react instantly.[1] Neither response, that is neither fight nor
flight, rests on an understanding of what it is that is actually threatening us—they
are, rather, emotional and physiological responses. We identify something as a threat
without questioning that classification and we react immediately. Only at a later stage
does the information that we gathered while reacting come to inform our rational
thinking.[2]

A basic feature of threats is that they, by being articulated, demand a response. To
the Copenhagen school of securitisation, this is a key insight: that to present some-
thing as a threat—or to present something as threatening—is to provoke a response.
Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and others developed the concept of securitisation in the
1980s, working within the field of International Relations (IR). They started from the
concept of security as a basic human need, and applied this concept to the level of
states—states strive for security. But what constitutes security, and what constitutes
a threat? The idea of securitisation is that when something is called a threat, or is
presented as threatening, something happens to how we treat that object (or, for that
matter, subject). The object is *securitised*, i.e. made into a security issue that prompts
certain responses. Phrasing a phenomenon as a security issue forces decision-makers
to allocate resources to deal with the perceived threat, and the question may dom-
inate public and political debate and set the agenda for authorities and opposition
groups alike.[3]

Since its formulation, the concept of securitisation have not only proven its place
in security studies, but have also influenced several other research fields. Historians,
especially of early modernity, have, however, hesitated to take inspiration, and per-
haps with good cause. When historical researchers do engage with securitisation, it is
primarily in studies of the territorial states of the 19th and 20th centuries, for which
the concept have proven well adapted. Premodern societies, during which states was
still in formation, seem to present more of a challenge.[4]

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[1] For those interested, the classic studies include Cannon (1915); Selye (1976); Chrousos & Gold (1992).

[2] See, for example, Uvnäs-Moberg *et al.* (2005); Damasio (1994: *passim*).

[3] Buzan *et al.* (1998); Williams (2003).

[4] Investigations into early forms of security have nevertheless shown great promise, see, for example,
Cressy (2011); Kampmann *et al.* (2018). See also the excellent work done at the research centre 'Dynamics
of Security: Types of Securitization from a Historical Perspective', at the universities of Marburg and
Gieβen.

A few excellent suggestions of how to use security studies and securitisation in research on premodern societies have been made by, mostly, German scholars. Eckhart Conze, for example, encourages historians to historise security itself, to see how the notion has changed over time.[5] Others have shown how prominent specialists of risk and security tend to make broad and generalising remarks about the historical evolution of central concepts, and argue that historians need to investigate such claims empirically.[6] In line with these scholars, I argue that state-centrism is a key shortcoming of the concept of securitisation which complicates its usage for historians. Premodern historians, with our dealings with pre-, early or non-state societies, are particularly apt to provide such a critique, and to show another way forward. With examples taken from my empirical studies of border making and migration, I demonstrate the spatial but also temporal preconceptions at the base of securitisation processes. Instead of presupposing the state, studies of historical securitisation processes can show how these preconceptions were instrumental in creating borders and political entities.

Before going into the historical case for securitisation research, I will briefly address the concept itself. Securitisation is a speech act, as formulated by J.L. Austin. Once spoken, such a statement changes the world in significant aspects: it changes how we think about it, how we feel about it and what we do about it. Once spoken, a speech act cannot be taken back, since the change happens immediately at the moment it is spoken aloud. Moreover, the speech act does not only change the object and how we look at it, it also changes us—the ones listening to, talking about or in other ways performing the speech act (which is not necessarily verbal).[7]

In defining a threat—in defining something as a security issue—implicitly or explicitly, we also define one additional thing: a referent object, i.e. that which is being threatened. In public discourse, this referent object is often recognised as a certain group of people who are supposedly in need of protection, but are unable to secure it for themselves: most often, women, children or 'us'. The act presupposes an identification with the object under threat, either because we constitute it or because it is something that we are responsible for, something that should be under our protection. The securitisation of an issue thus distinguishes something as threatening, who or what is being threatened, prompts a response to that threat, and identifies those who should be the ones to respond.

It is easy to see how the opportunity to securitise an issue may be abused by those in power, or those who strive to be. However, in itself, securitisation is not a normative concept—securitising an issue is not necessarily an act of good or bad. It is a way to cope with the fact that our future is uncertain and that we want to prevent future

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[5] Conze (2012).

[6] See, for example, Daase (2012); Zwierlein (2012).

[7] Austin (1976: *passim*).

harm. By articulating that which we perceive to be threatening, we compel others to become aware of this threat and try to create the conditions necessary to deal with it. Nevertheless, securitisation often has negative effects, and I will briefly mention four of these. First, when an issue is securitised, other issues tend to take a step back. Resources are allocated to deal with the perceived threat, whereas other matters are deprived of those same resources. It is therefore imperative that those who are responsible for allocating resources consider not only how best to deal with the perceived threat, but also what consequences the allocation of resources to deal with that threat may have for other vital concerns.

Second, securitisation is sticky. If one issue is securitised, other issues that are associated with the securitised issue may also become securitised. These other issues are not necessarily threatful, they are not even necessarily connected to the threat in any tangible way—the stickiness of securitisation means that it can adhere to related issues, as well as to human subjects who are simply walking by or who look like someone who was once in the vicinity of a securitised subject.[8]

This leads us to the third and fourth risks of securitisation: discrimination and auto-immunisation. Securitisation discriminates; some subjects—be they persons, groups, peoples or institutions—are more frequently securitised than are others. This means that they are subject to a disproportionate number of security measures because they are associated with perceived threats. Discriminatory measures easily lead to auto-immunisation, meaning that the security measures taken may end up attacking the very community or the fragile order that they were supposed to protect. Such is the case when border crossings are turned into military zones, and when refugees arriving by boats are prevented from disembarking in an effort to save lives by stopping dangerous boat journeys. Another example of both discrimination and auto-immunisation can be found in the problem that the Black Lives Matter movement has drawn global attention to: with the explicit aim of providing security, police forces around the world have targeted black citizens, thereby undermining the very security that they were meant to provide.[9]

Not every attempt at securitising an issue is successful. As with all speech acts, securitisation may be infelicitous if spoken by the wrong individual, at the wrong moment, to the wrong crowd, or if the wrong intentions of the speaker are plain for others to see. The success of securitising an issue is dependent on the authority of the individual identifying the threat, the context of the issue in question, on the timing with which the issue is presented, on the plausibility of the claim of danger, and on the willingness of the audience to accept the issue as a threatening one.[10] Altogether,

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[8] On sticky concepts, see Ahmed (2012: 89–92).

[9] On auto-immunisation, see Derrida (2005: 34–5). For examples on discrimination and auto-immunisation, see Mavelli (2017); Burke (2013).

[10] On felicitous and infelicitous speech acts, see Austin (1976: 14–15, 119–20, 138–9); Derrida (1988: 15).

this implies that in order to securitise an issue successfully, a person needs to be in a position to allocate resources and to effect changes in policy, behaviour or the like. It needs to be someone to whom others listen, and who has some degree of influence. The state, and key figures within the state, are generally the ones to manage this, although other actors may of course also participate, such as the media, institutions, organisations and members of the economic or cultural elite.[11]

## Migration, borders and the hovering state

Migration is one of the most frequently securitised issues in modern politics. It is one of those areas that Jef Huysmans has termed the 'domains of insecurity'—areas particularly prone to generate insecurity, and in which actors often address that insecurity and define it as a problem. Considerable resources are channelled into the securitisation process, trying to make migration 'secure'—or rather, to make 'us' feel secure about migration—thus turning it into a highly politicised issue.[12] From a historical perspective, the issue of migration stands out as well. A primary concern for most states and societies across time and space, as well as for families and individuals, has been that of creating borders to separate relatives from strangers, friends from foes, citizens or subjects from foreigners.[13] Border making gives us an illusion that it is possible to demarcate clearly the inside from the outside, but the separation between inside and outside depends on your perspective. Although political border patrols may follow a drawn line on the landscape, animals and plants seldom recognise these boundaries, and humans may cross it without detection as well. Countless exceptions and crossings are made every day and everywhere.

Even though borders are permeable, or perhaps because of it, threats are typically imagined as coming from the outside, be it from outside of the family (think of the evil step-mother in fairy-tales), or outside of the state (rogue states, or terrorists). Whereas what is inside is generally thought of as benign—or, if not directly benign, then at any rate part of 'us' and therefore known, identified and recognised—what is outside is defined as unknown, uncertain and, potentially at least, dangerous. In securitisation processes, certain outsiders are identified as especially dangerous, inducing security measures, whereas others are defined as more friendly.[14] The language invoking these aspects is often gendered and racialised, the state being described as a masculine force both impenetrable and protective, whereas migrants are categorised

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[11] On the interplay between actor and audience when it comes to securitisation, see Balzacq (2005).

[12] Huysmans (2006: 2–6).

[13] See, for example, Scott (2017).

[14] Huysmans (2006: 47–51).

as either 'innocent' or 'deceptive'.[15] Crossing from the outside to the inside is therefore an act that is frequently classified as threatening to those already within, shrouding other possible aspects of the migratory movement (which may be a security measure itself that is taken to avoid danger, or it may be work-related, or due to love relations, wanderlust or simply curiosity). States impose security measures to make sure that this potential uncertainty is handled correctly and that the threat is minimised by subjecting the migrant to various controlling measures.

Defining migration as a security issue localises the threat to the border area—this is where the entrance, the incursion or the intrusion happens. That said, the act of defining the border is itself an act of securitisation, leading to auto-immunisation. It not only creates a border, it also creates something beyond the border, an outside. Moreover, the border presupposes—and simultaneously creates—an entity inside its borders, which is what the migrant must not reach unless it is made secure, unless the citizens' security can be guaranteed. In fact—and this is one of the aspects that makes the concept of securitisation somewhat tricky to use as an historian—securitisation generally presuppose that there is an entity that is capable of such definite border making and able to enforce its order within those borders. It assumes the state.

The assumption of a state, often understood to be the primary actor in global politics, is problematic for present-day studies—for example, it neglects and conceals the presence of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), indigenous as well as stateless peoples, and other groups—but even more so for historical investigations.[16] According to the influential definition of the state by Max Weber, a state is 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory'.[17] The definition implies a clearly defined state territory as well as a central administration able to exercise power, control and violence legitimately. These factors were still in the making, and accompanied by other efforts, during the early modern period, prompting researchers to emphasise the processual nature of early modern states. Thus, state-formation research focuses to a large degree on how the administrative and organisational apparatuses of the modern state came to be.[18] This brings certain themes into direct focus for the researcher: war machinery, tax collection, the development of parliaments, and the like. Mostly, it means placing the centre of the state and actors of official power positions (kings, council members and prominent members of state) in focus, while groups without access to official power (such

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[15] Nayak (2019). See also other contributions in Gentry *et al.* (2019).

[16] On the problems of a state-based theory for present-day studies, see Fierke (2015: 89–127), and references therein. According to Emma Rothschild, the idea that states are primary in matters of security appeared first in the modern age (1995: 60–5).

[17] Weber (1946: 78).

[18] See, for example, Glete (2002); Tilly (1992); Anderson (1974).

as peasants, women, low-status officials) have generally received less attention. This has changed somewhat over the last 20 years, with more research published on these latter actors' influence.[19]

Weber's definition has gained as many critics as it has adherents, if not more.[20] For a historian interested in securitisation, the definition conceals more than it reveals. First, it suffers from Eurocentrism and presentism, starting from what the European state system increasingly looked like during the 19th and 20th centuries, but failing to see other possible solutions to state-like ventures in history and space. The Westphalian sovereign state system was codified in 1648, but it is generally understood to have been implemented only gradually in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Other conceptions of authority and borders were in play. The Westphalian peace did not codify an already existing practice—not in Europe, and certainly not elsewhere in the world—although it was instrumental in shaping a particular vision of order over the *longue durée*. Scholars have highlighted this problem for quite some time now, yet Weber's definition prevails. Perhaps its resilience rests not primarily on its ability to capture how states actually function, but on how it has managed to guide our way of thinking about what a state is and—at least in theory—does. Nevertheless, this problem means that both the post-Westphalian and the Weberian concept of a state sometimes steer us wrong and lead us to expect certain features that simply are not there, as well as to miss others.

A second problem, perhaps not as widely recognised, with this and other similar definitions of the state is that it conceives of the state as a fixed entity. Sovereignty is often treated as a spatial concept. A sovereign state is one that is in control of a certain territory: it extends, spatially. But even more so—and this part is absent in Weber's definition—sovereignty is a temporal concept. State is a temporal concept. A sovereign state worthy of the name needs to be maintained and protected through time; it needs to endure—it needs temporal control. Furthermore, sovereignty is grounded on certain promises about the future, namely that the future will be better and safer.[21] Sovereignty will provide this future by creating and maintaining a secure, controlled stability within a bounded space. This is not an easy thing to do, for time is not on the sovereign's side. Instead, as noted by IR scholar R.B.J. Walker when discussing Thomas Hobbes's idea of the sovereign, 'time and change constitute a problem to be overcome'.[22] In contrast to the sovereign state's desire for stability, the autonomy of a state is, and always has been, temporary at best. States are in flux.[23] They consistently

[19] See, for example, Dørum *et al.* (2021); Te Brake (1998); Wood (2002).
[20] See Lottholz & Lemay-Hébert (2016), and citations therein.
[21] Stockdale (2016: 18–24).
[22] Walker (1987: 74). See also Walker (1991).
[23] Krasner (2001: 17–19).

challenge each other's sovereignty, in wars, disputes, settlements and words—and they are challenged both from the outside and the inside. One might even say that the state's ever-changing qualities is one of its most defining characteristics, and borders are one of its most obvious time-dependent structures.

To simplify, there is a twofold problem with placing the state at the centre of securitisation that pertains to how scholars have dealt with the interactions between time and space when approaching the state. First, the definition of a state is time- and space-centred; it accommodates the system of 19th- and 20th-century Europe, with the idea of sovereign states at its core. Second, the state needs to be problematised by acknowledging the changing nature of its space—that is, by temporalising its spatiality. Whereas states find it hard to function without a space, how a state relates to the fact that it is spatial has changed over the years. The state's claim to endure, its claim to lasting eternally, is a relatively new feature.[24] This means that we need to investigate the spatiality and temporality of security measures, and study the effects of securitisation on both central and local polities, while keeping in mind other possible agents in the securitisation processes.

## Space: border making and local securitisation

In defining the sovereign state, borders take centre stage. They not only include certain territories and inhabitants, but they also exclude others. Where to draw borders, and whom to include or exclude, are questions of securing and of securitising both space and people: and the sharper the border, the sharper the questions. In many locations, borders are not fixed or even imagined as a clear line. Instead, there are border territories, or frontiers, that have an either/or status, or a neither/nor status. Historical examples include nomadic societies and remote and inaccessible areas with low population density in diverse localities, such as areas in early 16th-century northern Europe, late 18th-century Central America, and 20th-century North Africa and the Middle East.[25] In this section, I demonstrate how acknowledging the potential vagueness of borders may help us to better understand securitisation processes in the early modern world, and simultaneously enable us to step away from the state and highlight local actions. Examples are primarily taken from my own research on early modern Sweden.

As James C. Scott has shown, defining borders was often a state initiative. People living in border territories could certainly be susceptible to xenophobia, but at other times, they were more prone to ignore the border, trading and migrating freely across it.[26] For example, several sources from early modern Sweden testify to peasants

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[24] See Jezierski *et al.* (2022, forthcoming).

[25] Hoonhout (2020); Azuma (2019); Fur (2006); Chatty (2006).

[26] Scott (2009: *passim*); Scott (2017).

ignoring express prohibitions against transborder trade, and instead negotiating so-called 'peasants' peace treaties' with their fellow peasants across the border, in order to facilitate border traffic.[27] Another example that highlights the uncertainty of borders comes from a small area comprising the hundreds of Särna and Idre, situated close to present-day Sweden's Norwegian border. In 1645, Sweden and Denmark-Norway signed a peace treaty according to which Denmark-Norway was forced to cede the region surrounding Särna and Idre to Sweden. However, no mention was made of this specific area. Neither state seems to have noticed the omission, nor did the peasants remark upon it. The Swedish authorities did not detect it until a few years later when they tried, and ultimately succeeded, to incorporate it. During this interim period, neither authority claimed any taxes and other duties from the inhabitants, who seem to have enjoyed the peace and quiet.[28]

The example shows that it was not always in the peasants' interest to be included in a specific state, nor to be explicitly excluded from another. Demarcated and vague borders or border territories often existed side by side. A territory could have clearly marked and well defended borders against one territory, while neglecting to pay attention to a border that faced another; some borders were exact, some were not. Furthermore, some borders were exact sometimes, and at other times were not. Some could even be exact and vague at the same time, depending on from whose perspective we look at them, that of a state or that of the peasants living near or on it. Another example may help to make this point clearer. During a rebellion in 1719, peasants living in a central area in Sweden claimed that as the royal power had failed to protect them during the ongoing war against Russia, they were free to seek protection from the Russian tsar instead. This decision effectively challenged Swedish control over their territory, as the peasants' actions—had they been successful, which they were not—would have created a Russian enclave in central Sweden. Instead, the peasants were convicted of treason, and the Swedish royal power re-established its territorial authority. The rebellion reveals markedly different opinions on the nature of borders, in particular regarding the question of who had the right to define a border, who could make decisions regarding a territory, and who was ultimately responsible for solving security threats. In this instance, the border was vague and possible to change according to the peasants, who took it upon themselves to secure their situation, whereas the Swedish authorities strove to uphold what they argued was an exact and lasting border and claimed the right to define and neutralise security threats.[29]

Borders are not static entities. Rather, on many occasions, borders are what we might call temporary fictions: fictions, as they are imaginary creations before their

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[27] Österberg (1971: 117–21).

[28] Lorents (1916: 30–7); Nauman (2017: 131).

[29] On this rebellion, see Nauman (2021a).

actual manifestations; and temporary, because they are constantly susceptible to change, even though they seem to demarcate something absolute and unchanging. As such, they should be placed within the framework of thresholds, signalling elements that separate but also connect what is beyond them. Thresholds, as Aleida Assman and Jan Assman have argued, are mental images that evoke memories of movement, of crossing, and may indeed even inspire such actions—as may borders.[30] This wider understanding of what a border is and does needs to be taken into account when studying borders from a securitisation perspective, especially (but not only) when doing so for a time period that does not coincide with the existence of sovereign states and fixed borders. In fact, the act of securitisation may be instrumental in creating borders. While the actions of the peasants above temporarily blurred the border between Sweden and Russia, the actions of the Swedish authorities, when seizing the rebels and putting them to trial, effectively re-established it. As such, the assumption of the state as the primary actor in securitisation can be turned on its head, as securitisation was also instrumental in the state formation processes. We should ask how securitisation affected the polities in which it took place. These polities may have been states as we would recognise them today, but they may also have been local communities, peripheral zones or other centralised entities. Depending on the potentially negative effects of securitisation mentioned in the introduction to this article, attempts at border making might have worked to stabilise or de-stabilise these polities.

During the same war that had the peasants above turn to the Russian tsar, Russian troops occupied Finland, then part of the Swedish realm. Encouraged by the Swedish king to flee to Sweden, thousands of Finnish refugees reached the Swedish east coast in the years between 1710 and 1715. At first, the Swedish royal power employed security measures towards the protection of these refugees, establishing them as Swedish subjects entitled to help: a refugee committee was formed, responsible for a fund which would provide the refugees with housing and sustenance, and the refugees were exempted from military service and allowed to perform their trades. Several sources testify to the benevolence of the local communities, who received and provided for individual refugees. Yet, local attitudes towards the refugees changed as their numbers increased. In 1715, complaints were voiced in the city of Stockholm that the refugees were dangerous elements that needed to be controlled. Rather than being treated purely as referent objects in need of protection, the refugees themselves were gradually subjected to security measures, asked to prove themselves worthy of support by providing testimonies of their status. The authorities justified the demand by claiming that it would ensure that the funds sufficed for those entitled to help. Nevertheless, the decision posed considerable difficulties for those refugees who had been separated from families and friends and who did not know anyone who could testify to their

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[30] Assman & Assman (1997: 8). See also Simmel (1994); Bawden (2014: 10–12); Jütte (2015: 4–13).

status and conduct. The refugees' struggles to gain access to the refugee fund was in turn followed by further animosity between the refugees and the recipient communities, as the refugees were identified—and indeed identified themselves—as strangers.[31]

The security measures separated the refugees from the rest of the Swedish subjects. The refugees were demarcated as strangers, as different, and as a possible security threat. Experiencing this hostility first hand, several refugees tried to go home even before the war was over. They seem to have preferred returning to war-ridden Finland rather than to keep their uncertain status in Sweden. Their supplications to this effect were, however, rejected by King Charles XII. The king did not give any reasons for his decision, but it was likely taken to prevent the refugees from contributing to the Russian war effort, as they would have been forced to pay taxes to the Russian army upon their return. Only after the war's conclusion in 1721 did the Swedish royal power help the refugees to return home.[32]

Besides illustrating how security measures created borders between peoples, forming and separating two distinct groups—outsiders and insiders—the example of the Finnish refugees points to the benefits of studying the practice of security measures locally. From a state perspective, the security measures taken in protection of but also against the Finnish refugees were successful; the refugees were free from enemy attacks. Only at the local level has it been possible to observe the negative effects these measures had on the refugees and local communities alike.

The usage of passports in early modern Europe further illustrates my point. Originally a Chinese invention, passports were in sporadic use in different parts of the world before they became widespread in Europe during the early modern period.[33] Not all groups received passports; travelling safely and legally was a privilege reserved for those who could afford it and for those who had connections, through either family or trade. In his book on identification practices in early modern Europe, Valentin Groebner shows how historical actors used names, clothes, distinguishing marks and more to identify travellers. As bureaucratic control expanded, states mandated the use of passports, which gained ground as important instruments of that control. According to Groebner, this control was fictive: all inventions meant to enhance the states' security concerns regarding migration also led to counterfeit innovations, thus simultaneously increasing its insecurity. As the usage of passports became more widespread, forged passports also emerged. This, in turn, forced local authorities to invent new ways of distinguishing valid documents from forged ones.[34] Security measures taken at state level thus had unintended effects at the local level, prompting further security measures.

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[31] Nauman (forthcoming).

[32] Nauman (forthcoming).

[33] On the world history of passports and other identification practices, see the contributions in Caplan & Torpey (2001); About *et al.* (2013); Torpey (2000).

[34] Groebner (2007).

Spatialising and localising securitisation mean focusing on the local responses to perceived security threats and studying the effects that the measures taken had on polities and border making. Here, the four dangers of securitisation may be particularly prudent for the historian to study: which issues were singled out as acute, and which were neglected? Are there traces of securitisation 'sticking' to other issues as well? What about discrimination and auto-immunisation? This change in perspective allows the researcher to circumvent the hovering state, enabling comparative investigations across time and space, and may help us to uncover securitisation processes instrumental in forming and destabilising both states and other entities.

## Time: securing the future, remembering the past

As security measures and securitisation are actions directed towards the future, time and temporality are key. Securitisation deals with threats, what we fear will happen. To be precise, it deals with *potential* threats—it pertains to our uncertainty about the future. The realisation that the future is uncertain may inspire two different strategies. On the one hand, it can caution us against taking action, since we do not know what will happen; it might be better, then, to wait and see. On the other hand, it can cause us to act, to try to prevent even the possibility of a threat. In the latter strategy, the future is securitised. This type of pre-emption refers to, in the words of Marieke de Goede, Stephanie Simon and Marijn Hoijtink, 'security practices that aim to act on threats that are unknown and recognized to be unknowable, yet deemed potentially catastrophic, requiring security intervention at the earliest possible stage'.[35] In modern days, the strategy of pre-emption justifies the employment of anti-terrorism measures, states of exception and listening practices worldwide. In premodern societies, networking with foreign powers, the use of subsidies or the privatisation of tax collecting or revenues to ensure a steady income to the state may be identified as actions to the same aim, albeit to a different degree.[36]

According to de Goede, Simon and Hoijtink, instead of trying to predict the future, those responsible for deploying security measures today are engaging in a form of speculation. Instead of securing the most probable future, they act on multiple potential futures.[37] So far, this perceived shift in security measures has only been detected by scholars of the present world. It remains to be seen if it can stand historical scrutiny.

[35] De Goede *et al.* (2014: 412).

[36] These specific strategies har, for the Swedish realm, been dealt with by Norrhem (2019), Linnarsson (2018) and Hallenberg (2008), although these scholars do not discuss them as pre-emptive measures. See also the contributions in Kampmann *et al.* (2018); Karonen (2009).

[37] De Goede *et al.* (2014: 413).

Still, the proposed shift in the security debate shows how security can be commodified, revealing securitisation's roots in finance. Generally, the sovereign state's entry into the financial securitisation business has been pinpointed to the beginning of the early modern period. In the early 17th century, the Dutch and English East India Companies started to insure their financial assets by selling stocks and shares. During roughly the same period, insurance companies surfaced, and some time afterwards, European states began to issue bonds to finance wars and overseas colonisation.[38] State security has thus been tied together with finances since the advent of the Westphalian state system. In fact, securitisation as a concept first emerged within the sphere of finance, denoting the process through which financial assets, such as loans or bonds, are traded in financial markets.[39] Actions of security and securitisation are based on speculations regarding the future, where even unlikely—although not impossible—outcomes need to be taken into account.

To increase our understanding of securitisation's relation to the future, I propose that we combine it with two other central concepts: trust and control. Both these concepts respond to the uncertainty of the future, which urges us to act in order to avoid risks and threats, but from two diametrically opposed positions. In research literature, trust is an essentially contested concept.[40] It refers to an attitude towards another party, but depending on which school you adhere to, and where your research interests lie, it may be defined in a multitude of ways. Whereas Russel Hardin, for example, argues that trust is always specific—you trust someone in certain matters, not in others—Eric Uslaner claims that it is inherently general—you either trust someone, or you do not.[41] Another differentiation exists between interpersonal trust and institutional trust. While some people score highly on the former, they might score low on the latter, and vice versa. When it comes to future uncertainties, one aspect stands out. To trust someone is to refrain from further means of convincing ourselves of that person's (or institution's) future behaviour. Trust is, or should be, sufficient to deal with the uncertainty of the future. When we try to control someone or something, on the other hand, there is no limit to the amount of extra measures we might take

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[38] On the financing of the Dutch and English East India Company, as well as other early trading companies, see Harris (2020: 251–330); Ewen (2019); Gelderblom & Jonker (2004), and references therein. On financing the early modern state, see Jezierski et al. (2022, forthcoming); Nilsson (2017); Froide (2017); Neal (2000), and references therein.

[39] On links between finance and securitisation, see, for example, De Goede (2010); De Goede (2012); Boy (2015), and references therein.

[40] On essentially contested concepts, see Gallie (1956).

[41] The most influential definitions include Luhmann (1979); Hardin (2002); De Goede (2012); Uslaner (2002). Many other definitions deserve to be mentioned, but for this text I limit myself to three more: Baier (1986); Jones (1996); Holton (1994).

to make sure that our control is in fact satisfactory and effective. Control demands further actions.[42]

The difference between the two concepts suggests that trust and control are not readily combined. If we try to instil a trusting relationship, we have to refrain from inserting certain security measures that aim for control, since such measures signal a lack of trust. They may destroy our trust, making the situation more insecure than it had been to begin with. If we, on the other hand, aim for control, a trusting relationship may be detrimental to our goal since it forces us to renounce the need for certain instruments of control. Furthermore, several researchers have pointed to the difficulties in moving from one to the other: any measures taken to further trust in a controlling relationship will promptly be interpreted as further attempts to enhance control.[43] The effectiveness of certain security measures may therefore depend on the relationship into which they are introduced.

A historical example of how trust and control relate to each other is the use of political oaths—a fundamental historical security bond. My research on political oaths in early modern Sweden shows how mutual oaths were used to establish reciprocal trust regarding future actions between kings and subjects during the 16th century. This was a period during which the Swedish kings' authority was built on their presence, in lack of sufficient means of control in their absence. As means for control—such as a more effective administrative system, means of retributory justice— became available during the 17th century onwards, the use of oaths slowly declined and they were replaced by other security measures more apt for instilling control. Intriguingly, calls for the reinstatement of oaths are surfacing today across the world, often with reference to their ability to help establish trust. However, these new oaths are not mutual and are generally required only from groups singled out as uncertain elements: migrants and new citizens. Critics of these oaths astutely remark that they are deployed to instil control rather than trust. It seems that the ability of oaths to help establish trust has been negated by a control-oriented approach.[44]

Seeing securitisation as a temporal concept means seeking to understand the underlying assumptions made about the future by our objects of investigation while acknowledging the influence of past encounters. In trying to secure spatial and temporal sovereignty, states often resort to controlling efforts against its population and migrants. Border making is indeed one such effort. Trust, in some ways, seems to counter such security measures, as it urges us to accept uncertainty as non-threatening. Yet, once measures towards control have been deployed, trust is hard to achieve. Efforts to increase trust are instead perceived as efforts to control, counteracting trust.

[42] Bijlsma-Frankema & Costa (2005); Cofta (2007: 28).

[43] Cook *et al.* (2005: 140–1); Bijlsma-Frankema & Costa (2005); Cofta (2007: 28); Luhmann (1979: 36).

[44] Nauman (2017), Nauman (2021b). On the king's authority as built on presence, see Orning (2008: 5–10).

The concepts of trust and control emphasise the pre-existing relationship between the ones securitising and the ones being securitised, and highlights how their previous interactions and past experiences of the security measures proposed influence their decisions and reactions. The concepts can help us understand not only the approaches taken to secure potential future threats, but also why de-escalation of a securitised situation—de-securitisation—may be hard to achieve.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that the use of the concept of securitisation for early modern studies is thwarted by the concept's strong links to ideas about sovereign states. As we have seen, it is only through securitisation that sovereignty can make its claim to exist. The sovereign state endeavours to control the future in order to uphold safety and security within its borders. Time itself is securitised in the state's drive for control and stability, and in its aversion to uncertainty. This seems to lock studies of securitisation within the framework of the present-day European state system, and has exposed the research field to critiques of both Eurocentrism and presentism alike. In this article, I have added state-centrism to its faults, arguing that by allowing the sovereign state to take centre stage, the field of securitisation studies has turned its back on history and on the multitude of other state-like entities who have been operating locally and internationally.

The remedy for early modern historians lies in turning the argument around and investigating how security measures have been instrumental in the creation and de-stabilisation of political polities throughout history, of which the sovereign state is but one example. To do so, the spatial and temporal aspects of securitisation need to be part of our theoretical toolbox. Many responses to security threats have been performed locally, and have had effects on local communities and securitised subjects first. Moreover, localised responses towards perceived security threats are not dependent upon a prior state or a state system at all, but are discernible across time and space. Securitisation processes thus need to be investigated spatially and temporally, and their local and temporal aspects need to be acknowledged.

In this article, issues of borders and migration have stood at the fore. I have grounded my argument in empirical studies of wars, rebellions and border-making processes from the Swedish early modern realm, showing how peasants, refugees, local communities, kings and authorities all were affected by and themselves influenced security measures. The examples demonstrate how securitisation was not a top-down process, but rather enmeshed into processes of border making and local decisions on whom to trust and whom to fear. With securitisation, a future, abstract security threat is turned into a present, tangible one. What it boils down to, what

securitisation actually accomplishes, is turning questions of future threats into issues of present security. To study it historically, however, we cannot stop there. We must also investigate the effects of securitisation, long-term and short-term, locally and centrally, spatially and temporally, to consider change and continuity in different security regimes. To make such comparisons feasible, the state must give ground to other political entities.

# Acknowledgements

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