

Book Reviews

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Security and Everyday Life. By Vida Bajc and Willem de Lint (eds). New York: Routledge, 2011. Pp. 312. \$125.00 (hbk). ISBN: 9780415997683.

During the neoliberal period, more and more phenomena are ‘securitized’ or defined as safety threats, which require a response from a security apparatus. As the security agenda widens to include not only military and political issues but economic, social, and environmental problems as well, there is an increasing amount of investigation into and analysis of the ways certain issues are framed as security problems. For nearly two decades, what has become known as the Copenhagen School of International Relations or, reflecting its central concept, securitization studies, has been at the leading edge of this line of inquiry. Securitization studies aims to understand ‘who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent object), why, with what results, and not least, under what conditions’ (Buzan et al., 1998: 32). A process-oriented framework, securitization studies breaks with the dominant materialist conceptions in security studies and international relations to examine how certain issues are transformed from political problems requiring diplomatic solutions into security problems requiring technical solutions.

In this tradition, Vida Bajc and Willem de Lint offer the anthology *Security and Everyday Life*. Framed as ‘a contribution to our understanding of the dynamics associated with seeing all sorts of everyday social situations and cultural phenomena [as] a potential threat to security’ (p. 1), this anthology is organized around four thematic sections with an introduction by Bajc and a conclusion by de Lint serving as bookends. The first section, ‘Public Space and Collective Activities’, consists of two essays: Mark Salter’s ‘No joking!’, which focuses on airport security to examine the ‘emptying of public space of signs of community or solidarity’ and the subsequent construction of ‘the atomistic consumer-citizen-subject’ (p. 44); and Vida Bajc’s analysis of Pope John Paul II’s visit to Israel/Palestine in 2000 as what she calls a ‘security meta-ritual’ or ‘a ritual that orders – rather than represents – social life’ (p. 73). Capturing the intent of the anthology, Salter’s contribution shows the deeper issues embedded in the everyday processes of securitization such as the rules against joking at airports. With this seemingly mundane example, Salter elegantly shows ‘the core epistemological tension of the state’, where ‘all attempts to fix the knowledge regarding the inner realm of the citizen simply display the possibility of resistance and revolution’ (p. 38). Bajc’s essay, in contrast, stumbles in her deployment of Gregory Bateson’s communication theory. The language introduced in her theoretical exposition drops away in empirical discussion and yields a rather disjointed essay.

The second section, ‘Struggle and Resistance’, shifts attention to challenging securitization. Liora Sion’s contribution, ‘When the Israeli state of exception meets the exception: the case of Tali Fahima’, details the experience of Tali Fahima, a working-class Mizrahi Jew with no strong political affiliations, who befriended Zakaria Zubeidi, the Jenin chief of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, lived with Zubeidi as a his human shield and, after a series of interrogations and a trial for providing assistance to the enemy, became a Muslim convert. In one of the stronger contributions, Sion shows

how Fahima's basic act of human empathy short-circuited the binary logic of the Israeli security apparatus, creating a political problem that confounded the Israeli state. Pushing further, Sion uses this to raise broader questions about the integrity of the Israeli state and the overlapping states of exception upon which its permanent emergency rule rests.

The other essay in this section, Kathleen Staudt's 'Rethinking national security policies and practices in transitional contexts: border resistance' is a similarly strong contribution. Using definitions of human security derived from feminist theorists, Staudt shows how activism along the US–Mexico border challenged attempts to securitize the movement of labor. She finds that activists deployed

principles associated with federalism, constitutionality, civil disobedience cost-effectiveness, environmental sustainability and human rights ... to argue for human security [that] contest[s] the guarded way that borders and border security have been used. (p. 101)

Altogether, the essays in this section, with their focus on the contestation of processes of securitization, answer critiques that securitization studies tends to put analytical primacy on state agents and official policy discourses (Eriksson, 1999; Wyn-Jones, 1999).

The third section of the anthology focuses on issues around law and citizenships. Here, the contributions are uneven. De Lint's 'A note on security modulation' is limited by dense writing and a bevy of poorly operationalized, fuzzy concepts. The essay tries to integrate many theorists – Beck, Foucault, Garfinkel, Garland, Giddens, Gramsci, and Strauss – with the securitization literature but fails to consolidate a clear theoretical framework. The conceptual confusion and muddled prose are especially unfortunate. De Lint courageously takes on a taboo subject, the politics of information around 9/11 conspiracy theories, to argue that

the term 'conspiracy theory' is used as a wide brush to tarnish those who look for relatively powerful and coordinate agents of action (or agencies) within rather than without the established corporate-state nexus. (p. 127)

On this point, de Lint reminds us that '9/11 can be a terrorism conspiracy of great sophistication only where the agency is exogenous'. In this case, remaining within the safe confines of acceptable discourse 'distort[s] the contention that there can be two tracks of policy (as per Strauss) and that information control practices serve exclusive elite interests' (pp. 127–8).

The other two essays in this section – Reem Bahdi's 'Before the law: creeping lawlessness in Canadian national security' and Gabe Mythen's 'The pre-emptive mode of regulation: terrorism, law and security' – are more focused and approachable. Bahdi applies Agamben to show how Canada's use of indefinite detention in Canada has led to 'official responses to rights-claiming by investigative targets with official information control tactics tend toward lawlessness and undermine individual rights by thwarting accountability' (p. 143). In another strong contribution, Mythen uses literature on risk society to frame an argument detailing the rise of future oriented modes of power through counterterrorism policies of the UK. This study joins securitization studies' constructivist focus on discourse with a more materialist focus on institutional change to show how 'politicians have used media to bring a risky future into view in the present' and create consent for new and aggressive modes of policing (p. 174).

The final section of the anthology, entitled 'Global Agendas, Local Transformations', includes three solid contributions but lacks thematic coherence. It is unclear what makes these studies more 'global' than other contributions. Moreover, two of the essays – Sirpa Virta on counterterrorism in European Union and Jiang Gei and Huang Kuo on media as a security threat in China – are largely descriptive and empirical. While these studies are clearly written and informative, they do not

make an explicit theoretical contribution and, for that reason, are limited in their appeal. Nelson Arteago Botello's essay, 'Security Metamorphosis in Latin America', in contrast, captures the avowed theme of the section. Botello shows 'a fusion between security strategies and oriented toward reducing crime and the security logic promoted by the United States', in Latin America. Through a comparison of the Mérida Initiative and Plan Colombia, Botello details the 'formation of "archipelagos of security"' and shows how the United States

accelerated the consolidation of securitization strategies ... with the goal of not only reinforcing the security policies in countries where they apply but also to guarantee the so-called hemisphere security of the American continent ... which notably weaken[s] even young democratic institutions of the region. (p. 237)

In sum, *Security and Everyday Life*, like many anthologies, struggles to provide thematic and methodological coherence. The degree of specialist language and the cost of the book, likewise, make it ill-suited for course adoption in introductory courses. This book does, however, grapple with some interesting cases that should be of interest to experts in international relations and security. For scholars looking for a text that engages critically with structural inequalities, this book falls short. Like the wider sub-field of securitization studies of which it is part, *Security and Everyday Life* capably shows how certain phenomena become defined in terms of security but it does not consistently explain why these issues fall under this rubric. While Bajc, in the introduction, explains emergence of modern security apparatuses as 'an outgrowth of what Foucault calls "governmentality," a particular rationale of governing that appears in Western Europe in relation to the idea of the state' (p. 2), more is involved than the mere diffusion of mode of rule. As Gabe Mythen writes in his contribution,

The 'global terrorist enemy' looks very different in Chechnya than it does in Spain, in Istanbul than in Palestine. To reduce terrorism to a universal disease that can only be vanquished by force represents the failure of powerful states to come to grips with some of the drivers of political violence, including colonial exploitation, poverty, economic imperialism, religious bias and geopolitical exclusion. (pp. 180–1)

These structural relationships matter immensely and critical scholars of security, as well as policy makers, would do well to consider them.

References

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Raising Brooklyn: Nannies, Childcare, and Caribbeans Creating Community. By Tamara Mose Brown. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011. Pp. 240. \$22.00 (pbk). ISBN 9780814791431.

As Arendt (1958) notes, freedom means, among other things, freedom from the burden of biological existence, freedom from the labor that is commanded by necessities, that creates nothing permanent and must be perpetually renewed so as to sustain life. With growing participation of women