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Security and everyday life

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BOOK REVIEW

Security and everyday life, edited by Vida Bajc and Willem de Lint, Routledge Advances in Criminology Series, New York, Routledge, 2011, 312 pp., US\$166.00/£90.00 (hardback), ISBN 13:978-0-415-99768-3, US\$129.00/£70.00 (eBook), ISBN 13:978-0-203-83252-3

Vida Bajc and Willem de Lint have edited a multidisciplinary book on security meta-framing, an ordering principle of social life that holds security as the primary value. The way that a state of emergency is becoming normalized in some spheres of our societies is alarming, and therefore needs to be analyzed. The expansion of 'security' is, after all, an anomaly in the mainstream of developments. The world has become less and less regulated, especially in regard to mobility. At the same time, new binary demarcations are entering the scene. As Bajc points out, some of us are told to either give up human rights or expose themselves to the mercy of terrorists, as if there were no other options.

The volume has a somewhat misleading title: *Security and Everyday Life*. The book does not deal predominantly with everyday life on a human level, such as the ways families may perceive security in their everyday environments. The focus, rather, is on either relatively special situations or more general societal developments. For example, airport security checks may be routine for security personnel, but few of us experience them on a daily basis. Nonetheless, we periodically have to take part in these symbolic plays of power, even if it was nothing but an act, without real commitment. We commute and travel for tourism.

The publication consists of four parts, with two to three chapters in each section, written by sociologists, criminologists, politologists and researchers in media and communication studies. The first part analyses public spaces and collective activities, the second part communal and individual resistance against national security policies, the third relationships between the law, citizenship and the state and the fourth global security agendas, with focus on the European Union, China and Latin America.

The most interesting chapters share the common feature of successfully combining empirical material and theoretical thinking. In terms of understanding, it is important to make the connection. Liora Sion's case of Tali Fahima (Chapter 3), an Israeli dissident who challenged the status quo in multiple ways and later became a Palestinian, is a way to understand the habitat of a nation under a permanent state of emergency. Together with Vida Bajc's analysis of the congested security negotiations of Pope John Paul II's visit in Jerusalem, the two chapters provide an accurate and thought-provoking excursion into Israel and Palestine, and the potential futures of other nations building up similar structures.

Mark B. Salter's chapter 'No Joking' reveals the fragility of security meta-framing at airports, where humour is prohibited to minimize the risk of resistance. As those of us who have been involved with airport security management know, the communication at the gates may be strained, to say the least. Reem Bahdi, on the other hand, presents a

chilling view (Chapter 6) of the ways the Canadian state apparatus has recently by-passed laws and individual rights in its daily ‘acts of patriotism’. The administrative attitudes against protecting civil rights are remarkably similar to the ones which have kept Canada at the bottom of airline customer rights! In the UK, parallel developments have occurred, after an adoption of a pre-emptive approach to perceived threats, as described by Gabe Mythen, with a number of insightful examples of the recent climate of panic.

The rest of the chapters has a wider regional scope. Kathleen Staudt and Willem de Lint write about opposition to security meta-framing among the US/Mexico-border communities, and about security modulation. In Chapter 8, Sirpa Virta draws a conclusive picture of European counterterrorism governance and the ways the policy is shaping the new Union. As her examples show, the US ‘war model’ and the European ‘criminal justice model’ meet variable responses in the EU member states. Jiang Fei and Huang Kuo address the cultural security concerns of China, after the entry of transnational media corporations (Chapter 9). Last, Nelson Arteaga Botello discusses in Chapter 10 the recent metamorphosis of security policies in Latin America.

The latter two chapters are of particular interest as they deal with topics less often analyzed. In China, the drive to maintain the national cultural identity, while simultaneously supporting an image of an open society, is a challenge with particular consequences for young people, the main consumers of the new media. In Latin America, the strategic sectoring of cities into secure and crime zones has advanced hand in hand with redistribution of power and mechanisms of exclusion.

In the first 46 pages, the repeated misspelling of reference names (e.g. Aaltola, Weaver) is unfortunate, and initially disturbs reading. Accuracy does, however, improve later on. In regard to content, one may criticize the reproduction of the over-inflated importance of the 911 terror attack in New York, a minor incident if one believed in the equal worth of human lives on this Earth. True, the consequent political decisions have affected the world in an unprecedented scale. Nevertheless, the incident was not a rational reason for security meta-framing, but rather a convenient vehicle for agendas behind it. Neither is the ‘vigilante’ security administration, hidden and unlawful, ubiquitous in democratic nations. The arguably more effective ‘soft security’ could have therefore received further attention in the book.

Fortunately, the editors have been keen on expanding the analysis beyond the North Atlantic realm, and its Israeli appendix, by the inclusion of Chinese and Latin American voices. Moreover, the authors do present an interesting variety of critical analysis. Within its scope, *Security and Everyday Life* provides a rather insightful view of the situation right now. All in all, I would recommend this volume for researchers not only in the above-mentioned fields of research, but also in leisure, tourism and mobility studies. The multidisciplinary qualities of the publication make it a useful reference in a wide field of enquiry.

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