

II. REVIEWS

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ANDREW W. NEAL, *SECURITY AS POLITICS: BEYOND THE STATE OF EXCEPTION*, EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, EDINBURGH 2020, PP 288

For anyone who follows attentively the scientific output within the field of security studies in the span of at least the last three decades and the former's constantly growing complexity across all the domains, levels, and manifestations of security issues, the notion that ever since the outset of broadening of the security agenda in the 80s of the XX century scholars have acquired a firm grasp of the essence of the phenomenon of security must seem indeed very compelling. Yet, the nature of security never ceases to baffle its students as it continues to pose an intellectual conundrum to those who seek to fathom it. Some have voiced that opinion by defining security as ‘an ambiguous symbol’² or ‘a contested concept’³. In their daily endeavours scholars face an array of fundamental questions pertaining to security, such as: what is security? What does it mean for a subject to be secure? how does security come about? Is security politics compatible with democracy? Those are but a few of the numerous questions that must be addressed before any security issue can be studied. In essence, it is the knot of the ontology of security that must be cut.

This is particularly the case with the theory and also the tangible and practical phenomenon of securitization. Over the years, the securitization theory has been substantially amended and enriched by scholars who addressed its shortcomings, supplemented it with new vital aspects, and pointed to new

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² A. Wolfers, “*National Security*” as an *Ambiguous Symbol*, “*Political Science Quarterly*” 1952, Vol. 67, No. 4, pp. 481-502.

³ B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Colchester 2016, p. 216.

avenues for research⁴. However, it seems hardly possible to ascertain that, as a result of their efforts, it has been conclusively determined what it means that something has been securitized, i.e. it has become a security issue. More precisely, what remains obscure is, for instance, the difference between the areas of security and ‘normal’ governmental politics, especially in democratic and law-abiding countries. As per the fundamental tenets of the securitization theory, when security is invoked concerning an issue that is to become securitized, that issue gets “lifted above politics”⁵ and “extraordinary measures”⁶ are employed to tackle the threat to the referent object⁷. Does this mean, however, that the act⁸ of securitization drives a wedge between the realms of politics and security, causing a complete disjunction between them? Is security not one of the aspects of social life and one of the policies that are governed by politicians and through politics? Those and many more questions are taken up by Andrew W. Neal in his book entitled “Security as Politics: Beyond the State of Exception”, in which he challenges the outlook on the nature of security as a social and political phenomenon and the relation between security and politics, represented by the Copenhagen School and being an intrinsic part of the securitization theory.

In light of the securitization theory and other concepts developed within the much broader confines of critical security studies, one could point out three levels at which social issues can be considered. On top of the levels of politics and security, there is also the level of risk. If a social issue is subject not to securitization, but what Olaf Corry termed ‘riskification’, then, in short, it is not subsumed under the rubric of threat that is to be feared and dealt with the use of extraordinary measures, but treated as a risk and challenge that can be

⁴ The literature whose authors aimed to amend and build upon the original securitization theory developed by the Copenhagen School is so extensive that it would be impossible to provide even a rough overview of it, especially when it comes to the papers published in journals. Therefore, only a few books of central importance have been adduced here. See T. Balzacq, *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, London 2011; H. Stritzel, *Security in Translation: Securitization Theory and the Localization of Threat*, Basingstoke 2014; J. Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*, Abingdon 2004; R. Floyd, *The Morality of Security: A Theory of Just Securitization*, Cambridge 2019; J. Hagmann, *(In-)Security and the Production of International Relations: The Politics of Securitization in Europe*, Abingdon 2014; H. Broecker, *Securitization as Hegemonic Discourse Formation: An Integrative Model*, Munich 2022.

⁵ B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder 1998, p. 26.

⁶ Ibid, p. 21.

⁷ Ibid, p.36.

⁸ According to some authors, it is more apt to perceive securitization as a process or a set of institutionalized practices. See H. Broecker, *Securitization...*, op. cit., pp. 34, 38, 99.

controlled and managed⁹. The main advantage of this approach is that it allows us to comprehend the nature of security (issues) more comprehensively by going beyond security and politics being pitted against one another to form an alternative that often turns out to be out of touch with the reality. However, Andrew W. Neal points out the potential downside of introducing the logic or risk (management) into security politics, i.e. riskification. Following Jonas Hagmann and Myriam Dunn Cavelti¹⁰, he claims that “the way risk analysis favours experts once security politics also has implications for traditional security politics. Its scientificism undermines the sovereign decisionism traditionally associated with security because it hinders the symbolic leeway of political leaders to represent threats and risks.”¹¹ There seem to be two sides to sides coin. On the one hand, having political leaders make decisions based on substantive rather than emotional or ideological arguments is undoubtedly preferable. On the other hand, though, in democratic countries, the responsibility for making security-related decisions rests with political leaders and therefore it is their judgment that should take precedence over that of the experts, not the other way around. The experts’ professional and scientific knowledge is very often invaluable when an important decision regarding national security (or just any of its branches) is to be made, but ultimately, their role is and should remain auxiliary in countries that are democracies and not technocracies. Neal’s advocacy of the ‘politicisation’ of security is an important reminder of this fact.

As far as securitization and politicization of social issues are concerned, an irresistible question arises: why treat security as the negation of politics even though the empirical evidence proves undeniably that there is no state and no government without (national) security politics, which is not only not (much) different from other branches of politics, but also overlaps with them? To realize and acknowledge this more easily, it is helpful to adopt the epistemological and methodological perspective of Foucault’s empirical historicism and problematization of security, elaborated by Neal, who believes that for one to be able to accurately grasp the nature of security it is essential to treat it as a volatile and dynamic phenomenon, whose meaning is derived from the

⁹ O. Corry, *Securitization and ‘Riskification’: Second-order Security and the Politics of Climate Change*, “Millennium: Journal of International Studies” 2012, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 235-258. See also: P. Polko, *Bezpieczeństwo w dyskursie politycznym RP (1989-2020)*, Warszawa 2022, pp. 43-57; P. Polko, K. Kujawa, *Constructing Security: Securitisation, Riskification and De+tion*, [in]: *Contemporary Understanding of Security and Its Contexts*, eds. P. Polko, B. Wiśniewski, Berlin 2024, pp. 25-42.

¹⁰ J. Hagmann, M. Dunn Cavelti, *National Risk Registers: Security Scientism and the Propagation of Permanent Insecurity*, “Security Dialogue 2012, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 79-96.

¹¹ A. W. Neal, *Security as Politics: Beyond the State of Exception*, Edinburgh 2019, p. 248.

context in which it is embedded¹². If so, then the goal for the students of security is to examine not only the said volatility and contextuality of security but also how the state authorities incorporate security politics, comprising various methods and procedures of managing and governing security issues, into the very core of the overarching state policy, to ‘normalize it’.

Arguably, such normalization does not and should not be fathomed in terms of the stringent dichotomies proposed by the Copenhagen School, i.e. politicization vs securitization and securitization vs desecuritization¹³. Nor does it amount to what some champion as ‘emancipation’ from security perceived as a form of political oppression¹⁴. Instead, normalization of security means that the state’s (governmental) security politics should amount to ordinary and mundane proceedings based on merit, not the logic of ‘Othering¹⁵’, distrust, resentment, exclusion, hostility, and conflict. In his book, Andrew W. Neal demonstrates the process of normalization of security politics based on the UK case and the profoundly political game between various British authorities, engaged in a tug-of-war aimed at making the strategy and politics of security more political and less dominated by the British government and secret services¹⁶.

From the viewpoint of critical security studies, security and its policy are seen as suspicious and menacing because politicians often use them as the Foucaultian ‘technology of power’¹⁷. Security then becomes constructed as a state of affairs in which the ‘Other’ (seen, inevitably, as the ‘Enemy’) posing a

¹² Ibid, pp. 50-67.

¹³ O. Wæver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, [in]: *On Security*, ed. R. Lipschutz, New York 1995, pp. 46-87.

¹⁴ K. Booth, *Theory of World Security*, Cambridge 2007; C. Aradau, *Security and the democratic scene: desecuritization and emancipation*, “Journal of International Relations and Development” 2004, Vol. 7, pp. 388-413.

¹⁵ It must be emphasized that for any identity (individual and collective alike) to come into existence there must also exist some *Other(s)*, against whom the identity of the former is created. According to Ted Hopf, “We cannot know what an identity is without relating it to another” (T. Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, New York 2002, s. 7.). This mechanism, being an intrinsic part of identity construction, is, in a sense, ‘normal’ and does not constitute a security Issue as such. However, this mechanism can escalate (or, more precisely, can be escalated) to become another, referred to as ‘Othering’, in which those that do not belong to our group (social, ethnic, political, confessional, etc.) are discursively constructed as a threat (see e.g. Ch. Deacon, *Perpetual ontological crisis: national division, enduring anxieties and South Korea’s discursive relationship with Japan*, “European Journal of International Relations” 2023, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 1041–1065; B. Çağatay Tekin, *Bordering through othering: On strategic ambiguity in the making of the EU-Turkey refugee deal*, “Political Geography” 2022, Vol. 98.).

¹⁶ A. W. Neal, *Security as Politics...*

¹⁷ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York 1977.

‘threat’ to ‘Us’ is always ‘out there’, according to the discourse deployed by the political elites, which use that narrative as the justification for sustaining conflictual policies that grant them power¹⁸.

Andrew W Neal firmly opposes this perception of and approach to security and its policy. Upon examining the array of arguments laid out by authors who perceive security as ‘anti-politics’¹⁹, he concludes that what is needed to break away from the security vs politics dichotomy is to abandon the Hobbesian and Schmittean ontology and logic of security and replace it with the Machiavellian and Weberian ones²⁰. Also, as mentioned before, he advocates an approach to security that accounts for its historical dynamics and contextual specificity. Such an approach is freed from and unconstrained by theoretical rigidity and dogmatism, which are said to be characteristics of the theory of securitization developed by the Copenhagen School, as pointed out not only by Neal, but also by numerous other scholars who are critical of the said theory. It is probably the combination of the elegant theoretical framework, a convincing line of argument in favour of ‘politicization’ of security, and a meticulous study of the complex process of evolution of ‘problematization’ of security (at the levels of security strategy and security politics) by the British political leaders and authorities that makes this volume genuinely illuminating, thought-provoking, and inspiring. Andrew W. Neal proves in his book that robust theories are essential for scholars to grasp the nature and meaning of social phenomena but it is even more important to ensure that those theories are as grounded in the social reality as the phenomena to be studied. And, last but not least, he reminds us that security, as one of the cardinal values that people strive to achieve, must be a subject of political choice and decision, just like the rest of those values.

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¹⁸ D. Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Minneapolis 1998.

¹⁹ A. W. Neal, *Security as Politics...*, op. cit., pp. 12-19.

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