



Book Reviews: A Miscellany

Ayse Ceyhan (ed.) (2007) *Identifier et Surveiller: Les Technologies de Sécurité*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

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The journal *Cultures & Conflicts* has become an increasingly important reference for international relations (IR) scholarship. In certain quarters of the Anglophone critical security studies field in particular, there had been a realization that 'Paris' provided as constructive analytical contributions to the analysis of novel security trends and discourses as 'Aberystwyth' or 'Copenhagen' did (for a good review see CASE, 2007). If *Cultures & Conflicts* had not appeared on the IR radar screen earlier, this had more to do with linguistic barriers than with scholarly quality, this particular special volume on security technologies suggests.

The special issue at hand has been dedicated to novel trends in security technologies and their utilities for threat identification and surveillance. Ceyhan's introductory article conceptualises the central notion of 'security dispositif' as a set of formal and informal, material and social institutions, discourses and processes that establish a broader national security apparatus. Central to this Foucauldian understanding of the security apparatus is its reach beyond immediate physical elements, hence its inclusion of wider social control mechanisms. Ceyhan argues that in western countries, the liberal governance dogma had a profound impact on the dispositif's structuring, as the inclusion of a constantly increasing number of stake-holders has gravely complexified its implementation and control, raising serious accountability and oversight problems. While this latter aspect of security governance has already been widely discussed elsewhere (Hänggi, 2003 or Krahnmann, 2003), the Foucauldian focus on social control is a useful addendum to the analytical debate. It allows Ceyhan to discuss whether the proliferation and refinements of mechanical security technologies had not deepened the public sense of insecurity, so effectively procreating its own market.

The second article, written by the same author looks at biometrical identification, this is technical surveillance based on age, name or DNA. Ceyhan claims that the technological emphasis on objective identity criteria for individuals reduces the latter to baskets of unchangeable digital classification criteria. With this, identification technologies increasingly omit to assess the ideations and personal relationships of those individuals it

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seeks to cover. This omission arguably provides a fallible sense of technological certainty and societal security as crucial dimensions of intent and personal network are being neglected – contemporary security technologies are so not only reproducing subjective senses of insecurity by their mere presence, as Ceyhan’s first article argues. Their focus on stable biometrical codes also impairs their very ability to assess and control individuals effectively. Ceyhan’s argument is articulate and the critical discussion of biometrics-based identification catches a current theme. Yet, by neglecting to debate those socio-metric frames with which these increasingly ‘stable’ digital coordinates are actually being evaluated by security professionals, the article draws an ultimately incomplete picture of the issue at stake. Even though there is an increasing reliance on non-ideational and digitally collectable identity coordinates, socio-metric profiling respectively socio-metric interpretation frames have not become obsolete, our own international travel experiences confirm.

At the backdrop of these guiding conceptual considerations, Laniel and Piazza then provide rich empirical descriptions of British and French government efforts to introduce biometrical national identity cards. In the case of the United Kingdom, they focus on the identification of government discourses promoting such a political project. In their genealogy, Laniel and Piazza nicely trace the erratic shift away from conceptions of combat against fraud, hooliganism and illegal immigration in the 1980s towards anti-terror discourses in the late 1990s. In a well researched piece, they show in great detail how this latter argumentative turns has been stabilised since by political statements, despite the apparent oppositions of both British public opinion and British security experts. Also in his case study on France, Piazza confirms a primacy of mystified national security justifications over actual feasibility and utility debates and considerations on the contested issues of identity cards. In what becomes a quasi-critique of ongoing domestic politics, he demonstrates in detail how leading French politicians such as then-Minister of the Interior Sarkozy, but also other conservative figureheads such as Villepin and Raffarin constructed a nebulous, non-specific national security discourse which successfully evades any test of the scientific forensic utility of biometric identity cards. Echoing what Putnam (1988) had earlier circumscribed as the two-level game of domestic politics and foreign affairs, Piazza also notes how US demands on European authorities for biometrical data are being invoked by these same politicians in support of their agendas.

Preuss-Laussinotte’s final articles then shift the special issue’s attention towards more technical problems of security technology such as data storage and data protection. In so doing she goes beyond the often dominant government-centred focus of comparable works, describing how truly gigantesque and generally highly insufficiently protected personalised data bases have been established by, and are in possession of private companies. In a somewhat more legalistic and philosophical discussion, Preuss-Laussinotte also addresses the overarching contradictions between individualist personal safety and collective public security. Drawing on Hobbesian and other political conceptions of state-citizen relations, she assesses their current balance inside the European via an analysis of the European Court of Human Rights’ jurisprudence on the protection of the private sphere.

With its critical, French philosophy and sociology-based analyses and its impressively rich empirical descriptions, this special issue of *Cultures & Conflits* on ‘security

technologies' represents a useful and thought-through contribution to the international debate on the subject matter. The popularisation of Foucauldian and at times, Bourdieuan conceptions of politics is a particularly welcomed input into the largely Anglo-Saxon scholarly debate. Then again, learning and insemination between scholarly communities should be reciprocal interaction. In this vein, the articles presented in this issue often fail rather alarmingly to integrate international works into their analyses – such as Putnam's work indicated above. At times, such omissions of scholarly dialogue create the false impression of conceptual advancements in places where scholarly debates had already been held or resolved. Despite their well accomplished analyses, the authors of the issue reviewed here could clearly have shown themselves more open to such dialogue. Nonetheless, overall, the special issue is highly recommended for scholars critically engaging with the societal effects of modern surveillance technology and discourses. If French cuisine and literature were not sufficient to motivate readers' refinement of their French language skills thus far, this volume certainly provides another powerful reason.

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