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Book review: 'Securitization in statebuilding and intervention'

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Bonacker, T., Distler, W., Ketzmerick, M. (Eds.), *Securitization in statebuilding and intervention*

(Baden-Baden, *Politiken der Sicherheit. Nomos*, 2017), pp. 295, ISBN: 978-3-8487-4312-4

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Securitization in Statebuilding and Intervention constitutes the first volume of the ‘Politics of Security’ (*Politiken der Sicherheit*) series, edited by the ‘Dynamics of Security’ research program of the Universities of Marburg and Giessen. It considers securitisation dynamics during contexts of statebuilding, and as such provides an original approach to security and statebuilding, through the analytical frame of securitisation applied to contemporary case studies, from Turkey’s Second Republic to the mobilisation of a religious rhetoric in the US.

The contributors adopt a constructivist lens to catch the manifestations and consequences of securitisation in contemporary statebuilding processes. Thorsten Bonacker, Werner Distler and Maria Ketzmerick, all of them scholars at Zentrum für Konfliktforschung (Centre for Conflict Studies – CSS) at University of Marburg, edited this book. Axes of research of the CSS such as the history of statebuilding since decolonisation thus strongly structure the book, which is organised in 2 parts and 11 chapters. The first part deals with statebuilding by international actors, whereas the second part considers the issue of statebuilding from a domestic perspective.

Different themes, more or less typical of the securitisation literature, are explored through a wide range of geographical examples: Witold Mucha delves into the Proxy Myth through the example of Libya, Kerstin Eppert and Mitja Sienknecht examines the desecuritisation process between the UNSC and the UN Missions. In the last two chapters of the first part, Werner Distler, Maria Ketzmerick on the one hand, and Thorsten Bonacker, Maria Ketzmerick on the other, focus on securitisation in Cameroon through the organisation of elections and the statebuilding process during a trusteeship mandate. One of the case studies of the first part is far less familiar within the securitisation and even more within the statebuilding literature: Robin Lucke and Katharina McLarren interrogate how religion may be mobilised in a securitisation process, through examples driven from US history. The second part focuses more on domestic dynamics of securitisation in statebuilding, with the cases of Turkey, Tajikistan and South Sudan. In addition to shedding lights on some recent events that hitherto have lacked academic attention (the ‘Second Republic’ in Turkey for instance), this part also gives the reader the opportunity to get a glimpse on the role of many different actors, especially civil society, not usually considered as actors of securitisation by themselves.

Through a set of case studies, every chapter of the book raises the question of how the securitisation framework helps us understand the role of security in statebuilding. While putting a strong emphasis on the context of speech production during the securitisation process, the book identifies how security threats shape statebuilding. As such, the ambition of the book is more exploratory than explanatory: case studies are not part of a global presentation, rather a succession of illustrations highlighting different situations of statebuilding involving a securitisation or desecuritisation process.

Although heavily reliant on the Copenhagen school of international relations to grasp the securitisation phenomenon, many chapters also take some liberty with this theoretical core and go beyond the raw speech act as described by Buzan and Hansen.

Stephanie Krapler begins by drawing from the genesis of the securitisation of international peacebuilding, whose aim is to make interventions more robust, in response to a perceived security threat. Like most of the securitisation literature, she stresses the role of the speech act in the securitisation process. What is new is that Krapler raises the question of “whose security?” in the securitisation of peacebuilding, and the answer is clear: “western elites speak on behalf of the global south, which they aim to secure / securitise” (p. 41).

The next chapter, written by Witold Mucha, directly engages with the framing of the Libyan crisis between 2011 and 2014, which is an increasingly recurrent topic in the securitisation literature. The securitisation process which led to the enforcement of R2P in Libya evolved after the international intervention and the fall of Gadhafi’s regime, and the attention of the West eventually shifted from Libya because of other crises, such as ISIS, Ukraine, and Ebola.

The next case study is far more unconventional, because it is about an actor which is almost never investigated in this literature as a subject of statebuilding: The United States. Robin Lucke and Katharina McLarren highlight how apocalypse in its religious acceptance is exploited to securitise an issue. Many examples of the application of religion as a means of securitisation exist, with for instance the Second World War, portrayed as a fight against evil. During the invasion of Afghanistan by the USSR, the support for religious freedom fighters aimed at containing communism. Finally, the religious argument supports today the securitisation of transnational terrorism, by saying that the struggle against ISIL is in the name of the protection of religious minorities in the area. This chapter is highly valuable because of its originality, and because it perfectly aligns with the resurgent interest for religion in the academic literature on international relations.

Exploring another new trend in the securitisation literature, Kerstin Eppert and Mitja Sienknecht observe from an empirical perspective the desecuritisation process between the UNSC and UN missions. This chapter directly resonates with the first one and asks the question of how a UN mission ends. While securitisation might support the legitimisation of one’s own action (such as a UN mission), this chapter argues that the social dimension of the conflict must be restructured for desecuritisation to be successful.

The first part ends with two chapters about Cameroon as a Trusteeship. Thorsten Bonacker and Maria Ketzemrick show how both France and the UPC (the independence party in Cameroon) securitise each other. The former is portrayed in the UN’s trusteeship committee as repressive and waging a war in Cameroon,

whereas the latter is depicted as a terrorist group, against which violence is necessary to secure public order. It directly responds to Werner Distler and Maria Ketzmerick's chapter, which states that the threat of war and large-scale violence is recurrent in the discourse on protection.

The second part of *Securitization in Statebuilding and Intervention* is filled with the most interesting and original case studies, because of its very centre of interest: "internal statebuilding by domestic political actors who [...] aim to reshape the political orders of their respective societies" (p. 9). From an international perspective in the first part, the analysis thus moves on to a domestic lens, to study an overlooked topic in securitisation literature: securitisation dynamics within developing and weak states. It opens with a study of a double process that happened in Turkey between 2002 and 2015: the desecuritisation of religion, and the securitisation of secularism. The chapter rests on the premise that religion can be securitised, with faith being the object of survival, and according to a larger definition of securitisation than the one proposed by the Copenhagen School, with the idea of the construction of a regime of truth (p. 199).

This chapter highlights an issue that the reader might have had from the beginning with the book: the loose definition of securitisation. In this case study, the law on headscarf in France is dealt with in terms of a threat to French women's liberty, in a context of images of oppressed Afghan women. As such, French women's liberty is securitised according to the paper. But as described by the Copenhagen School, securitisation implies that the subject leave the political field to reach another level and justify exceptional measures, which has not been the case for French women's liberty. It is all the more ambiguous in this chapter because later on, Ahmed Davutoglu's policy of 'zero-problem policy towards neighbours' is described as a desecuritisation process. However, how Turkey's foreign policy was initially securitised is not presented; desecuritisation has to apply to a securitised subject, which means that it must have left the political area and be the subject of exceptional measures. At the end of the first part, the chapter on Cameroon also contains a broad definition of securitisation, which leads to consider everything under its scope. The implications of such a definition are far from the original concept, relating to a non-military subject which is militarised through a speech act.

Through its comparative perspective, the subsequent chapter is perhaps the most straightforward of the book. Richard Georgi explores how in Mexico human right's centres *Fray Bartolomé de las Casas* and *Enlace Civil* had different impacts on the peace process, while they were both part of the Zapatista movement. The main argument is that due to context, CSO identity, framework of action, two civil society organisations contribute to securitise and desecuritise an ethnic conflict.

"How Dynamics of Security contribute to Illiberal Statebuilding, the Case of Tadjikistan" directly engages with Richard Holbrook's thought when he raised the dilemma statebuilding faces when the process leads to the organisation of elections which are successfully contested by radicals or separatists. Thorsten Bonacker and Denis Liebetanz take the case of Tadjikistan to explore the role of statebuilding in the rise of illiberal democracies. Though the demonstration is interesting, this chapter involuntarily illustrates one of the weaknesses of the book that we highlighted earlier over the definition of securitisation, they define of securitisation as "the emergence of a dynamics of security or the securitisation of statebuilding" (p. 252). The problem here is that the emergence of a dynamics of security is by no means the definition

of securitisation, it is much broader, and leads to consider almost every strategy or rhetorical move as a securitisation move.

The closing chapter of the edited book is not a conclusion, but rather another case study. Ole Frahm argues through the case of South Sudan that securitisation has for a long time been a part of public policy in the developing world. When this process also involves international players such as in South Sudan, it leads to a blurring of the lines between security and development. This chapter stresses that governments in the South can use the dive of security by international players to stay in power, or even to strengthen their hold on power. While having a rhetoric based on development, leaders of weak states actually focus more on security, which lead to regime's security and neo-patrimonial practices.

Apart from their ties with the securitisation approach and the statebuilding literature, there is no real coherence between the case studies presented. This prevents us from drawing large scale conclusions, but gives an in-depth introduction to themes that are not usually explored in the academic literature about securitisation or statebuilding. Besides, bibliographies are well furnished with academic sources as well as first hand materials. Furthermore, many empirical analyses are major pressing issues, such as the Libyan case study, or the mobilisation of a religious rhetoric by the Obama administration against ISIL in 2013–2014. Overall the book appears to aggregate many high-quality articles or papers which were not originally written on this purpose. For instance, “securitisation” is not written the same way all through the book. More unsatisfactory is the repetition of the presentation of the Copenhagen School and the securitisation theory throughout.

Some findings of the book are truly inspiring for scholars who can draw parallels with their own geographic area. The blurring of the lines between security and development in South Sudan and its consequences described by Ole Frahm is, for instance, very similar to what is happening in the Sahel and how the G5 Sahel frames the problems in the area. Such comparison invites us to interrogate the potential extraversion strategies used by domestic actors, purposely securitising an issue to appeal to international support. While reading the introductory chapter and the one dealing with the UNSC, one could be frustrated in not finding more links with the DRC example of “robust peacekeeping” as an illustration of the securitisation of statebuilding; the operation is one of the largest, and longest-running, led by the UN, and has regularly been criticised, especially concerning its ‘liberal’ dimension (as Severine Autesserre illustrates about DRC for instance).