

BOOK REVIEWS

The State of Securitization Theory: A Review of *The Politics of Insecurity*

by Kapil Gupta

The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU. By Jef Huysmans. London: Routledge, 2006. 191 pp. \$120, hardcover. ISBN 0-415-36124-9.

Distinctions exist between European and American academic discussions of security as a subfield of international relations.¹ Jef Huysmans' *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* is a compelling introduction to current trends in European security studies. The book also has relevance beyond the academy. For security practitioners, *The Politics of Insecurity* offers an opportunity for critical self-awareness.

Through careful critique, Huysmans advances the Copenhagen School's theory of "securitization." His explanation of "security framing" describes how government and public approaches to security are generated, the contextual conceptualization of security itself, and how these definitions correspond with governmental and administrative security techniques. Following an initial theoretical exegesis, securitization theory is applied to an examination of immigration, asylum, and refugee policy in the context of the European Union.

Huysmans' securitization thesis emphasizes the constructed quality of security definitions by questioning what is being secured and the consequent governmental techniques of securitization qua policy responses to publicly perceived threats. Securitization theory illustrates how the rhetoric of security reifies political and policy solutions by invoking an imagined unity, threatened by outside forces: "Securitization constitutes political unity by means of placing it in an existentially hostile environment and asserting an obligation to free it from threat."²

Securitization itself can be interpreted as a technique or tool of governmental security practices. Taken to an extreme, the thesis could suggest that any particular security discourse can be reduced to "wag the dog" rhetoric in which interested

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government actors consciously construct public perceptions in order to justify particular solutions. Such deconstructions run the risk of reducing policymaking and governance to sophisticated conspiracies.

The more robust use of the securitization approach requires further theory. To reach beyond the limits of subject-object antinomy, securitization can instead be understood as a process where public and government actors are nearly co-equal constituting forces. Using Bourdieu's terms, the secured public and the securing state have different positions within a single field of security. Based on their locations, individuals (re)act from their distinct security habitus. When manifested through government institutions, the results are security policies, practices, and techniques.

Huysmans' treatment of immigration illustrates how political objectives are inherent within securitization. The governmental administration of immigration policy is superficially tantamount to border control; i.e. the identification and exclusion of criminals, terrorists, agents of hostile countries, and persons otherwise determined by law to be unwelcome. This construction of security focuses on specific types of threats and threatening actors, without explicitly examining what is being secured. As a consequence, the focus is on exclusion, which is necessarily reactive and instrumental.

This book inspires confidence in the intellectual project of security "widening." Although the policy implications of narrow security approaches (meaning kinetic, military, intelligence, and criminal type threats) seem straightforward and accessible, a narrow security orientation fails to address satisfactorily the field of threats even defined within these narrow objectives.

There are instrumental benefits to security widening. Narrow security frameworks fail to satisfactorily anticipate threats germinated from within, such as disaffected domestic extremists, hate-based groups, religious radicals, eco-terrorists, et al. By widening security definitions to include the "softer" non-traditional typologies of security (viz. individual human security, socio-cultural security, economic security), broader networks of causality, extremist motives, and agency can more fully be theorized, and therefore be potentially better understood and addressed.

Huysmans does not intend to provide a comparative analysis of the US and Europe. Nonetheless, this discussion serves as a conceptual mirror for understanding the challenges for US-European relations in the context of current geo-political securitization projects. The US and Europe ostensibly share broad security goals: the search for peaceful coexistence between liberal democracy and Islam, maintaining first-world standards of living, and supporting humanitarian and development progress in other regions of the world.

Despite these common goals, European and American cultural differences and related historical trajectories toward current institutional arrangements suggest that the contexts and outcomes of securitization projects will necessarily be different. Precisely because of the EU project and the related conceptual and practical challenges of post-national/trans-national institutional arrangements, the European

socio-political experience and associated intellectual foment better foreshadows the future of geo-political postmodernity. Thus, this genre of European security literature provides a means to better comprehend differences in the security orientation of the US and European states.

Deploying securitization theory as a means of understanding contrasting policy solutions for given security projects (e.g. Afghanistan, for NATO) can fill the conceptual void masked by certain diplomatic terms of art, such as “national will,” “leadership,” “consensus,” “willingness,” etc. Accordingly, securitization can be used as a theory both of domestic security policy and international relations.

While the theoretical dimensions of this book are very well developed, some potentially interesting dimensions of immigration and securitization in the EU are not discussed. Huysmans successfully argues that particular notions of political community are the referent objects of securitization, but he does not go into great detail when examining specific instances which make this theoretical move so potentially rewarding. For instance, Huysmans does not address the securitization dimensions of Turkey’s ambition to join the EU. The conditions of once-colonized minority communities in given EU member states are also not discussed. Although “whither Europe?” is not a question this book asks, Huysmans does provide the means for readers to reach their own conclusions.

The Politics of Insecurity presents intellectual challenges for both academics and practitioners of international relations. Securitization theory is a tool for expanding conceptual options and reassessing old modes of thought and action. As a consequence, even the possibility of becoming more secure merits critical examination: advancement may simply be the exchange of a known security issue for phenomena that have yet to be securitized.

Notes

¹Ole Wæver, “Securitisation: Taking stock of a research programme in Security Studies” February 2003; draft. (Unpublished manuscript, available at <http://www.iiss.ee/files/7/CopSchool2003.doc>).

²Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006), 50.

Coping with Democracy

by Andreea Florescu

Democracy in Question: Democratic Openness in a Time of Political Closure. By Alan Keenan. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. 238 pp. \$21.95, paperback. ISBN 0-804-73865-3.

We are (almost) all stockholders now, and if not stockholders, then homeowners, polluters, overconsumers, racists, sexists, and/or homophobes, enjoying consciously or unconsciously the benefits of American, or first-world, hegemony. ...we are all just tiny cogs in huge systems we can't control and that render our personal preferences and good intentions largely irrelevant.¹

This quotation from Alan Keenan's *Democracy in Question* expressively describes the psychological and political predicament of the average citizen in democratic societies. Citizens of hyper-individualized liberal democracies are at the same time empowered and enslaved, bullies and victims. Keenan's poignant and timely analysis of the paradoxes and difficulties of contemporary democracy attempts to restore the potential of democracy to be the rule of the people, while acknowledging the cynicism and lack of democratic participation of our times. In a critical reading of texts by Castoriadis, Rousseau, Benhabib, Arendt, Laclau, Mouffe, and Sandel, the author asserts the inherent imperfection and incompleteness of democracy and proposes a social mechanism of coping with this seemingly unacceptable truth.

The book's title is indicative of its contents: the author analyzes the question of democracy defined as perpetual questioning, or institutionalized uncertainty.² Keenan defines democracy in terms of its constitutive openness, as a system whose *raison d'être* is debate itself. Democracy's radical openness poses a double threat to its existence. First, because democracy is by definition ever revisable, its constituents are free to stray from its rules and recreate the system under a less-than-democratic guise. Its fragility, then, imposes the need for institutional safeguards for its basic tenets. In other words, the openness of democracy must be preserved through closure.

Having established the central paradox of democracy, Keenan dedicates the core of his book to critiques of several democratic theories, pinpointing other

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expressions of the imperfection of the system. He finds both Castoriadis and Rousseau guilty of not reconciling the coming into being of the democratic community with the values of democracy. Rousseau's argument is circular: the (public) individual enters a social contract for the common good, but it is the social contract that brings the public individual into being. In order to solve the paradox, Rousseau introduces the "legislator," a non-democratic, albeit legitimate and necessary figure, who makes democratic claims in the name of the people prior to their becoming a party to the social contract. Keenan deems this a feeble attempt by Rousseau to resolve a fundamental inconsistency of his theory.

Next, the author delves into an elegant analysis of Arendt's concepts of mutual promising, freedom (as plurality), and authority. Arendt views democracy as the result of mutual promising reiterated ad infinitum. Mutual promising creates the potential for new beginnings (which amount to freedom) and for the remembering and self-perpetuation of freedom. Authority (in the form of constitutions, etc.) is the promise (institutionalization) of promising, a necessary curtailment of freedom. Keenan finds fault with Arendt's attempt to separate freedom from authority and sovereignty (i.e. individual, non-pluralistic will) completely and claims that freedom is always impure.

The author also critiques Laclau and Mouffe's work on radical and plural democracy, which nevertheless seems to inform his own understanding of democracy to a great extent. In this view of democracy, the contingent, conflictual, and pluralistic spirit of democracy is affirmed rather than avoided. The authors embrace the fragmentation of contemporary individual sensitivities, which are unified across class and group interests. In democracy, individual (and hence autonomous) interests are expressed successfully only when grouped according to equivalent needs—through common action. Though equivalence and autonomy diverge, they are never brought to completion and, hence, coexist in democracy. Thus, the divide between individual liberalism and communitarianism is an artificial one. According to Keenan, this theory is a powerful description of the way democracy works, but fails to show how its mechanism is negotiated—this is central to his concern about the state of democracy today. In order to participate in the community, individuals (who otherwise have conflicting opinions and interests) must surrender important parts of their identities. Moreover, embracing the imperfections and contingency of radical plural democracy makes it less palatable for those in search of an ideal system of governance. How, then, can citizens of democracies cope with these difficulties?

The final chapter of *Democracy in Question* offers the most rewarding part of Keenan's argument. After deploring the state of American democracy (marred by cynicism, divisiveness, malaise, and lack of a collective identity and participation), the author reaffirms the existence of a false dichotomy between individual liberalism and communitarianism and rejects the moral judgments made against one or the other. Liberals and conservatives who stand firmly behind each of these views not only demonize the other side, but also alienate the non-aligned citizens who thus regard

politics as a power struggle and withdraw from the public sphere. Keenan argues that the moralism associated with these positions (and moralism in general) is rigid and hence profoundly anti-democratic.

Instead, he calls for citizens to participate in democracy without nominal judgments regarding the common good, or about which position (Right or Left) is preferable. He urges the public to accept the fundamental ambiguity and incompleteness of democracy. Embracing an amoral version of participation in an imperfect system eliminates the negative emotions and cynicism associated with the current practice of democracy. Citizens will cease to feel angry at one another, guilty for the pitfalls of democracy, or helpless as pawns in an alienating mechanism. Through an exercise in introspection and compassion, they will learn to understand that what they share is not the abstract Rousseauesque “common good,” but rather the ambiguity and lack of closure of democracy, a common inability to control the direction of democracy—which must remain uncertain, contested, and open. Democracy does not bring people together in harmony, but through the shared experience of fractures. It is, as Arendt would have it, only a promise.

Alan Keenan undertakes the imperative task of salvaging the theoretical grounds for the rule of the people at a critical time for the practice of democracy everywhere, but particularly in its traditional strongholds. At once rigorous and graceful in his writing, Keenan devotes the largest part of *Democracy in Question* to sophisticated theoretical discussions, which may, however, alienate the reader who is not well versed in political philosophy. The first and last chapters provide critical, if succinct, assessments of the alarming weakness of democracy today, alongside creative, simple solutions for strengthening it. Still, Keenan’s intention is not to write a “how to” manual of democracy. Rather, he posits crucial questions and offers vital answers about the meaning and direction of democracy in a time when it is, indeed, in question. Keenan’s award-winning book is an elegant, provoking, and, above all, urgent lesson in civics.

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¹ Alan Keenan, *Democracy in Question: Democratic Openness in a Time of Political Closure* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 183.

² The definition of democracy brought forth by Keenan is not new. Among others, Adam Przeworski famously notes: “Democracy is a system of ruled open-endedness, or organized uncertainty.” Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13.

Michael Kevane's *Women and Development in Africa: How Gender Works*

By Jean Githinji

Women and Development in Africa: How Gender Works. By Michael Kevane. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004. 244 pp. \$19.95, paperback. ISBN 1-58826-238-3.

Michael Kevane's *Women and Development in Africa: How Gender Works* explores various aspects of economic development in Africa as related to gender dynamics. Kevane analyzes land rights, labor rights, investment in education, gendered treatment of children, micro-financing and women, and the economics of marriage in African agrarian societies. He begins with an introduction to the economic situation in Africa followed by an overview on the origins of gendered structures in those countries. Kevane then explores precisely the economics of land tenure rights, labor rights, and the institution of marriage. He devotes the final chapters to the socialization of African children in highly gendered structures that have an impact on the choices they make as they reach adulthood. An evaluation of some practical solutions to the predicament of African women and their abilities to change the gendered economic constructs concludes the book.

The exploration of gender interactions in priority areas of African agrarian societies must include an analysis of both land rights and labor allocation, and Kevane's development on land tenure rights reflects much of what has been known to be the nature of property rights in Africa—a tense exchange between individualization and communalization of land rights. For women in highly patriarchal societies especially, this tension adds a layer of complexity to the idea of ownership. The informal structures that sustain labor allocation methods in these societies, Kevane finds, also place restrictions on activities of women and seem to continually undermine their economic attainment.

An exploration of the economics of marriage represents another gendered structure that, in African societies, sets “the space of feasible action that persons might take,” through determination of bargaining power within the household.¹ Therefore, the quality of a marriage can be surmised by its ability to sway bargaining

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power to one's advantage. Indeed, bargaining power is of immense importance to women in Africa, as it determines outcomes that may, or may not, "result in inefficient allocation of productive resources."²

Due to its current relevance, Kevane's analysis of third-party (NGOs, private institutions, advocacy groups, etc.) initiatives designed to change the economic status of women by providing opportunities to earn their own income, and acquire private property, deserves mention. Consistent with the current state of knowledge on the impact of micro-finance, and similar programs, on the status of women in Africa, Kevane observes that shifting entrenched biases against women requires the establishment of sustainable cooperative efforts. For instance, in micro-finance ventures, the simple provision of liquid capital does not, in itself, shift the balance in societal interactions. However, by increasing the bargaining power of women in the home, and decreasing discriminatory practices in business, these programs have afforded women a greater degree of self-determination in both economic and social decision-making.

Perhaps Kevane's most striking insights have to do with the connections between economic structures and the resultant gendered social interaction patterns. Kevane presents a thorough exploration on the "origins" of informal social structures and the endurance of such structures in African agrarian societies. It is interesting that he considers the economic structures as more or less the determinants of the choices that men and women can make, for this possibly implies that changes in the economic structures should/could change the kinds of social patterns exhibited. As women become more important stakeholders in their homes and societies, the kinds of choices they are "allowed" to make will change. Accordingly, resulting social interactions would change form and would not necessarily favor one gender over the other. Even if the relations remain partially gendered, the gross inequality and bias against women would not be observed. It must be noted, though, that conclusions related to structural change are often the sum result of, both deliberate acts, and the unintended consequences of individual decision-making. Kevane does highlight, however, that change in economic standing for women may not necessarily result in equality, as the nature of economics must allow for inequality in some form.

According to Kevane, mere social reengineering is inadequate, as most informal structures require organic regeneration over time. Alterations in the kinds of choices individuals make can lead to structural changes; "if just enough people change their behavior, then through their spontaneous choices a new economic structure comes to quickly replace the old."³

It must be noted, however, that the author tends to focus on rural societies in African communities without considering urban societies and the nature of gendered interactions in such a context. Kevane's work would be useful in evaluating certain aspects of urban culture and the nature of gender dynamics observed in ownerships rights, labor interaction, and modern perceptions of marriage. Such an exploration could provide an insight into the kinds of impact modern economic systems have on

the status of women and gender interactions, as well as how these interactions contribute to the nature of development

This book is quite useful in providing an economic model to gender dynamics and their role in development; and those interested in a “purely” economic perspective should find this piece especially instructive. The extensive economic modeling does require rudimentary understanding of such economic theory. One of the more appealing qualities of this book is that it builds on previous research in a comprehensive way. The blending of anthropology, gender studies, and economics, is an alluring quality and proves useful in building a good understanding of African societal relations. While it is easy to get lost in the details of some of the developments, by keeping the broader topic in mind, readers will find a very informative and well-developed book.

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¹ Michael Kevane, *Women and Development in Africa: How Gender Works* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 29.

² *Ibid.*, 122.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

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