

BOOK REVIEW

Claudia Aradau, Jef Huysmans, Andrew Neal and Nadine Voelkner eds., *Critical Security Methods: New Frameworks for Analysis*: (New York: Routledge, 2015), 214.

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The book, *Critical Security Methods: New Frameworks of Analysis* tackles the issue of methods in Critical Security Studies (CSS). CSS differs from positivist approach in international relations and traditional security studies in many of its basic assumptions. Central to CSS is the assumption that security threats and insecurities are not simply objects 'out there' to be studied or problems to be solved. It has also widened the scope of security to include subject matter as diverse as environmental security, migration, health and disease, economy and security issues.

The book takes a bold approach to methods by reconceptualising the relationship between theory, methods and practice. It argues that methods are not just tools to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Instead, it proposes a more experimental interplay between theory, method and practice. It departs from other research techniques in international relations and CSS by dispensing with the cascading approach to theory, methodology and methods that relegates the latter to the bottom of the research hierarchy. The authors reconceptualise method as practice. It also approaches methods as experimentation through the concept of methodological bricolage. They argue that to practice methods is to engage in a free and experimental interplay between theory, method and practice. The analytical movement need not be top to bottom, from theory to methodology to method, or from abstract to concrete, but a more experimental move to and fro, of improvisation and bricolage. The authors turn methodology into a way of experimenting with concepts, methods and empirical objects. Bricolage focuses on experimenting with combining theories, concepts, methods

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and data in different ways to bring out relations that would otherwise remain invisible.

Their insight is that the security practices that CSS studies are methods in themselves. They further argue that method should be questioned as practice and as part of the empirical world that the CSS studies. CSS is not about studying security problems but about security problematisations, or the ways things come to be treated as security problems.

Another insight that the book provides is the political life of methods. They argue that methods do not come from nowhere, they have a political life. It means that instituted scholarly methods tend to reproduce dominant power relations and legitimating frameworks that sustain them. So their concept of political life of methods draws attention to the role that methods can play in challenging and changing dominant productions of security and insecurity. The book highlights the reflexivity about power relations and habitus that methods produce and sustain. In turn, critical security methods raise questions about power relations that shape and are shaped by methodological practice.

The chapters offer innovative insights into critical security methods such as mapping, discourse and materiality, visibility, proximity and distance, genealogy and collaboration. Chapter 2 on mapping explores distinct critical methodological mapping tools and vocabularies for studying the spatiality of security practices. It draws attention towards politics inherent in mapping. It convincingly argues that maps are not mirrors of reality but rather ‘mobile engines’ that distort and co-constitute the outside world. Chapter 3 on discourse and materiality suggests making relationality instrumental in analysing discourse and materiality. Drawing on concepts, inspired by critical scholars such as Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett, the authors deploy them in empirical sites such as biometric technology, the performativity of drug classifications to devise a framework for critical analysis of discourses and materialities of security.

The chapter on ‘Visibility’ provides insights in analysing visibility in the form of still or moving images, signs, symbols, charts

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and graphs that play a role in security practice. The major works of CSS have focused on discursive rather than visual for analysis. The authors add value by highlighting that the visual aspects of meaning making and discourse have an importance that the written or spoken artefacts do not. They argue for a broader methodological focus on regimes of visualization, the multiple meaning they can have and the ambivalent nature of visual strategies.

The chapters on proximity and distance draw upon growing trend of ethnographic work and weigh the merits and demerits of proximity and distance in research. They draw attentions towards distance from security practices and the problematic of understanding it through representation rather than experience and engagement. They further highlight the importance of engaging with situated practices through fieldwork in order to understand and situate the prevailing orders of security. The chapters argue that mediating proximity and distance is a defining issue of critical research.

The chapter on “Genealogy” looks at how to research security through historical raw material. It looks at genealogy as a method for analysing problematisations, their emergence, the strategic needs they respond to, the political and epistemological struggles and the reorganisation of power relations they entail.

Overall, the book provides many insights into methods in CSS. It adds value to the CSS by looking at methods not as bridges between theory and practice but are practices that intervene and interfere in sites of security and insecurity that researcher seek to study. Methods are not detached tools of knowledge extraction but work interactively with the security practices CSS researches. The book demonstrates its unique approach by implementing it on many practical security sites. The book indeed adds to the literature on CSS in general and its methodology in particular. It is a valuable resource for students and scholars of CSS and International Relations.