Salvatore Palidda (ed.): Governance of Security and Ignored Insecurities in Contemporary Europe

Review by Thierry Balzacq
University of Namur, Belgium and LSE London

The scope of this book is straightforward, though the treatment of its topic takes surprising paths; put simply, its main thesis is that security governance, as it is currently practised, is producing a range of direct and indirect effects, which are termed here as “ignored insecurities”. The book sets out to examine how ignored insecurities function, how they are interconnected, and what ought to be done about them. In this sense, the volume falls within the broad tradition of critical approaches to security studies, striving to blend, as it were, a poststructuralist diagnosis with a Frankfurt School normative cure, that is, through a sustained emphasis upon recognition and emancipation of those who suffer from marginalisation and injustice.

The editor, Salvatore Palidda, has organised the volume around three parts, with a total of eleven chapters and a general introduction. Part I charts both the material and ideational changes that underlie the rise of “ignored insecurities”. Part II contains empirical snapshots of ignored insecurities and focuses on some specific aspects, moving from the “decriminalization of business law” to refugees’ deteriorating status in Europe, through urban security, and the Court’s discriminatory treatment of cases brought to its attention and the securitization of Roma. Part III, which closes the volume, has two chapters, each featuring an instance of how ignored insecurities can cripple society at large. It is not entirely clear why these two chapters had to be set apart from those of Part II, in which cases of ignored insecurities have been addressed, including a discussion of the actors involved, the underlying mechanisms, and the consequences.

What, then, are ignored insecurities? This concept shapes the volume, which brings together different ideas and cases on the consequences of security governance, with chapter 2 providing a framework of sorts devoted to the analysis of this concept. However, the definition, or what comes close to one, is found in the general introduction. Ignored insecurities are insecurities that are concealed, neglected or kept out of the public’s gaze, in order to promote and safeguard private interests. In addition to undermining the capacity of individuals to live the life they want, ignored insecurities alter trust among individuals on the one hand and between individuals and institutions on the other. In short, ignored insecurities are anti-emancipatory because they can raise human security concerns.
The book subscribes to a causal argument, according to which ignored insecurities are the results of a neoliberal turn in security governance. In the volume neoliberalism is a “total political act” in a Maussian inspiration. According to this volume, a determining characteristic of a neoliberal mode of governance is greed, as its main aim is “prosperity hic et nunc of the small minority of dominants, who become increasingly rich, and no prosperity, that is, no future, for the greater majority of humanity” (p. 3). Whilst there is considerable variety in the processes through which neoliberalism supports ignored insecurity, the book emphasizes three: the weakening of legal constraints on the business sector in chapters 6, 8, and 11); the tightening of rules against minorities, which stands here for all the most vulnerable groups in society (cf. chapters 7, 9, and 10); and complicitous interactions among the ruling elites (cf. chapters 2 and 5). But what eventually enables ignored insecurities to thrive is the apathy of its victims. It appears here that the argument takes a Marxist nuance, with cases on resilience (chapters 4 and 5) extending this view, but locating it within a wider social context, in an attempt to reclaim it.

In this volume, enquiry into ignored insecurities serves a normative purpose; that is, cultivating a genuine res publica, wherein democratic rule of law thrives. The contributors develop an innovative approach to security that coheres with both state’s security and individual well-being, with, individuals as the primary referent objects of security. To the degree that it emphasizes rule of law and concerns with individuals’ emancipation, the book can be described as a work of critical theory, in particular of the kind developed by Ken Booth in his colossal work, *Theory of World Security* (2007).

In acknowledging to the book’s contents and merits, we must not lose sight of two main problems. The first has to do with the main concept of the book – ignored insecurities. To the extent that this concept threads it way through the book’s chapters, a more serious engagement with it would have been helpful. Sometimes, “ignored” means neglected security issues; at other times, “ignored” refers to concealed security problems. Furthermore, chapter 3’s attempts to map forms of in/ insecurities does not resolve, but actually compounds, the problem as it introduces new distinctions, such as between objective and subjective securities. It seems that ignored insecurities cover a broad range of issues, and the book deals with some of these. Parts II and III are specifically concerned with these “aspects” of ignored insecurities. However, and this is the second shortcoming of the book, the rationale behind the organization of the book is not always explicit. Elements of Part I or II could have been dealt with – without affecting the book’s flow – in Part III, and vice versa. More importantly, however, is the categorization of ignored insecurities. For instance, criteria employed to consider a given type of ignored insecurity remains unclear. At times ignored insecurities seem to be fashioned by identifiable agents, which raises questions about intentionality; at other times it seems like these forms of insecurities are either emergent phenomena of world politics or indirect effects of the way neoliberalism operates. Yet, if this were the case, it would indicate that ignored insecurities are not necessary features of neoliberalism, but deviant instances of its working. Of these possibilities, however, the book says next to nothing. In other words, the volume’s indictment of neoliberalism would be stronger if it had presented what it means by neoliberalism and seriously accounted for alternative readings of security governance today.
This volume is published as part of a series that primarily welcomes advanced research on criminology. Hence, it might be worth considering whether this is an appropriate intellectual space for a volume on ignored insecurities. It also makes me wonder whether setting a book of a cross-disciplinary nature within a neat, specialized series does not risk isolating it from some of its main audiences, namely sociologists, political scientists, IR scholars, and perhaps lawyers. Be that as it may, the book is strong in challenging disciplinary boundaries. It will certainly be of interest to those who work on new approaches to security, security governance and the relationship between knowledge and security. Furthermore, because the book’s empirical sections host a diversity of cases, it is likely to attract the attention of scholars who work within these specific fields and who might be interested in the extent to which their subject matter is likely to be affected by the changing nature of governance. In sum, Palidda and his colleagues have compiled a book that raises new questions and provides some promising, if radical, answers as to how to address them. On various occasions, the contributors state that the book is primarily programmatic, that is, its main results are yet to come. Therefore, a more comprehensive assessment of the project would have to bide its time. However, it would be interesting to see whether future research on ignored securities would be able to offer enduring insights, forged in the foundry of this book.