



Title: The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU

Author: Jef Huysmans

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Reviewed by: Dr. Klejda Mulaj

Senior Researcher

Gulf Research Center

Security literature has grown proportionally with the debates about widening and deepening the subject in order to include referents other than military ones which characterised security literature during the cold war (arms control, nuclear deterrence the role of conventional arms, military alliances etc.) and look beyond the state as the main referent object of security. Hence since the early 1990s security analysts have argued continuously for or against moving beyond inter-state relations and including security questions such as population movements and environment degradation (this is what is known as the ‘widening debate’). Simultaneously with this debate run the debate about the deepening of the concept of security which challenged the state-centric nature of security studies by introducing non-state units, such as individuals, humanity, and society, as primary referent objects.

While widening and deepening debates have played an important role in opening up the field of security studies they have not necessarily resolved the question as to what does security exactly mean. Huysmans argues that as long as the logic of security remains fundamentally contested – that is, no logic is able to institutionally dominate the field of security knowledge in international relations, as arguably the logic of national security did during the Cold War – the question of the meaning of security will remain a contentious issue. Furthermore, he thinks that the kernel of this debate is not a contest of widening threats and referent objects, as it has been presented. Instead, more important is the competition between different security rationalities that is played out in the disputes over widening. This book suggests that the politics of security studies have been a politics of insecurity framing rather than the often more explicitly visible politics of expanding security sectors.

The lead question of this work is: ‘How does one conceptualise the politics of insecurity as a contested process of framing political and social relations in security terms?’ The starting point of Huysmans’ analysis is the assumption that insecurities emerge from framing certain developments and events in a security way. Security practice makes phenomena intelligible as insecurities and thus as objects of security policy. Insecurity is an outcome of a process of framing that integrates social and political relations on the basis of security rationality.

Insecurity is a politically and socially constructed phenomenon. As the author argues, even if one accepts that the arrival of large groups of outsiders can be pretty disruptive for the community of the established, the definition of the situation and the way one tries to govern it depends on political and social processes. The more important question for him, however, is how to conceptualise this political and social rendering of insecurity. How is 'insecurity' to be conceptualised? What is at stake and contested in the politics of insecurity? A common-sense answer would be to say that insecurity refers to threats or dangers to someone. The problem for security knowledge is then first of all one of threat definition: what threatens whom?

Defining certain events or developments as threats, dangers, or risks is an important aspect of framing the domain of insecurity. For instance, the events of 11 September 2001 are a prototypical security event precisely because they were immediately politicised as an exceptional and global threat to the United States and the Western world more generally. They led to urgent introduction of emergency legislation that reinforced powers of the executive to the disadvantage of the legislative powers, a rhetoric of a 'war on terrorism', and to the large-scale use of military power. Moreover, the act of violence of 9/11 transformed the global security agenda, not only catapulting terrorism to the top of the agenda but also making the control of the free movement of people top security priority.

Thus, threat definition is at the heart of security framing. Securing works on the basis of 'insecuring'. Security and insecurity are not opposites but two sides of the security framing coin. Securitisation, therefore, is characterised by a circular logic of defining and modulating hostile factors for the purpose of countering them politically and administratively.

This book is located in the wake of the linguistic turn in security studies. It works in line with the idea that language plays a central role in the modulation of security domains.

The author adheres to the view that policies and the political significance of events depend heavily on the language through which they are politicised. Before an event can mobilise security policies and rhetoric, an event needs to be conceived of as a question of insecurity before it can attract security policies and rhetoric and such notion requires sustenance by discursively reiterating its threatening qualities. A domain of insecurity is then not simply constructed through policy reactions to a threat but first of all by discourses of danger that reframe an event into a condition of insecurity. Language does not simply describe an event but it also mobilises certain meanings that modulate them in rather specific ways. For instance, security discourse that links labour migration to leaking borders and the loss of national identity tends to mobilise emergency measures and to invest fear or unease in a policy issue.

The concept of 'politics of insecurity' in the title of the book refers to contestations of the modalities of security framing and their political and professional legitimacy. Huysmans states that the politics of insecurity encompasses conflicts in decision-making and implementation (i.e., policy) and struggles for the capacity to define the modalities of security framing and to effectively question or assert their legitimacy (i.e., politics).

The book proposes a bifurcated concept of the politics of insecurity in so far as politics is both political spectacle and technocratic. As spectacle politics consists of the development and circulation of symbols in public contests of policies and power positions. In the spectacle contestants evoke crisis situations, enemies, dramatic developments, political myths as well as political rituals such as elections to justify both their power position and the specific policy proposals they support. As spectacle the politics of security framing is primarily a publicised discursive or symbolic process of seeking and contesting political legitimacy. Differences between political visions are asserted on the basis of evoking fears and emergencies and by presenting credible methods of dealing with them so as to reassure that it is possible to control insecurities. A technocratic concept of politics, on the other hand, draws attention to the importance of technology (i.e., hardware, trained skill, and expert knowledge) and professionals of security (i.e., people who claim security knowledge and do 'security work' on a daily basis). Technocratic politics relies less on public visibility and more on asserting expertise,

institutionalised routines and available technological hardware. Technocratic interpretations of politics implies also the importance of institutional community and longer-term and incremental change to the analysis of security-framing. Lobbying and bureaucratic in-fighting between different security services are among the most visible indications of technocratic power struggles.

Technocratic framing has been central to the Europeanisation of internal security. The tension between technocratic processes and public politics is a central element of modern forms of government and politics. However, the tension between technocratic regulation and democratic legitimisation has been a central concern in the European integration process since its inception. Huysmans suggests that in the last two to three decades this tension has very visibly entered the wider and intense public debates on the democratic deficit of the European Union.

If politics is to a considerable extent technocratic, security knowledge plays an important role in security framing. The politics of security knowledge are thus an important part of the politics of insecurity. The book contains a number of reflections on the political nature and significance of security knowledge. Specifically, producing knowledge and training people into a particular kind of security knowledge can bear on the forms of knowledge that are available in the technocratic arena. It also can have an impact on the kind of security knowledge that can credibly legitimate political positions in the political spectacle.

The author introduces a preference for normalising insecurity rather than emphasising its exceptionality. He opines that one should analyse security questions through an analytical framework that combines a pluralist notion of politics with a notion of politics of everyday life. The former would locate securitising practices within a political struggle that includes a wide variety of positions and visions. The latter would represent security concern in the context of a life world in which insecurities are one of many aspects that concern people. Such a framing of security practice challenges a form of security studies that dramatizes security questions as the ultimate questions of survival. In highlighting the extreme existential dimension of insecurities, this form of security studies produces knowledge that tends to sustain calls for exceptional politics. The pluralist and everyday concept of politics relocates security questions within a wider and less dramatic life world. This position does not imply that security questions are necessarily illegitimate or unimportant. Indeed, this notion of politics does not ignore security issues or questions the legitimacy of analysing certain events as security events. Huysmans' argument is rather one of letting security issues emerge in a form of security analysis that de-dramatises them and makes them less exceptional.

Jef Huysmans has opened up the whole area of societal security to a deeper and more detailed scrutiny than it has been given before. He has emphasised how different an issue such as migration is depending on whether it is framed in humanitarian or security terms. Framing refuge as a humanitarian question introduces different relations to refugees than framing it as a security question. While the former allows for compassion or for relating to the refugee as a rights holder, the latter sustains fear of refugees and policies of territorial and administrative exclusion.

Huysmans shows that migration has been made central to EU identity politics by being framed as a security issue built around fear of difference, rather as it was a few decades ago, being mainly a matter of employment and economic policy. Consequently, he has exposed a contradiction between the overall liberalising image of the EU, and its relatively repressive policy towards migration. Emphasising the sociological nature of security analysis, this book advances a political-sociology theoretical understanding in security studies while at the same time making a substantial empirical contribution.