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Book Review
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Critical Security Studies and World Politics

by Ken Booth (ed). *Critical Security Studies Series*. Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner, 2005, ix+323 pages, Index. £39.95 ISBN 1-55587-825-3 Hb., £14.95 ISBN 1-55587-826-1 Pb.

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What is critical security studies (CSS)? CSS is a self-consciously new and heterodox approach to theorizing about security issues that emerged in the 1990s. Rejecting the largely (neo-)realist and statist mindset of Cold War-era security studies, it aims at both theoretical re-conceptualizations of what 'security' is, as well as empirical investigations of whether conventional security-enhancing practices actually deliver. Additionally, CSS has served an important function by broadening the scope of the debate within security studies via the introduction of postpositivist perspectives (feminist, postcolonial, neo-Marxist, constructivist, sociological, and postmodernist, amongst others).

Ken Booth, a self-confessed 'fallen realist', has long been one of the pioneers of CSS and contributed to the field's seminal work, Keith Krause and Michael Williams' 1997 *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*. In many ways, Booth's recent edited volume *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* sees itself as the successor to Krause and Williams' tome, providing a fresh assessment of the impact, strengths, and likely future directions of the CSS project. Assisting Booth in this endeavour is an impressive cast of contributors, including Andrew Linklater, Richard Wyn Jones, Steve Smith, Jan Jindy Pettman, and Hayward Alker.

The book can be read on two levels. The first is as a clear introduction to the main features of the CSS project and a caustic attack on orthodox approaches to security. Newcomers to CSS will find three chapters particularly helpful: Booth's introduction ('Critical Explorations'); Smith's literature review ('The Contested Concept of Security'); and Linklater's contribution on 'Political Community and Human Security'. Taken together, these chapters strongly suggest that individuals – not states – should be the referent objects of security analyses, that political realism fails to offer either a satisfactory theory or practice of security, and that systems of security based on the insecurity of others are unsustainable. Instead, the authors argue for the development of new forms of political organization which depend upon dialogue rather than strategic action, and suggest that emancipation can be a crucial stepping stone towards greater security for all.

Emancipation is thought of as the removal of structural barriers which either impede certain groups from total political participation or create situations of insecurity for individuals. Emancipation having gained a rather chequered reputation over the years, two entire chapters are dedicated to defending it (by Alker and Wyn Jones, respectively). Interestingly, the two authors separately set out to find common ground between postmodernists sceptical of emancipation and heirs of the Frankfurt School tradition much more amenable to it (the latter including several of the volume's contributors). They both argue that any attempt at progressive critique necessarily involves some understanding of emancipation, even if postmodernists reject 'Emancipation (with a capital E)'. To support this assertion, they note that Jacques Derrida eventually came to support 'the great classical discourse of emancipation', and both cite the same Derrida quote: 'I believe that there is an enormous amount to do today for emancipation.' But this sanguine statement partly misses the point. The Derrida passage goes on to say '... even if I would not wish to inscribe the discourse of emancipation into a teleology' and it is precisely of holding onto a teleological and totalizing view of history and progress that postmodernists accuse the Frankfurt School. Booth, for instance, at one point writes that 'emancipation... offers a theory of progress for society, and gives a politics of hope for common humanity', statements which would likely make Derrida and other postmodernists queasy. More work remains to be done in this area to reconcile postmodernists and

Frankfurt School critical theorists, although Alker and Wyn Jones do succeed in laying a promising foundation.

The second way of reading the volume is, according to Booth, to 'go beyond CSS as a *body of critical knowledge* and outline a specific *critical theory of security*' (italics in original). Bizarrely, for Booth, devising a theory of critical security largely seems to involve deciding which subsections of CSS ought to be included and which excluded from the theory. Thus, in his strongly-worded concluding chapter, he lists a hodgepodge of approaches to security he finds useful and promising (e.g. the Frankfurt School; neo-Gramscian/neo-Marxist traditions; the work of cosmopolitans such as David Held; the Peace Studies community; the World Order School; and historical sociology). However, he does 'not believe [the following] offer the basis for a convincing theory of security': postmodernism/poststructuralism ('characterized by... obscurantism, relativism, and faux radicalism'); the Copenhagen School ('state-centric, discourse-dominated, and conservative'); feminism (too broad, although gender 'must be integral to a critical theory of security'); and constructivism ('it does not in itself give us a politically relevant ontology or praxiological orientation').

Booth is careful to pepper his conclusion with caveats and cautions, and twice issues calls for pluralism. Still, the underlying metaphor here is not so much the *erection* of a new theory of critical security on the foundations of CSS, and certainly not a *synthesis* of competing strands of CSS, but rather *sifting* through CSS to separate out the gold from the dross. Defenders of the targeted approaches will find the dismissals unfair and unhelpful (the Copenhagen School is written off in a swift six sentences, and Booth's treatments of both constructivism and postmodernism are surprisingly unsophisticated). Additionally, critics could point to the fact that several of the volume's other contributors rely upon the discarded approaches, which suggests that they may indeed be of some use; for instance, various contributors rely upon the securitization theory developed by the Copenhagen School.

Why, then, does Booth (and to a lesser degree Smith) feel the need to draw such fixed lines in the sand of the CSS community? Booth defends his totalising moves as a necessary preparation for the larger battle with the foe of orthodox security studies. Explicitly rejecting the heterogeneous nature of Krause and Williams' earlier CSS text, Booth argues that 'it is impossible to base a research strategy or political activities on an eclectic collection of perspectives that share little except rejecting neorealism... I do not share at this point the worry of Krause and Williams about invoking "a new orthodoxy"; I do however fear the consequences of perpetuating old orthodoxies in a fast-moving political landscape, [the price of which] is paid, daily, in the death, disease, poverty, and oppression of millions'. However, not only is Booth's assumption that unanimity is required for the development of research and political agendas a questionable one, he also undermines his own theory with the hegemonic manner in which he develops it. Does a critical theory of security committed to Habermasian notions of dialogue not owe more to rival approaches than outright dismissals?

As befits a field concerned with the security of 'real people in real places', *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* pays significant attention to empirical case studies. Less ideological in nature than the theoretical parts of the book, these five chapters do an excellent job of demonstrating the rich research findings that can be obtained via the application of a CSS perspective to issues as diverse as the study of international political economy and the Northern Ireland conflict. To take but one example, Sandra Whitworth considers the troubling tendency of elite, Western soldiers to commit atrocities while on UN peacekeeping missions. While some attempt to explain this as the work of a few bad apples, Whitworth contends that the problem lies in the paradox of sending soldiers, carefully and deliberately fashioned for war, on missions to keep the peace. She analyzes how the techniques used in boot camps to create soldiers (even in the most seemingly benevolent of countries, such as Canada) depend upon 'militarized masculinities' and 'an explosive mix of misogyny, racism, and homophobia'. Her work poses troubling questions for an international system which relies ever more heavily on UN peacekeepers to end insecurities across the globe. Perhaps the only shortcoming of the case studies is that none focus explicitly on questions related to internal security or policing (as developed, for example, in the work of Didier Bigo), thereby missing an opportunity to further tear down the false dichotomy between external and internal security.

In conclusion, despite the misgivings raised by Booth's efforts to segregate certain CSS approaches, this book remains a valuable resource for those interested in alternative approaches to security. Newcomers to CSS will find it accessible and wide-ranging, and those more familiar with the field will find themselves treasuring its rich case studies and following up on its footnotes. The volume marks an important step forward for what remains a young, relatively unknown field, although it does not succeed in replacing Krause and Williams' ground-breaking work.