

PROTOKOL HODNOCENÍ DIZERTAČNÍ PRÁCE

JMÉNO STUDENTA: Dagmar Rychnovská

NÁZEV PRÁCE: The Politics of Bio(in)security. Science, experts and the dilemma of dual-use

HODNOTIL: Lubomír Lupták

First of all, the updated version of Dagmar Rychnovská's thesis is certainly better than the first one, which, when we consider the high quality of the first version, does not allow for any other final conclusion of this evaluation than to recommend it (for the defence as well as publication). The topic of the thesis is highly original (and not just in the context of Central European International Relations and Security Studies), the analytic aims seem to be constructed soundly and followed with admirable rigour, the text itself is eloquently written, well-structured, thoughtful and reflective, and the author also managed to present (besides the results of her empirical research and an original interpretation of her data) a very interesting and rewarding theoretical discussion. All in all, the thesis presents a wonderful addition to the (critical) security studies in Central Europe, bridging the work of a diverse body of authors and connecting disciplines (CSS/IR and STS) whose communication in the Czech Republic is almost non-existent (or at least nearly invisible). Such a transdisciplinary work certainly has to be lauded, especially when we consider the fervour with which the disciplinary boundaries and orthodoxies are guarded in the field of Czech IR.

The subchapters dedicated to methodology are now much clearer and more open and direct than in the first version, for which I am very grateful – it also made reading of the text much more enjoyable. It seems that the rather dynamic development of the original research project and perceptions of what it is about and what is to be done shares many aspects with the experience of other researchers, including myself. The superfluous or unclear passages in the theoretical discussion are now mostly gone and/or much better put into context of Dagmar's research journey, and her account has become a bit more ethnographic, fitting her research strategies.

That being said, there is not much space for me to present any critical remarks besides what I already stated in the first version of the review. The thesis still lacks somehow in the field of materiality, but the discussion we had during the first defence and Dagmar's explanation of this problem in her letter are more than sufficient for me to cease forcing her to adopt a more Marxist approach.



Still, I think that for a future reworking of this thesis for publication, or perhaps as part of design of a postdoctoral research project, more focus on the various aspects of materiality in her field could be potentially very fruitful. By materiality I mean more than just the economic aspects of mechanisms of management of bio(in)security and of the world of its expertise. I would be very interested in her perceptions regarding the shape, use, function and visibility of physical objects that are used in everyday banal practices, the structure and meaning of spaces which these people occupy and in which their practices take place, as well as how the status of an expert or the fact of dealing with the grave matters at hand gets embodied and imprinted into people's bodies, their visage, movements and routines – especially in situations where the role of a bio(in)security expert is socially and culturally significant. All of this may be subsumed under a single question: where, how and with what tools and props is expertise in this field actually performed?

The theoretical discussion presented in the text is, as I have outlined above, really rewarding, presenting some interesting innovations that I would like to ponder upon for a bit. The conceptual trio of bordering, hybridization and securitization naturally points the attention of a reader toward the relation between the worlds of security expertise and some of the more significant cultural mechanisms which have long been investigated and explored by researchers in various fields, from anthropology to sociology and political science. More specifically, my attention was grabbed by the relation and similarities between the (post)Barthian view of ethnicity as a cultural mechanism serving to establish and negotiate differences and boundaries between peoples, and the bordering/hybridising function of security, as well as by the connection between the recent theorizations of creativity and originality and the potential uses of hybridization.

Both ethnicity and security seem to share a strong stress on the creation and imposition of a world of master categories regulating inclusion, exclusion as well as the actual content of what it means to be included or excluded into this or that category – whether we are talking about the negotiation of different ethnic (id)entities or about entities which are being securitized as threats or things to be protected from them. In my research field – which is the overlap between the security discourses and practices and processes of marginalization under postsocialist condition – it seems that security discourses and practices do indeed play a vital role in the reproduction of ethnoracial boundaries, imposition and negotiation of categories of difference, as well as in the physical management and control of populations on which the ethnoracial categories are imposed. Just as Didier Bigo seemed to point out in his seminal work on the governmentality of unease, the classificatory functions of new security discourses and practices work to reinforce the foundations of old kinds of stratification and inequality.

This all brings me to think that it may be fruitful to think and talk about the wider cultural and political functions of security and try to integrate the conceptual worlds of ethnic and other culture oriented studies with the rich reservoir of concepts coming from critical security, without trying to subsume one under the other (as might be the inclination within the traditional view of critical security studies dealing with ethnic identity as a potential referent object).

Also, the stress on hybridization might be very useful in grasping the practices of resistance against the master categories and in focusing on an unexpected target – the creativity which is present in each process of hybridization. The topic of the dissertation seems particularly fitting – dealing with the world of science which is obviously much more obsessed with the concept of “the original”, “the creative” and “the author” than any other social world, save perhaps the world of art. What exactly is the relation between bordering and creating new things out of what already exists - does creation mean hybridization? If so, how to deal with the tension between viewing securitization of science as an obstacle to its creative progress, the creative practices necessarily inherent in securitization itself, and the systematic fascination of science with originality? What if we add the notorious Mertonian serendipity into the equation?

Nevertheless, all of the above is meant more as a set of issues to deal with in the future, after the successful defence – some of them might be more fit for an entirely new research project or, hopefully, for future theoretical discussions which would transcend the boundaries of individual research projects or disciplinary backgrounds. To sum up and conclude, the improvements presented in the second version of the text are sound and meaningful, they connect very well with our first June discussion, the text is even more enjoyable and I cannot but recommend it for defence.

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