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Public Security at the Turn of XX and XXI Century: Securitization, Space, Identity

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**PUBLIC SECURITY
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Introduction

At the turn of the XX and XXI century public security has risen to the status of one of the major issues in political theory and practice. Also, it constitutes an issue that dominated the public imagination – mainly because of mass media’s rapid tabloidization, which is evidenced by focusing media messages more and more on sensational news, which results, *inter alia*, in the demonization of not only crime but also all kinds of cultural and ideological differences (cf. Pfeiffer 2004). At the same time, the issues of public security have become coupled with the neoliberal political and economic logic that has prevailed since the 1980s. In consequence, the security issues are subject to ever more pervasive commercialization and privatization.

However, it is worthwhile stressing that to a large extent the media and political-economic discourses have only made more acute the feeling of insecurity experienced in their everyday life by a growing number of individuals in the contemporary globalizing world (cf. CBOS 1998). Among the main causes underlying that feeling one could list – on the one hand – ever more frequent direct contacts with cultural Others (especially immigrants) who, in the conditions of neoliberal globalization, turn out to be not so much visitors, guests or tourists as competitors or (supposed) enemies (cf. *Debata w Parlamencie...* 2010). On the other hand the roots of that feeling reach back to the ongoing decomposition of social structures, collective identities, value systems, social statuses and social-professional roles that until recently generated a sense of cohesion in societies and states. This decomposition has been propelled by the neoliberal globalization (cf. Bauman 2005).

The consequences of the two processes are accompanied by processes of dramatic shrinking of public space in which – as in an ancient *agora* – compatriots (as well as visitors and guests) used to have an opportunity to meet, get to know one another, exchange views and form negotiated opinions on issues of public concern (cf. Bauman 2005; see also *Chcemy żyć w zamknięciu...* 2006). This trend is aggravated by the experience of increasing degradation of material public space (its ecological erosion, vandalization, extreme commercialization, so called gating) which often constitutes an everyday context for individuals and social groups (cf. Kelling, Coles 2000; *Warszawska debata...* 2006; Gaśsior-Niemiec, Glasze, Lippok, Pütz 2009). Lastly, without any doubt, that feeling of insecurity has been aggravated by terrorist attacks, incidents caused by fanatical sects such as the Japanese Aum Shirinkyō and outbursts of moral panic which are related to incidents of extreme violence and aggression increasingly perpetrated by young people.

Securitization

One phenomenon that accompanies the aforementioned processes is *securitization*¹, which is gaining a status of a supreme rationale to justify an ever broader spectrum of political, social and economic practices. Securitization is understood in the paper as a tendency to implement actions whose major aim is to segregate, exclude, isolate and closely watch individuals and social groups that are taken to constitute a source of a threat to public security (cf. Turner 2007). In spite of the seemingly limited scope of the securitization agenda, the lack of practical means to focus the securitization apparatuses exclusively on „pre-selected” individuals (such as terrorists) or single social groups (such as migrants) in the context of mass societies and globalization brings about a situation in which whole societies are subject to surveillance – which is frequently carried out with infringements and violations of democratic principles, civic liberties and human rights (cf. Lyon 2001; *Debata w Parlamencie...* 2010).

Thus understood, securitization could be characterized by a few features that distinguish its aims and organizational agenda from earlier

¹ From Latin *securitas* meaning security. In political science this term has been introduced first by international relations scholars from the so called Copenhagen school.

practices implemented by democratic states over the XX century in the framework of policies aimed at public security. Many of the differences are linked to the transformation of the state's structures and functions in the spirit of neoliberalism and its accompanying social and economic changes in the broadly defined West (cf. Harvey 2008). Simultaneously, those features need to be seen in relation to a paradigm of surveillance society that has emerged within the Western civilization in the course of modernity (see Foucault 1993). They are also related to the dynamics of demographic and migration processes now underway in the global space (Gąsior-Niemiec 2007). Lastly, their close dependence on developing markets for new technologies should be emphasized (cf. Broeders 2007; *Biometryczna odprawa pasażerów* 2010).

One of the paradoxical traits inherent in contemporary securitization has been its focus on symptoms rather than causes (real and perceived) of threats to public security. This feature is mainly responsible for the self-sustaining status of the securitizing structures, programs and instruments which seem to provide „services” for unresolved problems underlying the feeling of decreasing security. Another of its characteristic features involves its tight coupling with neoliberalism as a political and economic doctrine. This finds reflection, for example, in defining the rules of social life through the prism of zero-sum games whereby benefits reaped by some social groups by necessity generate costs for other social groups – in this particular case, increased security for some means decreased (sometimes only subjectively) security for others.

The same linkage could be identified in the process whereby security loses its status of a public good – and undergoes progressive commercialization and privatization. The fast development of securitizing „markets”, „industries”, „products”, „services”, „marketing” and „commercials” evidences clearly the progressive transfer of the functions related to public security from public to private actors who treat securitization exclusively in terms of profit. In the process public security is transformed into a „normal” commercial good whose demand and supply are regulated by the market mechanism (which is, incidentally, ever less effective in the conditions of neoliberal globalization – see for instance Stiglitz 2010).

Further, intense „technologization” is one of the conspicuous trademarks of securitization apparatuses in the current period of late

modernity. Ever more frequently programs and instruments of securitization take the form of solutions devised in order to make use of emerging new technologies (not infrequently with clear military potential) which are generated mainly in the field of ICT, biotechnology and nanotechnology (cf. Walters 2006; Broeders 2007). Even so, the predominant medium through which securitization is implemented still involves more “traditional” techniques such as tracing, tagging, recording and registering – which, however, are now used on a mass scale. This trend is well exemplified by a massive growth of electronic gadgets (micro-cards, chips, electronic bracelets etc.), systems of closed circuit television, networks of urban video-monitoring or, recently, systems of biometric tagging and scanning passengers at the airports.

Lastly, a particularly interesting feature of the contemporary securitization agenda – especially if contrasted with the (real and supposed) de-territorialization of structures and processes and free movement of goods, services, persons and ideas in the globalized world – is its concentration on the category of space and place. Securitization is often tantamount to attempts at physical demarcation of selected spaces and places, their isolation and/or immobilization of streams of persons (goods etc.) flowing through them. Such practices stand in a stark contrast to the declarative objectives of (neoliberal) globalization which are premised upon the free circulation of goods and persons in the borderless world. What is specially striking in this respect is massive recourse to the use of most „primitive” methods to control space such as walls and fences that physically segregate „us” from „them” (cf. Turner 2006). The issue of interlinkages between securitization and space will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

Summing up, in general terms securitization might be seen as an epiphenomenon related to the current phase in the development of societies typical of late modernity. These transforming societies have been termed, following Ulrich Beck, *risk societies* (*Risikogesellschaft*) (Beck 1998). Taking this perspective, one could perceive securitization as a process through which social reality is gradually colonized by ever new *discursive* constructions of risk, insecurity and threat. These discourses of in/security give rise to ever new institutional-(bio)(nano)technological apparatuses that declaratively serve to „restore security” (cf. Walters 2006). Most generally, this process might be also interpreted in terms of a backlash provoked by the multi-faceted transformations of the postmodern societies and their external environments in the direction of growing complexity, uncertainty and risks that seem impossible to predict, manage and control.

Strategies of securitization: space and identity

Much research by sociologists, political scientists, social geographers and criminologists indicates that in the context of the contemporary globalized risk society space has become one of the key variables taken advantage of to implement various – often paradoxical and mutually opposing – strategies of securitization (cf. Glasze, Pütz, Rolfes 2005). In spite of their diversity, all of the strategies to use space as a factor to facilitate restoring (or increasing) security stand in stark contrast to discourses of the borderless world, universal mobility, joyful cosmopolitanism and multicultural societies, de-territorialization of identities, a universal rule of human rights etc. As a matter of fact, we are rather witness, as noticed by David Newman (2006: 181), to a „direct confrontation of two dominant [...] discourses: this of security and that of [...] liberalization”.

The ambivalent positioning of the category of space within this framework is seen, on the one hand, in an emphasis (justified by requirements of competitiveness and economic growth) on a „necessity” to continue to open up national, regional and local spaces to global flows. On the other hand, there is a „necessity” to provide protection for the beneficiaries of the regime of the opened up spaces (justified by demonization of both enemies and victims of the new world order). In addition, there is an objective „necessity” to maintain social peace and order in the conditions of increasing demographic congestion; overlapping economic and social-political systems; decreasing capacities for top down steering of the systems; and the emergence of multiplicity of destabilizing global flows (including speculative finance and criminal flows but also international migration).

A solution frequently preferred in such circumstances involves rigorous management of spaces subdivided into places, which makes it possible to selectively steer flows that intersect those spaces or to immobilize some of such flows – the ones that are classified as „risky” or „threatening”. Ultimately, strategies to securitize space entail identifying, demarking and separating „secure” places from „insecure” spaces. In the process an obligation to strive for security defined in terms of a universal public good is forsaken.

Most generally, the strategies of securitization that are implemented by means of the category of space could be presented as consisting in three operations. Firstly, space is subdivided into segments. Namely, it is divided into regions and/or zones according to the criterion of

in/security (cf. Glasze, Pütz, Rolfes 2005). As a result, some spaces (regions, zones) are recognized as *in se* „secure”, whereas some others – as „insecure”. Secondly, following this kind of demarcation, the segmented spaces are subject to valorization whereupon „insecure” spaces are stigmatized. The process of their stigmatization – by means of an identitarian metonymy – starts to be extended to embrace individuals and social groups that happen to „occupy” the stigmatized spaces². Thirdly, the instruments of securitization (organizational structures, personnel, products, services etc.) are used to institute and inscribe *second order borders* in the regionalized and valorized space. In consequence, the divided space is transformed into an „archipelago of enclaves” (Turner 2007).

Resulting from those operations are practices of visible (and visual) isolation of „secure” spaces from „insecure” ones and (visible or invisible) control or blockages of flows of persons *identified* as carriers of insecurity, threat, risk etc. Often, the specific categories of persons are targeted simply because of some visual symbols of their „membership” in the stigmatized social group/space such as their color of skin, attire etc. (cf. Glasze, Pütz, Rolfes 2005).

This type of three-stage strategy of securitization might be implemented in any spatial scale (from local to global) – as exemplified by „gated communities” in the local scale, detention camps for migrants in the regional scale or sanitary cordons in the continental scale. It is worth stressing that segmentation, second order demarcation and isolation of selected enclaves of security amid zones and „bearers” of threat and insecurity simultaneously means concentration of apparent (and real) risk factors outside of the borders of the protected enclave (or an archipelago of enclaves) – that is in the freely and commonly „accessible” public space.

Clearly, securitization carried out *via* the category of space contradicts the image of all-mobile world without borders that is being promoted by supporters of neoliberal globalization. What is more important, for liberal democracies and social democratic states the new mode of securitization means additionally that ever new and ever more strongly demarcated borders materialize within their spaces that start to divide their social groups. Also, the spatial-material borders seem to be

² This process may of course develop (and often does develop) in the reverse sequence, that is stigmatization of a social group (e.g. of migrants) is extended to embrace space „occupied” by the stigmatized group as exemplified by the case of the French *banlieues*.

reflecting the social-economic divisions produced by increasingly more polarized social structures. These processes have been interpreted by some analysts in terms of neoliberal restoration of class dominance, which is aided by mechanisms to dismantle the public sphere as constructed during the postwar era of democratization (cf. Harvey 2008). It is highly significant that the borders inscribed in the securitized space are as a rule „trademarked” with emblems of *group identities*: ethnic, religious, class and increasingly – those related to age.³

In consequence, as concluded by Turner, in the border-less, global world we witness a rise of societies in which governments and other agencies attempt to regulate spaces by immobilizing, constructing barriers, gating, sealing off, ghettoing and (pre-)empting as well as by tagging, tracing, watching and registering. In other words, instead of the promised mobility we are witness to the birth of a regime of immobilization that takes the form of gated communities (for the elderly), ghettos (for migrants – both legal and illegal), „mobile” prisons equipped with a whole spectrum of electronic devices such as the ones enabling electronic monitoring (for criminals and deviants), quarantine practices etc. – all of which are said to restore or contribute to security (Turner 2007: 290).

Increasingly, the second order borders surrounding the spatial enclaves of security as well as spaces within those enclaves are furnished with technology-intensive, depersonalized instruments of security supplied by the securitization industries and the related markets. Selective, commercial and/or private security providers gradually replace the public security providers. The universally binding forms of social control, security infrastructures and traditional political mechanisms to maintain social peace and public order are undermined and fragmented, which simultaneously results in a rapid increase of actors, modes and instruments of securitization *and* a decrease of spaces which are discursively constructed as secure (cf. Glasze, Pütz, Rolfes 2005; Barry 2006).

The multiplying zones left outside of the privately protected enclaves turn into „frontiers” and „passages”. Increasingly, they are materially and discursively constructed (and recognized) as spaces of chaos, pathology and anomy. They are increasingly demonized and criminalized. In some cases they might be subjected to extreme securitization

³ It is interesting that both the category of old people and the category of young people is stigmatized, which signals an arbitrary nature of those processes.

modes, including the use of (privatized) military techniques whose aim, however, is not to broaden the zone of security but rather to deter and/or selectively eliminate „trespassers” – individuals (groups) that are classified as a threat rooted in the immediate neighborhood of the securitized enclaves.⁴.

Conclusion

At the turn of the XX and XXI century, that is in the period of late modernity, we are found living in a globalized world in which barriers and restrictions associated so far with time, space and the „tyranny” of the nation-states and local communities have supposedly disappeared. Owing to this, goods, services and ideas may supposedly be freely circulated around the globe, while perfectly mobile and free people who can take advantage of open networks linking the local with the global are able to maximize their life chances, opportunities and capitals. However, in the framework of neoliberal globalization old social structures and political-public infrastructures are progressively dismantled. New structures and new infrastructures gradually emerge, the increased mobility and shedding of the old political and social rules generate also increasingly – alongside the opportunities – uncertainty, risk and a panoply of threats. An increased (perception and feeling of) insecurity – personal and public – is one of the effects of such constituted global risk society.

In reaction to the global risk society and its consequences strategies of securitization emerge, which are put into practice paradoxically contradicting the declared transformation of the global space of places into globalized spaces of free flows. The strategies involve selective (physical) closing of certain spaces and their rigorous, ever more technologized surveillance as well as selective immobilization of some kinds of the flows – especially of the flows of persons who have been *defined in terms of collective identities*. These collectives are then stigmatized often only because of physical signs-symbols of their (supposed) mem-

⁴ A telling example was provided by the Brazilian government that in November 2010 ordered a regular army to one of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas (slums). After a few regular battles with the local gangs and when a few wanted gangsters had been taken captive, their arms and some amount of drugs confiscated, the army was withdrawn from the *favela* leaving behind unchanged social relations and living conditions there.

bership in the social groups, for example the Muslim, migrants, the unemployed.

In stark contrast to the universalizing strategies of public security implemented in the postwar period by democratic welfare states, the logic of securitization typical of late modernity in its neoliberal version entails creating selective guarantees of security by means of segmentation, gating off and cleansing only some socio-spatial enclaves of threats and risks. Accompanied by the deconstruction of public security as a public-common (universal) good, the neoliberal securitization generates new markets for security „products” and „services”, which are, however, available for *consumers* with a required PPP, while not necessarily for citizens.

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