Books Forum Introduction

Securing life against life

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Since the mailing of anthrax-contaminated letters after the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 and outbreaks of SARS and avian influenza epidemics, national administrations, international organizations, media and scholars now consider biosecurity as a major concern of the twenty-first century governments. Containing risks of transmission of pathogens and the proliferation and abuse of harmful biological materials have required more than repressive and disciplinary control mechanisms. The emergent security regime draws on the very knowledge and practice, which it seeks to rein in. The resulting complexities are the subject matter of the publications discussed in this Books Forum.

Anthropologist Carlo Caduff presents two books on the global biosecurity apparatus. Petra Dickmann's German-language *Biosecurity: Biomedizinisches Wissen zwischen Sicherheit und Gefährdung* examines the debate about how to regulate the circulation of biological information (and not just materials) that is both necessary to respond to pandemics and always at risk of falling into the wrong hands. On the basis of sociological and historical research conducted at the World Health Organization, Lorna Weir and Eric Mykhalovskiy's *Global Public Health Vigilance: Creating a World on Alert* analyses the formation of mechanisms for detecting, responding to and containing international public health emergencies. Caduff calls into question

whether this form of public health vigilance is indeed a global phenomenon, or whether it is not rather a 'view of the world as it appears from a Geneva office'.

Innovation, Dual Use, and Security: Managing the Risks of Emerging Biological and Chemical Technologies is a volume edited by the late Jonathan B. Tucker, reviewed by Nicholas Evans. It provides a wealth of contemporary and historical case studies of dual-use technologies (from synthesis of viral genomes to transcranial magnetic stimulation and from protein engineering to military uses of LSD) framed by Tucker's theoretical model for how to study such Janus-faced applications.

The life sciences also endow refashioned security apparati with knowledge that allows identifying individuals on the basis of bodily markers such as fingerprints, voice, physiognomy or iris patterns. The uses of such biometric technologies are examined by three social scientific studies discussed by Dietmar Kammerer. He challenges one of the central claims of Lisa S. Nelson's *America Identified: Biometric Technology and Society* that societal perceptions dictate the success of biometrics. In response to Benjamin J. Muller's *Security, Risk and the Biometric State: Governing Borders and Bodies*, Kammerer calls into question whether arguments about biometrics in general are defensible and whether the employment of particular biometric technologies in border management is just another story to illustrate the burgeoning of biopolitics. Kelly A. Gates's *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition and the Culture of Surveillance* is commended for showing how a mechanism such as automated face recognition (controversially popularized by Facebook) produces social, cultural, economic and legal effects despite its technical deficiencies because its users believe in its inevitability and handiness.

Together these publications shed light on the formation of a new security apparatus, which innovatively relies on the life sciences, as it integrates national security and international public health as hazards of the Cold War fade into history.

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