Book Review/ Compte rendu

Masco, Joseph, *The Theatre of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. Duke University Press. 2014. 273 pp., $34.00 paper (9780822358060).

Joseph Masco has made many contributions to theorizing security, secrecy, and government practices. His new book *The Theatre of Operations* adds to growing sociological and anthropological literature on how security, policing, and intelligence agencies construct threats. What makes this book unique is that Masco compares threat construction and its outcomes in the United States (US) from World War II to the present. Masco's central argument is that American identity and insecurity are shaped by how government agencies communicate notions of threat to the public. From the Cold War to the War on Terror, the claim is that threats such as nuclear and biological warfare not only influence the way people in the US feel about themselves; these threats also "focus social energies, unlock resources, and build things" (7). In other words, threat categories are not simply immaterial concoctions of government workers, but have material consequences for how cities are built and how security operations unfold.

Masco suggests that US government communications about threat since World War II are intentionally shocking. "Living code orange" (21) today operates to legitimize massive expenditures on military and security, much like the nuclear bomb raid drills in schools and workplaces did in the mid-20th Century. In the first chapter, Masco examines the nationalism that emerges in relation to nuclear ruins across the US. He argues that "mass circulation of certain images of the bomb and censorship of all others" (52) cultivated support for America's geopolitical maneuvers and mass testing of nuclear devices in North America and elsewhere. Masco then explores how images of families were set against bomb blasts at the Nevada Testing Site (NTS). At the NTS, 925 above and below-ground nuclear tests occurred between 1951 and 1992. There were nearly 90 tests in 1962 alone. Bombs of 61 and 74 kilotons were dropped at the NTS during the 1950s – the bomb dropped on Hiroshima had a nuclear yield of approximately 15 kilotons. These operations normalized the bomb and sensitized US citizens to the possibility of nuclear combat. Masco also considers how similar catastrophic imagery is woven into apocalyptic films to bolster "the continued commitment to,

and pleasure in, making nuclear ruins and then searching the wreckage for signs of the collective future" (71).

Next, Masco investigates how the establishment of nuclear ruin as an ultimate referent is linked to environmental crisis. Nuclear and environmental catastrophes become tethered, for a few reasons. First, the testing regime at the NTS and elsewhere unleashed nuclear radiation upon all kinds of life, from trees to livestock and, of course, people. The purpose of the tests was to measure how radiation exposure impacted biological development. Second, a whole generation of scientists was brought into being simply to study the fallout of numerous nuclear tests around the globe. These operations invented new methodologies for tracking global contamination. Third, some of the earliest popular and scientific alarms sounded about environmental damage measured the destruction of the planet against a nuclear winter. More recent accounts of global warming and events such as Hurricane Katrina have been compared to nuclear wars and explosions in scholarly and lay publications. The main point is that nuclear bombs and fallout in the US have become benchmarks in accounts of human suffering and environmental degradation. In these ways, nuclear concepts are embedded in US political and scientific cultures (108).

Masco goes on to consider secrecy and threat related to the extension of the US nuclear warhead program under the Department of Energy Science-Based Stockpile Stewardship (SBSS) initiative. He argues that secrecy and threat have a mutually reinforcing relationship, which serves to further extend classification programmes and threat assessments. Masco encourages more critical research strategies since, in his assessment, the classified and secret archive is much larger than the open source, accessible archive of government documents (125). The institutionalization of this secrecy/threat matrix has resulted in what Masco calls the "counter-terror state" (129), which applies this approach to secrecy and threat to all government matters. These secrets then become the object of political maneuvering, for instance in US claims about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq post September 11 2001. In this way, the secrecy/threat matrix has become "a core tool in the War on Terror…one that functions to fundamentally distort both expertise and knowledge" (144).

The final substantive chapter examines how this secrecy/threat matrix is implicated in debates about biosecurity and bioweapons. Masco claims the conflation of warfare, terrorism, and disease still shocks citizens into accepting more anticipatory, preemptive military and security operations. In the conclusion, Masco reiterates "American identity is continually reconstituted through national trauma, generating desire for

counterterror expertise, as well as for heroism, sacrifice, and revenge" (210).

I would have appreciated another chapter using qualitative methods to assess whether people across the US actually feel this way, perhaps broken down by geographic location, race, class, and gender. For instance, Masco makes an argument about the "nuclear sublime" (218) and individual and group contemplation of the bomb. But the claim is not substantiated with data. Interviewing people across the US about these issues and writing about the findings would have added a thought-provoking layer to *The Theatre of Operations*. Nevertheless, Masco has offered a stimulating text on the bomb and the operation of state power that should appeal to sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and criminal justice scholars.

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Kevin Walby is Associate Professor and Chancellor's Research Chair, Department of Criminal Justice, University of Winnipeg. He has co-edited with R.K. Lippert *Policing Cities: Urban Securitization and Regulation* (2013, Routledge) and *Corporate Security in the 21st Century: Theory and Practice in International Perspective* (2014, Palgrave). He is co-author with R.K. Lippert of *Municipal Corporate Security in International Context* (2015, Routledge). He has co-edited with J. Brownlee *Access to Information and Social Justice: Critical Research Strategies for Journalists, Scholars, and Activists* (2015, Arbeiter Ring Publishing (ARP) Books). He is working on a SSHRC-funded study of industrial ruins in sites across North America.