

Socially responsible innovation in security: critical reflections

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BOOK REVIEW

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Socially Responsible Innovation in Security: Critical Reflections, by Burgess, J. P., Reniers, G., Ponnet, K., Hardyns, W., & Smit, W. (Eds.), London and New York: Routledge, 2018, ISBN 9780815371397.

Modern societies are fascinated by the idea of technological progress. A constant search for improvement, whether of an individual or of society, is underscored by the belief in innovation: ‘solutionism’ provides the drive to innovate. Innovation is framed as the unsolved not-*yet*-innovated, which creates an understanding of the present as deficient, and a notion of the future as bearing solutions. This also creates a structural dissatisfaction, coupled with a deeply anchored impatience. This impatience, then, is both the driver of innovation and the reason for putting aside societal considerations in exchange of solutionism (Dewandre 2018).

The desire for security is a case in point. In contemporary liberal democracies, we see a steady increase in the scope of issues, technologies, and actors that are seen as sources of insecurity. This sense of insecurity often stems from a concern with the effects of increasing global interconnections, and is grounded in hopes of technology offering solutions. Airport scanners, unmanned aerial vehicles or cyber surveillance tools offer a sense of increased security and in the rush to innovate often compromise societal concerns, such as privacy, accountability or social fairness. How to balance the societal values in innovation and security is the topic of the recent book *Socially responsible innovation in security: critical reflections*.

The central theme of the volume edited by Burgess (a philosopher and political scientist), Reniers (a chemist and safety researcher), Ponnet (a psychologist), Hardyns (a criminologist), and Smit (a theologian) is bringing the debate on responsible innovation into the realm of security. The editors suggest that, in order to meet the needs of citizens, innovation in security shall take into account moral, ethical, and social concerns of a broad scope of stakeholders from early stages of research and development – something that is widely acknowledged as the key principle of responsible innovation. In practice, this translates into increasing the quality and quantity of interactions between companies and different institutions so that social norms and values are respected in the design of technology. The book explores three lines of reflection of the emerging practice of social responsibility in security innovation. First, it focuses on security as technological innovation and how the notion of security and the imaginaries of innovation influence each other. The second line of reflection looks at public and private decision-making. The final part deals with democratic control and ethical implications.

By exploring security-related innovation, the book makes an important contribution to the scholarly literature on security policy and technology governance with a focus on science, technology, and (responsible) innovation governance. The book problematizes overlooked implications in security governance when employing new technologies, including their potential discriminatory effects, bias, and their role in perpetuating insecurity, and thus moves further the debate about bringing technology closer to societal needs.

By addressing security innovation and addressing different scholarly audiences interested in research governance, the editors had a complicated task in bringing together diverse perspectives such as science studies and security politics. The potential for a critical

reflection of such a dense web of relations might be assisted by more engagement with the existing critical approaches to security, innovation, and technology. As an important first step to bringing social construction of technology to the realm of technology and security, the authors mostly draw on a traditional understanding of ‘security’ and ‘technology’ – something that may be called techno-realist ontology coupled with a social constructivist perspective on technology (SCOT). Yet the authors fail to engage with the ways in which the deficit-framing of technology and innovation reinforces calls for security innovation – and the implications this has for governance. The edited volume may have benefitted from a theoretical framework that guides readers in the complex territories of science and technology studies, responsible research and innovation as well as social theory related to the power/knowledge of technology, innovation, and security. Empirically, the book offers a number of interesting case studies; however, readers would be better assisted by having a conceptual vantage point beyond the European policy framing of responsible research and innovation (RRI) and its five main areas (public engagement, science education and literacy, ethics, gender, and open access). Such a framework would allow for making broader observations based on the multiple empirical cases.

The main argument that runs through the book is that with a more stakeholder inclusive approach to security innovation we can create better ‘technology’ – such as with greater engagement of citizens in designing theft prevention technologies. This thesis is based on the assumed universal desirability of security innovation. This assumption is not problematized until the very last chapter which rejects the idea of responsible innovation of security and argues that the idea of responsible innovation cannot mitigate the disciplining and ordering effects of security on the power fabric of societies.

This conclusion, however, may not be very helpful for a critical reflection on innovation policy and security. Security may be framed not only as a normative concept or as an ultimate desire, as it is done in this book, but as an imaginary that animates the technosocial future through shared and performed visions (Jasanoff and Kim 2015), or as an apparatus that creates security subjects and at the same time refers to them as ‘users’ (Foucault 1980). Thus, technology and security may be politicized as modes of control that are brought to life via material practices of everyday life. And it is here that technology emerges: it becomes part of the apparatus of security; not (only) being socially constructed as the authors of this book argue, but also conceptualized as being part of the apparatus of control: of people, of bodies and of whole societies.

Responsible innovation can then be understood as an emerging theory aimed at involving different forms of knowledge and challenging the prevalent power/knowledge of the imaginary of security. Beyond offering an alternative set of values that ‘make-up’/create security (as the book proposes), we ought to be responsive to and critical vis-a-vis the apparatus (the said and the unsaid) that captures both security as a social desire and innovation as a strategy to cater to this desire. This may assist in anticipating impacts and critically reflecting on such technologies and their roles in society (what Foucault would call the strategic interplay of governmentality of securitization). The desire for or need for security is thus inseparable from the technology that offers security solutions: solutionism, deficit-framing, security innovation and artifacts, once they are innovated and deployed, are all part of the imaginary of security and securitization.

It is security as ‘illusion’ that animates the apparatus of securitization. The animating force for innovation of technology is not necessarily the language of danger, threat, and urgency; it is often technology that creates the ‘illusion of security’ imagining the present as insecure and innovation as a response to this insecurity. Responsible innovation points to the complexities of the co-production of technology and security and additionally suggest

ways to better address these complexities. This book makes a valuable contribution to pointing to the troubled waters of the confluence of technology and security and draws our attention to values, societal embeddedness and the ethics of innovation in security. Following these steps and looking at the modes of co-production as well as critically examining how techno-security is framed and ordered might be a productive agenda for further research.

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