

One of the most popular TV shows of recent years has been Netflix's *Narcos*, a series aimed at documenting – albeit with creative license – the rise of Pablo Escobar. The show depicts the growth of the cocaine industry, amidst the efforts of governments and their agencies – notably the American Drug Enforcement Agency – to prevent the regional distribution of the drug. Of course, a bi-product of this is a consideration of the social and economic impact of the drug trade on life across Colombia. John Gledhill's article *Securitization, Mafias and Violence in Brazil and Mexico* does not focus explicitly upon Colombia, but a number of themes are similar to those addressed in *Narcos*. Gledhill's argument, in a nutshell, is that violence serves a regulatory role within society, stemming from economic conditions emerging from neoliberalism; moreover, that political elites have capitalized on changing societal power relations as a means of ensuring their survival within an increasingly securitized environment.

Gledhill's argument, whilst not necessarily a traditional approach to securitization provides fascinating insight into life in Brazil and Mexico, wherein structural factors shape the capacity of agency to operate. It also focuses upon the nature of political and social life that is shaped by the market forces of neoliberalism but a zone in which a range of domestic actors also seek to exert influence. In doing this, the article raises questions about the nature of political organisation broadly, which, in turn, raises a number of issues for approaches to securitization. A Weberian understanding of a sovereign state bestows a legitimate monopoly of violence upon ruling elites, yet the erosion of such a monopoly has serious consequences for authority and political hierarchies. From the level of violence across South America, arguing such a position is easily done. Moreover, with this breakdown, there are clear repercussions for securitization theory, with an apparent linear structure of securitizer and audience. Amidst the fragmentation of political authority, this linear process is broken among competing audiences and a number of different sources of authority and power.

Political life is a key part of Gledhill's paper, which, in turn, provokes a number of issues for the application of securitization. As with much of the recent literature on securitization, it is with the concept of the audience that the paper finds the most traction. For Gledhill, securitization in South America serves as a means of regulating life, amidst rising criminality which the author suggests is a direct manifestation of neoliberal agendas. With this in mind, the author sets out to reveal more about the social relations of each society. In doing so, the paper evokes ideas of sovereignty and broader understandings of territoriality. Within this, securitization frames such criminality as an existential threat to social – and societal – dynamics and it is those typically hardest hit by neoliberal agendas that are predominantly the victims of such moves. In a nod towards the work of Giorgio Agamben, whose ideas of the *state of exception* (2005) and *homer sacer* (1999), the article sets out the conditions within which life becomes marginalized, with all traces of political meaning removed. It is in such conditions that we can see the successes of securitization processes.

Where Gledhill diverts from conventional approaches concerns the multiplicity of actors involved in a multidirectional set of securitizing process(es) and,

broadly, within political life itself. It is here where Gledhill's application of securitization is at its most useful: by shedding light on the internal dynamics of Brazilian and Mexican societies, securitization helps to reveal how political life is regulated and by whom, moving beyond the conventional understandings of power within state structures. In doing this, Gledhill's approach makes an important contribution to debates on the internal machinations of sovereignty, moving away from Weberian understandings of institutions and a legitimate use of force, to reveal the multiplicity of actors involved in violence and the regulation of life.

Whilst this may seem to many to be the predilection of Security Studies or of Policing, broadly, there is a more much existential and ontological concern at play. Indeed, the article seeks to unpack the social relations of society and the 'hidden agendas' that are shaping life in *favelas* and urban environments. This is important within the age of neoliberalism as it is the urban environment that brings people together as a site of political life but also contestation; the struggle to regulate urban life is a struggle to regulate politics broadly. This struggle, of course, is dangerous, not only to those whose life is marginalized, but also to police and individuals involved in regulation beyond formal institutions.

It is with this that Gledhill's article offers a great deal. Securitization has typically sought to understand the logic behind, and framing of, particular issues as existential threats to security. These have typically occupied a central, and visible, space within a state's calculations, playing upon existing, latent fears of society. In Gledhill's piece, latent and manifest structures are revealed, along with the multi-directional process of securitization. The use of securitization initially appears counter intuitive, yet proves invaluable as a mechanism to reveal structural dimensions within society. Thus, with Gledhill's argument, we see how securitization theory can be used as a mechanism to engage with political life more broadly.