

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Toby Beauchamp, *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019). ISBN 978-1-4780-0157-7, pp. 208. \$24.95 USD (paperback).

In the introduction to *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices*, Toby Beauchamp asks: 'How are transgender and gender-nonconforming populations caught up in ongoing state surveillance practices that almost never explicitly name transgender as a category of concern?' (6). This guiding question sits at the core of this timely book that makes an exciting intervention into theorising the ways in which gender is mediated and enforced by state apparatuses. By focusing on everyday practices of scrutiny and gender-policing to which transgender and gender-nonconforming bodies and lives are continuously subjected, *Going Stealth* expands common understandings of state regulation and surveillance. Beauchamp achieves this aim by closely analysing several case studies that complicate relationships between technology, embodiment, and 'security,' including identity documents (Chapter 1), United States Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screening procedures (Chapter 2), public bathrooms (Chapter 3), and framings of Chelsea Manning (Chapter 4). Much like queer theory has developed into an anti-identitarian, 'subjectless' critique, transgender is taken up here as an analytic and critical framework, rather than an identity category. As Beauchamp wryly states, 'this is a transgender studies book that is not terribly interested in transgender people; instead, it considers surveillance practices through a transgender critique to explore that category's edges and its complicated interactions with racialization, citizenship, disability, and militarism' (22–23).

*Going Stealth* grapples with a growing tension between visibility and violence; that is, with an increased visibility of transgender folks, so has there also been increased violence directed at gender-nonconforming bodies. Following Michel Foucault, Beauchamp uncovers how as a form of biopower, visibility is not a panacea but is, instead, a trap, particularly

given that ‘one’s visibility to surveillance mechanisms can allow those mechanisms to work more effectively’ (16). This dynamic occurs alongside medical, legal, and technological developments that produce and regulate identity categories. For example, in showing how the category of transgender is produced through surveillance practices, *Going Stealth* problematises that very category and also demonstrates how transgender can work to denaturalise or problematise taken-for-granted ideas about race, citizenship, and disability. In tracing the problematics of visibility and inclusion, Beauchamp also points to the ways that NGOs and advocacy groups negotiate a changing neoliberal landscape that further diminishes the life chances of already marginalised communities. In this sense, the book offers an implicit critique of rights-based approaches by articulating that while visibility projects might often be seen as beneficial steps toward social change, they are not innocent or benign. Here, Beauchamp applies a critical lens to not only governmental policies but also to the work of transgender advocacy groups, showing, for instance, how some strategies and approaches actually reconsolidate US nationalism and allow for increased policing of those who fall outside normative categories. Beauchamp explains how some mainstream transgender rights organisations are unable to address how the policing of gender is intertwined with that of racial difference, a problematic that is encapsulated in the provocative question: ‘For which bodies is legitimacy attainable, and for which is it already foreclosed?’ (48).

Particularly compelling is the theme of anxiety that suffuses *Going Stealth*. Beauchamp zooms in on how anxious discourses about the ‘threats’ posed by bodies that fall outside of markers of normative race, gender, sex, religion, and ability become cause for increased surveillance measures. The book argues that surveillance practices must be looked at from a long view, that is, in the broader context of strategies and systems of classification and biopolitical management, if not – I would also add – racism, colonialism, and national security. This is particularly evident in Chapter 1, entitled ‘Deceptive Documents,’ which takes up the case study of the *Real ID Act* and the standardisation of state drivers’ licenses and IDs to create a federally recognised identity card. By tracing a history marked by racism and xenophobia, Beauchamp’s analysis of this latest iteration of documentation is grounded in a more complicated picture of structural oppression. For example, Chinese immigration regulations, slavery and manumission papers, and voter ID laws all come to matter, highlighting how current discussions around non-conforming gender cannot be disaggregated from long-embedded institutions of violence and discrimination. While the problematics of documentation has been thoroughly explored in transgender legal

studies by scholars like Dean Spade (2008) and A.J. Wipfler (2016), amongst others, Beauchamp pushes this analysis even further by highlighting the biopower and biopolitics of IDs and by uncovering how such documents produce a ‘truth’ about a person, simultaneously containing, constructing, and producing identity.

Similarly, in Chapter 2 (‘Flying Under the Radar’), Beauchamp uncovers how practices and policies – including airport screening – that standardise bodies must be understood within a wider trend towards interpretive practices that sort bodies according to race, gender, and disability, often with a purported goal of national health and security. While these are not always explicitly ‘anti-trans’ measures, transgender and gender diverse people especially feel the effects of policies that impact already marginalised populations. Here, the book also highlights the biopolitical and necropolitical aspects of surveillance practices. In the case of the x-ray, for instance, Beauchamp shows how what had originally been conceived of as a medical technology has come to be deployed in militarised and securitised contexts. This chapter in particular engages with the somatechnics of surveillance – that is, how medico-legal systems shape policies, laws, regulations, and bodies as well as how corporeality is bound up with a variety of technologies that consequently shape transgender care. Pushing this line of thinking even further, the book as a whole takes as one of its primary motives to ‘turn back the scrutinizing gaze of science, medicine, and law, attending not so much to the gender-nonconforming figure that is positioned as dangerous as to the uneven relations of power that produce that figure and its accompanying threat’ (5).

Chapter 3 takes up a different form of ‘biometric surveillance’ to encapsulate another way in which anxieties about citizenship, public sex, and sexual purity are projected onto transgender and gender-nonconforming people. This chapter, entitled ‘Bathrooms, Borders, and Biometrics,’ focuses largely on the infamous ‘bathroom bills’ that have emerged as a cultural flashpoint in recent years, with numerous US states (e.g., Arizona, North Carolina, Utah, Virginia) having passed such discriminatory laws that restrict public bathrooms to one’s sex assigned at birth. The chapter also traces the historical emergence of sex-segregated bathrooms in the United States, which occurred alongside the institutionalisation of racially segregated spaces. Indeed, racist histories of public bathroom access cast a shadow over present-day debates regarding which bodies are considered ‘threats’ to public safety. Public bathrooms, as the chapter demonstrates, are spaces that construct the boundaries of citizenship through restrictions that implicate race, gender, and disability.

As Beauchamp emphasises throughout the book, by culturally mobilising narratives of concealment and disguise, heightened security measures frame gender nonconformity as dangerous. Surveillance practices make gender nonconformity even more visible and consequently construct it as deceptive, thereby justifying these very practices of surveillance and control. This is particularly evident in Chapter 4 ('Sensitive Information in the Manning Case'), which analyses the case of former National Security Agency analyst and whistle-blower Chelsea Manning, who was convicted of leaking classified military and diplomatic documents related to US foreign policy and military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. The case was framed in such a way that it also evoked questions for the general public regarding if transgender people should be permitted to serve in the military, a framing that was, again, partially built on the fallacy that transgender people are inherently 'deceptive' and, hence, damaging to national security. Classified military documents and news of Manning's gender identity became intertwined and conflated to construct a narrative of treasonous acts. This final chapter also chronicles how Manning's defence was premised on the idea of an 'inner struggle' that presented the secret (and attendant stress) of her gender as inseparable from the secrecy of her work. While there is by now a substantial body of academic work that has analysed Manning's case, Beauchamp pushes the conversation further by arguing that this lens of exceptionalism through which Manning was framed has necropolitical impacts: 'The production of Manning as an exceptional transgender individual occurs through the disposability of other lives' (128), that is, in the systemic violence that is routinely directed towards (transgender) people of colour. Indeed, Manning's legibility, visibility, and individuality are only possible because of her whiteness and US citizenship. Moreover, framing her transgressions as exceptional functions to direct attention *away* from reprehensible government policies and *onto* her. Despite this compelling argument, centring the chapter on the figure of Chelsea Manning does compromise the author's assertion that the book resists focusing on transgender people. While Beauchamp acknowledges that this analysis risks replicating the problem it recognises – i.e., privileging Manning as a figure worth examining itself marks her yet again as exceptional – this point is only briefly mentioned by way of a conclusion to the chapter, leaving the reader wanting to learn more about this tension and the ethical considerations that writing about the case in this context provokes.

The book's open-ended conclusion catalogues political developments since Trump's election [e.g., targeting of Deferred

Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, ban on transgender individuals serving in the military, rescindment of federal guidelines on transgender students in schools that receive government funding, amongst others]. The question of course remains: onto whom will this most recent spate of anxiety be placed? And what effects will it have? Based on Beauchamp's argument that anxieties related to 'national security' have come to be displaced onto gender-nonconforming subjects, it seems we can only expect worsening conditions as anti-immigration and anti-transgender discourses are on the rise. The book ends on a call for political solidarity, yet leaves it there without further exploration. In this sense, I would have only wished to have read more about practices of resistance and how they might serve as tools in moving forward in these politically polarised times.

While *Going Stealth* makes clear that its focus is primarily the United States, it does make some passing references to other national contexts. In fact, these examples complement Beauchamp's astute analysis of the American context, nuancing the US-based examples by placing them within a broader neoliberal framework. Therefore, given how surveillance, biometrics, and legal gender are fast changing, a more sustained discussion of other geo-political contexts would have been helpful in further gesturing towards divergences and parallels in the contemporary global climate. Nonetheless, the book's robust analysis of how state practices of surveillance – most of which do not reference transgender yet impact transgender people – could be helpful for scholars working in national contexts outside the US. Sitting at the unique intersection of transgender studies and critical security studies, the book moreover signals a new direction in trans critique by approaching transgender as an analytic rather than as an identity category. In its theorisation of everyday surveillance and transgender politics, Toby Beauchamp's *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices* makes a strong and compelling argument that promises to expand the scope of transgender studies, surveillance studies, and cultural studies.

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Aren Z. Aizura, *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). ISBN 978-1-4780-0156-0, pp. 296. \$25.95 (paperback).

Aren Z. Aizura's *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment* is a wonderfully nuanced exploration of the complex circuits of mobility central to the narrativization of transsexuality. Indeed, as the author describes throughout this monograph, trans narratives are overwhelmingly conditioned by a dizzying array of journeys, spanning tropes both metaphorical and literal: from the metaphoric liminalities of gendered unintelligibility to somatic returns to proper embodiment, and from transnational migrations across the borders of an elsewhere to the promise of stability in one's desired sexed embodiment.

However, as with all fantasies, these tropes of mobility are not without their complications. As Aizura illustrates throughout *Mobile Subjects*, these fantastical journeys to the 'elsewheres' of transsexual becoming need to consider the sociohistorical and geographical reach of Eurocentrism's own origin stories in mapping the world. More specifically, as the author explains, it is impossible to separate accounts of transsexual becoming from the grand binaristic narratives of colonialism and imperialism that shaped the civilized west in stark contrast to non-Western pre-modernity. It is in the spirit of troubling these hyper-mobile fantasies of trans narratives that Aizura extends Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) concept of 'provincialization' to critique how narratives of trans mobility are grounded in specifically Euro-North American origin stories that are reflective of their specific geographical and historical locations and the production of heres and elsewheres.

This trope of mobility likewise characterizes documentary film representations of trans subjects whose transnational and rural-to-urban migrations cement what Aizura calls the 'metronormative migration plot' (96). Drawing upon Jack Halberstam's framing of the 'metronormative' as 'a spatial narrative of queer becoming that maps coming-out onto rural-to-urban migration' (97), Aizura critiques this tired plot device for the implied connection between upwardly mobile forms of migration and the promise of self-fulfillment, freedom, and the neoliberal capacity for individual self-definition. As *Mobile Subjects* illustrates, trans migration is especially susceptible to these liberatory narratives of metronormativity