SCIENTIA
MILITARIA
South African Journal of Military Studies

Book Review

Cultural security: Theory – Selected aspects – Case studies

Elżbieta Szyszlak, Rafał Wiśniewski and Radosław Zenderowski (eds)

Berlin: Peter Lang
2023, 304 pages
ISBN 978-3-6318-9249-7

The volume *Cultural security: Theory – Selected aspects – Case studies*, edited by Elżbieta Szyszlak, Rafał Wiśniewski and Radosław Zenderowski, offers a diverse array of research perspectives, and elucidates the intricate, multifaceted nature of the relatively new concept of cultural security. Published by Peter Lang, this book is an insightful compendium of the works of Polish scholars on the topic of cultural security, presenting a compelling genesis of this discipline, and underscoring its interdisciplinary character. The collection of 19 essays, penned by 20 authors, comprises the 53rd volume in the series Studies in Politics, Security and Society, overseen by series editor Stanisław Sulowski. Since 2015, the monographs and collective volumes published within this series have been showcasing the research pursued by both Polish and Eastern European scholars on the theoretical and practical dimensions of politics and security policy.

The editors of *Cultural security* are interested in the cultural security of the state, which provides a framework for the protection of cultural identity and heritage. The lucid structure, of the book organised into three distinct parts, enables readers to engage with the material selectively, according to their specific research interests, or to read it sequentially, according to the layout of the chapters. The latter approach facilitates a progression from theoretical considerations to practical applications of cultural security. A notable strength of this volume is its grounding in empirical realities and concrete case studies. Even the first and second sections, which delineate theoretical frameworks and examine particular aspects of cultural security, remain closely linked to tangible solutions enacted within socio-political contexts. Meanwhile, the contributors to the third section offer an incisive analysis of cultural security from the vantage point of selected European and non-European states.

The opening section, covering cultural security in theoretical and methodological dimensions, seeks to define the notion of cultural security by introducing the issue and various concepts related to it. The section begins with a cogent and historically grounded essay by Marek Bodziany. While the discipline of cultural security emerged at the end of the twentieth century, the interrelationship between culture and security extends back to antiquity – or even earlier – when culture signified ethnic distinctions. The emergence

of cultural security issues was a natural outcome of wider social processes, with the catastrophic events of the two world wars in the twentieth century, serving as a catalyst for the development of research into the culture–security nexus. In this context, the post-Cold War era proved transformative, as the resulting geopolitical changes, particularly in Europe, required fundamental rethinking of the prevailing security paradigms, with an increasing emphasis on non-military dimensions of security.

In the academic debate, this shift was articulated by representatives of the Copenhagen, Welsh, and Paris schools, although these approaches 'do not fully reflect the essence of cultural security' (p. 27). Nevertheless, several of the contributors to the volume draw on these intellectual traditions. Sebastian Wojciechowski proposes the pentagonal model of cultural security, which can be analysed across local, regional, and global levels. Krzysztof Cebul explores the intersection of cultural security and security culture, prompting a critical inquiry into the ideological foundations of cultural security. This question is further explored in the final essay of the section where Anna Kurkiewicz offers a novel narrative, challenging prior assumptions, and invoking the concept of myth.

The second section of the book, 'Selected aspects of cultural security', begins with an in-depth analysis of contemporary and emerging threats to cultural security, particularly those related to religion, ethnic minorities, and migration. Andrzej Szabaciuk discusses the securitisation of discourse surrounding migration processes as a tool in the politics of fear (p. 78). Tomasz Szyszlak presents the cultural security system as a subsystem of national security, while Jarosław Jarząbek delves into the role of cultural security in the politics of security of the state. These discussions highlight the crucial need to consider cultural factors in the design of national security systems. If cultural security is to function as an integral subsystem of national security, it naturally requires careful and systematic management, including intersectoral coordination. Elżbieta Szyszlak, in turn, offers an insightful analysis of cultural security in the context of minority groups, particularly ethnic minorities, emphasising the necessary balance between protection and development of cultural security, which can be achieved by 'drawing on the culture of the majority' (p. 117). Ireneusz Jaźwiński points to the significance of economic factors, including human capital, in shaping cultural security. The education system plays a pivotal role in this regard, creating a direct link with cultural security. The final two essays in this section address the influence of religion on cultural security. Mariusz Sułkowski posits that the role of religion is intensifying, especially in light of demographic factors and globalisation. Joanna Kulska then explores cultural security in the context of faith-based diplomacy.

The third section of this edited book consists of several case studies, which encompass both European and non-European countries with diverse historical experiences and current potentials. In addition to exploring the cultural security of individual states (Poland, Lithuania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel, Iran, Germany), the section also addresses the cultural security of the European Union. Michał Gierycz and Piotr Mazurkiewicz, in their analysis of the European project and its implementation, argue that 'the EU's actions in recent decades seem to have weakened Europe's cultural security rather than strengthened it' (p. 288). Those following the escalating conflict in the Middle East may be particularly interested in the chapters on Iran and Israel. Radosław Fiedler

traces the foundations of Iranian cultural security to Khomeini's doctrine and its official anti-Western stance, which stands in sharp contrast to the 'Iranian society [that] would like to see an opening to cooperation, as well as a cultural opening to the West, particularly the United States' (p. 233). To support this claim, Fiedler references a 2002 survey (the most recent opinion poll on this issue) in which 70% of Iranians expressed support for restoring relations with the United States. The ongoing conflict with Israel, which has targeted Hezbollah's assets in Iran and Lebanon (autumn 2024), along with Iran's growing ties with China and the outcome of the 2024 United States presidential elections, could however profoundly change the socio-political landscape and influence the Iranian cultural security in the near future. Marcin Szydzisz offers a comprehensive analysis of Israel's cultural security as understood by its authorities, identifying threats that are unique to the Israeli context: geopolitical considerations, the Arab environment, efforts to delegitimise Israel (e.g. through the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement [BDS]), internal tensions between secular and religious Jews, demands for equality from various Jewish denominations, and finally, migration. Nevertheless, the reduction or degradation of Israeli culture seems unlikely, as some of the perceived threats (e.g. the Arab environment or migration) paradoxically serve to reinforce it.

Cultural security involves not only the preservation of tangible heritage and monuments, as the authors of subsequent chapters demonstrate, but also the safeguarding of elements that constitute the cultural identity of a given community and the institutional framework that should be integrated with national security. The cultural aspect of state security – alongside military, economic, demographic, and digital factors – is rarely addressed in scholarly literature with the comprehensive approach offered by this book, distinguishing it notably from other publications on the subject. The editors are guided by the conviction that, while contemporary political dynamics exert substantial influence over the construction of cultural heritage narratives, 'there is always an unchanging cultural core, a set of socially preserved symbols and traditions, and objects of vital importance for a given culture, with a fundamental role in maintaining cultural security' (p. 13). This assumption may not appeal to all scholars, although its influence does not weigh upon the chapters that follow.

Cultural security constitutes a significant contribution to the evolving field of cultural security studies. It systematises key conceptual issues, critically examining the challenges and threats, while also delineating possible new research directions. Interesting bibliographies direct readers toward further scholarly engagement, with a significant portion of the referenced works authored by Polish researchers. While it may be premature to speak of a distinctly Polish school of cultural security, the growing interest among Polish scholars in this discipline – especially in its relation to the state and security policy – is undeniably evident. This is also evidenced by the book under review.

Barbara Schabowska
Warsaw University of Business, Poland