post-1980 eras, much of this scholarship instead characterizes the Bretton Woods regime as exceptional. For instance, Jeremy Green’s book carefully traces the contingency and specificity of the post-1960 Euro-dollar era (see The political economy of the special relationship, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020). Ultimately, Bruneau persuasively seeks to ‘supplement, rather than replace, existing accounts of the transformation of sovereign lending’ (p. 133). Beyond the book’s nuanced empirical insights, the author also draws on the history of international political thought (HIPT) to make an ambitious methodological contribution to the International Relations (IR) discipline. While HIPT is ‘primarily geared toward the study of what one might call ‘great thinkers’, Bruneau proposes ‘modifying’ its approach in order to study ‘forms of knowledge’ transmitted through education (pp. 11–12). He argues that, even as IR scholars have turned to studying ‘practice and practitioners’, education has ‘remained hidden under a bushel’, despite its importance to practice-oriented sociologists and historians (pp. 19–20). On this note, the book is a significant achievement, providing a novel method through which IR scholars can recover the pivotal yet ‘seemingly most mundane aspects of a given epoch’s thought, among specific social groups’ (p. 19). Bruneau’s innovative approach to studying practitioner ‘mentalities’ usefully complements prominent historical analyses of elite practitioner policy-making (p. 14). It thus enriches our understanding of how global economic governance has transformed over time.

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Energy, environment and global health


At the end of her thoughtful book, Jessica Kirk says that ‘if this book communicates just one thing, it should be that we are never bound by our societies’ worst tendencies, nor by the Schmittian heart of security. There are always multiple perspectives, and these can change over time. But we need to be willing to grapple with them and consider the role that we play in securitization and the contestation that occurs within it’ (p. 177). This is a pithy summary of More than a health crisis, and it points to the kind of contribution that the book offers: a critical examination of the securitization of the 2013–16 Ebola outbreak in west Africa using discourse analysis. The book seeks to answer the following questions: why and how was the west African Ebola outbreak securitized in the United States, given that it did not pose an existential threat to it? How and why was the securitization of Ebola contested? And, relatedly, in what ways did this affect the US’ response? To answer these questions, data were drawn from a wide range of sources, including government documents, news databases, press statements and opinion pieces (of opposition politicians), fact sheets and legislation, as well as presidential speeches and proclamations.
Kirk sees discourse not simply as dead text but as an intersubjective, social process that requires interaction and reiteration to produce stabilization. A focus on discourse is important, she argues, because ‘security actors operate within the conditions of possibility crafted by discourse’ (p. 150). Kirk tracks three competing discourses—‘helpless west Africa’ (HWA), ‘potential global catastrophe’ (PGC) and ‘America under threat’ (AUT)—and one counter-discourse—the ‘Fearbola’. Representation of west African fragility was common to all three basic discourses, though each interpreted this fragility differently, leading to different meanings.

The PGC discourse represented the Obama administration’s official narrative, which understood the practical risk to the American public to be extremely small. AUT, the main competing discourse, focused on the horrific manner of death, as well as the high mortality rate, and sought to blame west Africans as the sources of threat. Each discourse prescribed a different course of action: AUT emphasized control of bodies and hermetically sealed containment as prudent common sense, whereas PGC focused on enhanced surveillance and airport screenings. AUT was dominant in the securitization process at crucial moments, essentially guiding and narrowing the range of possible debate. HWA shared the other two discourses’ understanding of west African fragility but adopted a human security, rather than a state security, approach to the outbreak. As a result, it prescribed military involvement in the short term and capacity-building in the long term. HWA and AUT, though, held a common view that Ebola required urgent action. The Fearbola counter-discourse offered a critical narrative but was not itself de-securitizing. This nuanced understanding of the competing discourses at play, and their relationship to one another, is therefore one of the key insights of the book.

The book joins the growing literature on racialization and global health, alongside other important recent books that include Alexandre I. R. White’s Epidemic Orientalism (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023; reviewed in International Affairs 100: 3, May 2024), Martha Lincoln’s Epidemic politics in contemporary Vietnam (London: Bloomsbury, 2021) and Eugene T. Richardson’s Epidemic illusions (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020). Kirk’s book makes two more specific contributions to the securitization literature. First, it moves beyond the Copenhagen School’s framework, offering an approach that seeks to bridge and synthesize literatures from different generations. Second, it provides an analytical account of the contestation between competing security discourses in this important case-study. I also appreciated the author’s brief reflections on how the book’s lessons might be applied to the COVID–19 pandemic. Those who may not be familiar with discourse analysis or the Copenhagen School may find themselves on an uneven footing. However, they will soon appreciate the seriousness and dedication that are obvious in Kirk’s methodological approach. The author is devoted to understanding ‘multiplicity, contestation, and change’ in the case of the Ebola outbreak (p. 32). I am not trained in this approach, but I came away from this book with a healthy respect for the method, a greater appreciation of the similarities and differences between different kinds of discourse and a sense of how this kind of approach can help us understand unfolding world events.
While there are few criticisms I can offer, I might have enjoyed seeing a bit more transparency in the discussion of methods, specifically in communicating how many sources were analysed; whether (and why) some documents received greater attention or weight in the analysis; and ultimately, why AUT was the dominant discourse. Nonetheless, this book is worth reading, and I look forward to Kirk’s next contribution with great interest.

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Sydney Calkin’s Abortion pills go global traces the contemporary movement, and the politics, of abortion pills across borders. It takes as its starting-point the US Supreme Court’s overturning of Roe v. Wade in the summer of 2022, which removed the constitutional right to abortion for women in the United States. Abortion pharmaceuticals were first developed in the 1980s and have increasingly become a preferred abortion method in recent years, changing people’s experience of both legal and clandestine abortion. Importantly, they have contributed to the decoupling of abortion’s safety from its legality. Following the drastic restriction of abortion rights in the US, there has been an increased interest in the international politics of abortion and the cross-border social movements that facilitate access to abortion pills. In nine chapters, Calkin attends to the social and political lives of abortion pills in five key locations: India, Northern Ireland, Poland, the Republic of Ireland and the US. These case-studies demonstrate how abortion pills change the ways in which people have abortions and how states seek to restrict access to them. Through its interdisciplinary approach and focus on the pills themselves, the book illustrates how the transnational flow of medicines and other goods enables abortion pills to be moved across the globe both legally and illegally, making it difficult for states to block them and enforce restrictive abortion laws. Calkin analyses how abortion pills enable activists to undermine the criminalization of abortion and to change public perceptions of abortion, making a compelling case for the ‘practical accessibility of abortion in the short term as a means to achieve longer-term social and political change’ (p. 3).

Calkin begins her exploration of abortion pills in India, describing how the country’s pharmaceutical industry, specialized ‘in the production of low-cost generics’, produces many of the abortion pills used globally (p. 32). Chapter one sheds light on the production, distribution and export of abortion pills from India and traces their route out of the country via feminist networks, online pill vendors and online pharmacies. It illustrates how objects like abortion pills change status as they cross borders, from ‘legally made’ to ‘illicitly sold’ (p. 44). Subsequently, the book’s focus shifts to the US and Poland, two locations where abortion laws have become more restrictive over time. Calkin provides an insightful analysis of the politics of pharmaceutical abortion in the US prior to the overturning of Roe v.