



ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Audio Transcript

Feminism and women's roles in the "security state"

INDERPAL GREWAL: Well, as a feminist, I was very interested in thinking about how women are pushed into these positions, right? And under neoliberal circumstances, they have to see themselves in some ways as becoming part of doing something to help others – active citizens of a state that sees itself as exceptional in the world.

So my notion of exceptional citizen comes from the way in which, in the US, there's a particular version of its imperial stance in the world, that it sees itself as an exceptional place, right? And because of its neoliberalism, that exceptionalism can no longer be upheld. It's a waning power, one can say. This empire is slowly declining. And so, in that way, when it is declining, individuals rush in to prop it up. So I see some ways in which some women and some who call themselves feminists feel, as we will say, as this term always is used, empowered to become some kind of agents of the state.

I look at "security mom" in terms of popular culture. You see this figure very much in movies, for instance. There is a famous movie I talk about in the book, which is called "Zero Dark Thirty", and it's about the killing of Osama bin Laden. And it sort of circuits around a woman who is a key figure in the CIA, who's a secret agent who's trying to find information about bin Laden and how she comes to be a part of his targeted killing. And what I find so interesting is, as much as the film, for instance, celebrates her as a heroine, it in the end shows that she's actually not an agent in the killing, that it is the masculinity of a SEAL team, like a very heteronormatively characterised SEAL team of these very stock characters, heroic characters in American culture that have to come in and do the work. And she is outside that frame of the target, of the targeted killing. And in the end, she has lost her friends, she's in despair, she comes back on the plane alone and crying.

So all of these ways in which the security feminist, for instance, in this case, is both empowered to help the state, but actually loses out because of the masculinity of the state itself, right? I look at "security mom" as another way in which mothers are compelled and exhorted, indeed, to surveil their families. What does it mean to be a good mother, is to know where your child is at every given point.



And here the work of technology is really important because technology is sold to us on the basis of fear and paranoia and the ways in which we have to protect the home, the family against all these different others. And the others in our times are, of course, you know, not just the quote unquote, the terrorist, but also the migrant, for instance, is a key figure in the imagination of the security state. This this kind of other. But the security state is also there to repress and shape citizens that can do its work.

And so I argue in the book that relations within families, relations, parental relations, take shape as relations of surveillance. And that in order to protect the family, you have to have gadgets on your phone that tell you exactly where your child is at any given point. That you need to make sure that they have a gadget, that they can be controlled, not just controlled, but they can be connected to you at every given point. And that these technologies are sold with a great deal of paranoia and fear of insecurity. So actually what I do argue in the book is that the work of security, the work of the security state is to create insecurity at every given point.