

Towards Safe City Centres? Remaking the Spaces of an Old-Industrial City.
Gesa Helms. Ashgate: Aldershot, 2008, 238 pages, ISBN: 978-0-7546-4804-8. £55

Helms's consideration of the way in which safety is approached and managed in the city centre of Glasgow (UK) illustrates how policies concerning the management of safety are borne out of the socio-economic context of the moment in which those policies are made. As she explains in her preface, some of the agencies which Helms worked with during her research have since been disbanded as the focus of local government policies has changed over time. As such, what she offers us is less an analysis of government safety policy or even an analysis of the effectiveness or longevity of such policies, but rather a snapshot of the way in which safe-keeping was managed in Glasgow between 2000 and 2003. This snapshot of the city is accompanied, as the book opens, by visual snapshots of the city and the safe-keeping initiatives that become the focus of Helm's analysis. These six 'vignettes' situate the study in its socio-temporal context and provide an overview of the main themes of the book; those of surveillance, observation, exclusion and boundary erection. In short, the 'work' of safe-keeping.

In this analysis Helms focuses on the work of the agencies, police and local government. The 'work' of safe-keeping, it is argued, is important and commercially desirable because it is by fostering the impression of a safer city-centre that is both *actually* safer and *seen to be* safer that the city-centre might accumulate financial capital by tempting in tourists or shoppers. And it is this neo-liberal imperative to foster impressions of safety that are the central focus of the book.

Helms interrogates these imperatives to 'make safe' the city and the tools through which this is achieved. It is through the surveillance of cameras, police or city wardens, the criminalising of anti-social behaviour such as begging or street-drinking and the pushing of perpetrators of anti-social behaviour to the outskirts of the city that these imperatives are achieved, and threats to the economic wellbeing of the city are diminished.

Helms argues that safe-keeping, for the city of Glasgow, is deployed as a neoliberal necessity by the local government and a means through which to organise societies and spaces. In this way, although Helms adopts a critical Marxist approach to theorise the 'work' of safe-keeping in Glasgow, her approach has echoes of Foucauldian thought. This critical Marxist analytical lens, with its focus on labour and production, reminds of the 'work' that is safe-keeping and contrasts with the neoliberal approaches adopted by the agencies which Helms critiques.

This book contributes to the body of literature which examines the ways that urban spaces are made safer. The influences of Fyfe & Bannister (1996), Pain (2000), Young (1999) and, though she does not engage with her work directly, Koskela (2000), are apparent in discussions of how surveillance, regulation and community-building are thought to construct safer city-centres. With its focus on the agencies who implement safe-keeping strategies themselves, this study offers a perspective on safety that is at present often overlooked; the ways in which safe-keeping is tempered by economic imperatives.

In addition, Helms spends some time considering the experience of these safe-making policies for those who are marginalised by them and excluded from the city-centre. It is this discussion on street-dwellers that I find most interesting as it broadens the scope of the book beyond the focus on agencies of safe-keeping. Her discussions with sellers of the *Big Issue* and with agencies who work with prostitutes outline the effects of these neoliberal imperatives on the most socially disadvantaged of Glasgow. Similarly her consideration of corporate crime and the way in which businesses which are neglectful of their Health & Safety obligations are not criminalised in the same way that aggressive beggars are, also illustrates how decisions of local government have been influenced by the neoliberal imperatives of improving commerce, acquiring wealth and excluding those who do not fit in.

From this perspective, Helms is able to make an analysis which unmasks the neoliberal reasoning behind safe-making strategies. She also explores the ways in which wardens and other agency workers resist these regulating

practices, through what she terms *Eigen-Sinn* by, for instance, not reporting street-drinking or tolerating prostitution. Thus though her analysis focuses on the agencies, rather than on the people affected by the agencies, this discussion is not wholly top-down in approach. Similarly, this mimics the way that power operates in the 'work' of safe-keeping and recognises that this too, is not wholly top-down in approach. Her analysis allows the space to consider the alternative effects of policy-based safe-keeping work.

One limitation of this discussion, however, is that there is rather scant theorisation of the way that the terms 'fear' and 'safety' are understood. Given that this is a discussion of the way in which safety is engineered, or 'imagineered' as she suggests, Helms does little to problematise the terms 'fear' and 'safety'. For instance, in one discussion, Helms notes that the reasons given for criminalising aggressive begging and thereby making the city-centre safer, were the emotions of 'hatred', 'frustration', 'upset' and 'harassment' felt by inhabitants of Glasgow. Emotions which, she argues appear to 'have little to do with *fear*' (Helms, 2008:130). In contemporary research into fear of crime, and particularly in the work of Koskela (1997), it is recognised that fear is non-monolithic and can be expressed and experienced in response to a variety of situations and as a range of emotions. The emotions of 'hatred', 'frustration' or 'upset' that Helms suggests are unlike fear might also be understood as alternative expressions of fear, from a Koskelian perspective. However, this undertheorisation of 'fear' and 'safety' reflects the taken-for-granted way in which the agencies, police and local authorities in this study talk about fear and the promotion of safe-keeping. Their generalised approaches to what 'safety' means has in no small part led to the problems and exclusions identified and critiqued by Helms.

Overall, this book presents a sound analysis of the ways in which class and economic imperatives impact on safe-keeping strategies. In so doing, it offers insights into an aspect of safe-keeping which has remained overlooked in extant fear of crime studies. Scholars of fear of crime will enjoy the classed perspective that Helms's approach affords and find the discussions of exclusions through safe-keeping strategies particularly insightful. Thus,

notwithstanding the unproblematized way in which Helms uses some terms, her analysis remains salient and its contribution to the field significant.

Alexandra Fanghanel

University of Leeds