

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JENNIFER WOOD and CLIFFORD SHEARING, *Imagining Security*. Portland, OR: Willan Publishing, 2007, viii + 184 p., index.

Security is no longer the exclusive domain of the public police or the state. Anyone who has shopped in a suburban mall or downtown improvement area, entered an upscale residential condominium, or attended a major sporting event or political rally of late undoubtedly finds this easy to imagine. Further reading on the matter is not required. But *Imagining Security*'s purpose is to move far beyond this truism. It seeks to show this basic fact's remarkable complexity and normative implications, and how they can be better understood through empirical study. To this end, Wood and Shearing explain how security can be conceived as a nodal network of actors and environments.

The authors show that as security is increasingly governed by multiple entities, a concomitant blurring of governing mentalities and previously distinct public and private realms has occurred. No longer is there a "single model of governance, but a complex of hybrid arrangements and practices in which different mentalities of governance as well as very different sets of institutional arrangements coexist" (21). Comprised of combinations of governing authorities and providers, security can be understood using a nodal framework recognizing that state authorities as well as private and third party entities seek to govern, shape, and imagine security. Via a self-described Foucaultian/Latourian conception of power, the authors' nodal governance perspective focuses on "mentalities, institutions and practices of governing entities, or nodes, as well as the ways in which nodes may form governance relationships with others" (27). Nodes have a stable institutional form and are linked to others in inexhaustibly multiple networks. This perspective assigns greater attention to non-state entities and by recognizing a greater diversity of entities, empirical research can begin to chart the diffusion of mentalities among nodes or how "mentalities from some spheres are influencing those in other spheres" (34). As a result, security outcomes can be achieved through endless combinations and forms of nodes, but rather than assuming this is the case, the framework treats it as an empirical question to be explored.

The authors trace how nodal networks are at work within forms of security. In chapter 2, for example, they elaborate how security functions in a single state context by examining the way public policing has changed over the last half-century. Through an account of overlapping "waves" of public policing, a shift away from punitive mentalities is identified. The authors

show how risk-based thinking has aligned security with the idea and practice of governing through community. The public police have shifted their own view of their security role, and while often remaining a central node at certain moments, their well-known “monopoly” has given way to a diverse and intricate policing network.

Significantly, the authors also suggest security need not be limited to physical security but can include what they and others call “human security” (63), a usage typically found in international development and related studies. Consistent with an increased broadening of securitized domains, threats to human security are affected by highly nodalized networks, in some cases local in character, but in others global, as seen in relation to organized crime and geo-political conflicts. As threats to human security defy geographical boundaries the authors contend there should be a melding of these two conceptions of security. Thus via alignment of differing objects of security within the nodal network, a more comprehensive re-imagination is possible.

Having laid out their perspective, Wood and Shearing address a central normative question of how nodal governance arrangements can be changed “to improve governance processes and outcomes for weak actors” (98). Drawing on the earlier work of Braithwaite and Drahos, the authors elaborate a set of lessons for the weak in order to achieve more democratic governance based on the successful practices of strong nodes (101-12), such as “concentrate power nodally and use it to steer governance” and “concentrate knowledge and resources at nodes.” Following this, the authors discuss related issues of accountability in a chapter aptly called the “governance of governance” by returning to the case of the public police in Ontario, as well as to private security and other regulated domains.

There is much that we find agreeable in this book. Of particular theoretical significance in relation to existing Foucault-inspired “governmentality” work, from which the authors draw, is the key contribution of the nodal governance framework, which is to go beyond the obligatory claim about the onset of “government at a distance” arrangements, whereby non-state actors and agencies become enrolled in state projects through various means and ultimately follow state direction. As the authors at one point pronounce: “This certainly happens but it is not all that happens” (100). It is not merely that their perspective moves attention beyond the state (social and political theorists have been doing this for at least two decades), but that it refines the understanding and reveals the complexity of what this move entails in a particular and vital context. By referring to nodes the authors effectively call into doubt any prior assumed direction and nature of links among various actors and institutions engaged in authorizing and providing security. As well, the explicit broadening of security to include human security, while not novel, is equally laudable, since it potentially frees the study of security from its criminological box, allowing it to engage more comfortably with other progressive literatures. Another praiseworthy departure from orthodox “governmentality” studies, evident in later chapters, is the book’s explicit inclusion of normative questions.

Finally, the book also manages the occasional unique twist on well-trodden substantive topics, such as the suggested symbolic link between widely-discussed “broken windows theory” and communitarian thought (52).

Inevitably, the book is not immune to minor criticisms. Considering the authors’ recent and separate co-authored works, there is not that much which is novel here. Most of its coverage of substantive topics, for example, is available elsewhere. Inclusion of normative considerations is welcome, and the outlined strategies are undoubtedly a good starting point consistent with promoting democratic values. However, there is a vast and theoretically sophisticated literature on social movements that deals with similar strategies head on and which could have been mined for insights for weak actors in the security context. Future efforts to look beyond Leviathans to fill governance deficits surely must engage with this kind of research. As well, a lingering question of the nodal perspective is whether and how nodes govern themselves as institutions in the course of providing or authorizing security. Some nodes are so weak their attention is directed as much at securing against insiders as outsiders. Others are not only weak but also fleeting, authorizing or providing security only briefly and then breaking apart. The reasons for their nodal demise can include the very rationale used for authorizing external security in the first place (e.g., a neighbourhood group recently studied by one reviewer in Ontario that formed to purchase security patrols could not sustain itself precisely because of the high level of neighbours’ suspicion of outsiders and other neighbours). That security can be directed inwardly and externally in relation to nodes, and that there can be complex interactions between the two, are aspects a nodal perspective overlooks.

Overall, however, this is a worthwhile and appealing book. It serves as an excellent and approachable introduction to the nodal governance framework that is being adopted by emerging policing and security scholars in some quarters. Due to its readability and wide coverage of pertinent issues – including issues of human security not linked often enough to discussions of physical security – we highly recommend it to policing scholars, anyone trying to imagine how to improve security governance in their “corner” of a nodal network, and for upper-level undergraduate and graduate criminology and sociology courses in policing and security.

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