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The partial turn to politics in plural policing studies

Fabio Scarpello

F.Scarpello@murdoch.edu.au

Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, Murdoch, Western Australia, Australia

Review of

White, Adam (2010), *The politics of private security* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan)

Abrahamsen, Rita and Williams, Michael C. (2011), *Security beyond the state*: *Private security in international politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Albrecht, Peter and Kyed, Helene M. (Eds.) (2015), *Policing and the politics of order-making* (Abingdon: Routledge)

Policing is an essentially contested term. At its simplest, it involves organized order maintenance, peace keeping, rule or law enforcement, crime investigation and prevention, and other forms of investigation and associated information brokering, which may involve the conscious exercise of coercive power (Newburn, 2008, p. 217). But policing is also highly political and it entails practices, discourses, arrangements and modes of governance that define the very nature of state-society relations and affect *how* power is exercised, by *whom*, and for *whose* benefit. Critical criminologists have long engaged with the politics of policing and explained, for example, how the state, the police or a social class frame understandings of crime to sustain power relations skewed in regards to class, gender and race (Crowther, 2000; DeKeseredy, 2010; Grover, 2008; Neocleous,2000). The attention to the politics of policing,

however, has not been fully replicated by the scholars that, in the last decades, have left behind a state-centred view of policing, with its emphasis on the police force, and focused on a plural understanding of policing, or policing as resulting from the relations between a multitude of actors, such as vigilante and paramilitary groups, militias, community policing, private security, as well as various state-linked policing units. Indeed, paradigms developed by criminologists and socio-legal scholars, such as nodal governance (Shearing & Wood, 2003; Wood & Shearing, 2007), anchored pluralism (Loader & Walker, 2001, 2007) and multi-choice policing (Baker, 2008), have been instrumental in conceptualizing what has come to be known as the shift from police to policing (Loader, 2000, pp. 323–324), but have partly neglected the politics that shape plural policing landscapes.

For example, the starting point of both nodal governance and anchored pluralism is the effects of neoliberal globalization on the provision of policing services. The first then argues that the proliferation of nodes indicates that the pluralization has gone beyond neoliberal-driven privatization and globalization-induced trans-nationalism (Johnston, 2006, p. 33), and that nodes are neither state nor non-state, but as new forms of governance outside the state parameters (Johnston, 2006, p. 33). Anchored pluralism instead argues for the need to keep the state at the core of pluralized policing via its power to supervise and legislate over non-state policing actors. Multi-choice policing, on the other hand, takes the perspective of the citizens as its starting point and calls for mapping who the auspices and providers of policing are. In so doing, it discloses a fluid, diverse and overlapping policing landscape shaped by various 'form and method of policing, whether it is formal or informal, legal or illegal, effective or inept, fair or partisan, restrained or brutal' (Baker, 2008, p. 5).

Taken together, the three paradigms have been influential in placing the accent on the 'relational' nature of policing as resulting from the set of practices that can be exercised, and governed, by state, private and communal actors. This has led to a broadening of the conceptual standpoint to understand policing beyond strict state-non-state, formal-informal, legal-illegal as well as secular and religious and human and supernatural dividers, among others. Yet, nodal governance and multi-choice policing have maintained a problem-solving approach best suited at describing how policing is delivered and how it can be improved, while anchored pluralism has maintained a normative stance aimed at advocating how policing ought to be delivered. Their engagement with the politics of plural policing remains thus limited and they are, for example, unable to answer why some actors play a role in a specific context and not in others, and how policing affects the broader political economy and vice versa.

The three books under review have moved the discourse forward and partly filled the gap. They have done so by bringing 'power' – hence politics – to the centre of some facets of plural policing studies in a theoretically informed manner, and by broadening the literature of plural policing from its core in criminology and socio-legal studies to include perspectives from political economy, international relations and political anthropology. With this multidisciplinary dimension in mind, this review pays due attention to each book's contributions in explaining the politics of plural policing, but also to why, overall, the turn to politics remains 'partial'.

The politics of private security and *security beyond the state* engage with the politics of one facet of plural policing, the private security companies (PSCs). They do so in very different ways, though.

The politics of private security, authored by political scientist Adam White, essentially explains how politics and economy affect each other in shaping the relations between the state and PSCs in the UK. The focus of the book is thus on domestic politics. On the other hand, *Security beyond the state*, authored by Rita Abrahamsen and Michael Williams whose backgrounds respectively include expertise in African studies and critical political theory and international relations, explains how the mutually constitutive dynamics between local, national and global political economy has led to new loci of security governance – global security assemblages – involving state and PSCs (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011, p. 83). The key strength of both books is in their theoretical chapters, as these represent a clear advance in problematizing the politics of the PSC facet of plural policing.

The politics of private security borrows conceptually from nodal governance and anchored pluralism, but departs from these as it theorizes the political nature of the negotiations between the state and PSCs over the market of policing provision. Indeed, White (2010, pp. 25–28) endorses the economic explanations of the rise of private security broadly supported by the nodal governance school. These are centred on the shifting laws of supply and demand in the domestic security sector that ensued with the fiscal crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. But White (2010, pp. 25–28) also endorses anchored pluralism's state-centric political norms based on the belief that security ought to be provided by the state sheltered from market interference. The synthesis of nodal governance and anchored pluralism's narratives is then developed within a pluralist view of political economy that sees politics as being about conflict over power, and the competing forces and interests as the reflections of functional role specialization and, therefore, amenable to negotiated settlements. Importantly, the framework is based on three assumptions: the first is that there are state-centric political

norms about how security ought to be delivered that structure the actions of state and private security actors; the second is that the actions of the private sector are structured by the shifts in supply and demand; and the third is that both the state and the private security industry have a high degree of political agency (White, 2010, pp. 34–37). Based on these assumptions, White (2012, pp. 95–96) suggests that state-PSCs arrangements are to be mapped according to the nodal school methodology, while the political nature of the arrangements are extrapolated via anchored pluralism's historically grounded cultural investigations.

The usefulness of the framework is evident in the empirical chapters of the book, which span from 1945 until 2010. For example, the dialectic between economic and political rationalities emerge clearly in the first decade of what White calls the 'Neoliberal experiment' (2010, pp. 102–106). This coincided with the election of Margaret Thatcher in May 1979 and the introduction of quasi-market logics into public delivery service chain. In the private security field, this New Public Management (NPM) approach led to a change in the logic that mediated the negotiations with the state. In the preceding decades the private security industry had been pushing to gain statutory regulation via supporting the introductions of draft laws on the matter. The logic underwriting this approach was political, as it was believed that a law would legitimize PSCs *au pair* with the police (White, 2010, pp. 80–101). The government responded with measures that allowed self-regulation under the overall control of the state. However, once the NPM approach took hold, the private security industry was content with self-regulation and strived to portray itself as the provider of just another service. This was facilitated by the switch in the broad political economy that saw the state contracting out traditional security services to the private sector; the construction of shopping malls and other forms of mass property opening space for PSCs financial gains; and the effects of NPM in other sectors of the economy leading to the phasing out of many jobs that

had a social control function, such as tickets inspectors and roundsmen. This also opened up economic opportunities for PSCs (White, 2010, p. 105).

Security beyond the state's starting argument is similar to White's. Abrahamsen and Williams argue that commodification shifted security from being a public good to being a service that can be traded globally, while the entrenching of the risk mentality has led to professional private security actors becoming sought after as part of any business or investment activities.[1] These dynamics have led to a shift in the way security is provided and, importantly, in the way security is thought about, with private security becoming accepted. Also similar to *The politics of private security,* the book initially frames these dynamics by concurrently borrowing from nodal governance's view that security is provided by new sources of governance that are neither state nor non-state (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011, p. 85), and from anchored pluralism's view that the state matters.[2] But *Security beyond the state* takes both arguments much further, and engages with power and politics in a manner that neither nodal governance nor anchored pluralism or, indeed, *The politics of private security*, do.

The book's main contribution is in providing a theoretical framework – the 'global security assemblages' – to explain the private security facet of plural policing in a relational dynamic between the local and global political economy. This is achieved by pairing elements of Sassen theory of globalization (2006), with elements of Bourdieu's sociology (1977, 1986, 1992).

Sassen (2006, p. 21) provides the conceptual basis arguing that we are witnessing a three-fold movement in contemporary political structures. This sees a process of 'disassembly' in which

previously public functions are increasingly transferred to private actors; followed by a

process of development of 'capacities' by private actors that allow them to act at a global

level; and, finally, a process of 'reassembly' whereby these new actors and capabilities

become part of 'global assemblages' that are embedded in national settings but operate at a

global scale. Abrahamsen and Williams (2011, p. 107) argue that the result of this three-fold

movement in the field of security has led to the formation of complex, multi-sited

institutional orders – the global security assemblages – where a range of different security

agents interact, cooperate and compete to produce new practices and structures of security

governance.

Abrahamsen and Williams then employ Bourdieu's concepts of 'field' (Bourdieu &

Wacquant, 1992) and 'capital' (1986) to explain how global security assemblages develop

within a historical trajectory. According to Bourdieu, the social world is divided into fields

and a field is a social space structured by the operation and distribution of particular forms of

capital, both materials – such as economic capital – and non-material, such as cultural, social

and symbolic capital. Bourdieu sees the ability to move in a field as tied to an agent's

possession of the relevant forms of capital. In the case of the global security assemblages,

Abrahamsen and Williams use the concepts of field and capital to explain the resource

available to public and private, as well as global and local security actors, and explain the

shifting forms of power and contestations within the global security assemblages

(Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011, p. 90).

Again, the explanatory usefulness of the framework is clear in the rich case studies included

in the book. The analysis of global security assemblage in the Niger Delta, summarized in

some detail below, is emblematic (Abrahamsen & Williams,2011, pp. 126–148).

The analytical starting point is the nature of the Nigerian state and its rent economy. At its simplest, the discovery of oil in Nigeria has led to the state becoming dependent on it; politics is an intra-elite zero-sum struggle of winner takes it all; and institutions largely a means to allocate patronage. This politics of plunder is accompanied by a highly unequal society with some 80% of oil revenues accrued by 1% of the population, and 70% of private wealth held abroad. At the same time, about 70% of Nigeria's population live below the poverty line, with deprivation acute in parts of the oil-producing states (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011, p. 130).

In the Niger Delta this political economy translates into virtually no development leaving people torn between a life of subsistence and unemployment. The situation is exacerbated by the widespread environmental damage caused by petroleum extraction and has led to vigilante groups, militias and, especially, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta targeting multinational companies, which are seen as intertwined with the state.

The global political economy comes into the analysis in various ways. The oil industry in Nigeria is centralized via the Nigeria National Petroleum Company. This, however, operates in joint ventures with several global oil companies, such as Shell, Exxon Mobil and Chevron. Also, most of the Niger Delta's oil is exported to the West, and western engineers make up the bulk of the senior staff keeping the industry going.

The security situation is so dire that most of the oil extraction takes place in fortified enclaves. This is where global security assemblages have emerged in manners that blur the local, national, global divider, as well as the public and private one. PSCs are key players in global security assemblages. But in the Niger Delta they are prevented from carrying

firearms. This has led forms of cooperation with the police whereby police officers are seconded to PSCs, integrated into their everyday operations, paid supplementary wages by the companies and supervised by PSC officers, while still taking orders from their own commanders.

Also, PSCs cooperate with the so-called supernumerary or 'spy' police at the direct request of the oil companies. They are deployed as an unarmed police force under the direct pay and control of the oil companies, and with police powers only on company property. Shell alone has 1200 at its operations; ExxonMobil deploys between 700 and 1000, and Chevron approximately 250 (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011, p. 138). Oil companies have also integrated armed components of the police with arrangements that significantly blur the authority between company security officials and public officers. In addition, private security personnel interact on a daily basis with the military forces, or government security forces, which are increasingly used to protect oil operations defined as 'national key assets'. In such a way, these global security assemblages affect the broader political economy of Nigeria.

Taken together, therefore, *The politics of private security* and, in particular, *Security beyond the state* represent a quantum leap in our understanding of the politics of the PSC facet of plural policing. The problem is that both engage only with PSC and their frameworks are unable to engage with other facets of the plural policing landscape.

The key limits of *The politics of private security* are the state-centred assumptions upon which it is based. These prevent the framework from also explaining the political economy of PSCs that only partly operate within a state-centred frame. In South Africa, for example, there have been attempts through the state to regulate and supervise the industry through an

on-going process of negotiations (Berg, 2007; Gumedze, 2007). But the industry is also represented by PSCs that operate outside such a state-centred framework and, indeed, on the margin of the state law (Baker, 2002, pp. 37–38). The Mapogo a Mathamaga is a private-security-company-cum-vigilante-group that epitomizes this type of actor (|Oomen, 1999, 2004; von Schnitzler et al.,2001).[3]

The limit of the *Security beyond the state* is instead inherent in the conceptual basis deriving from Sassen's globalization theory. Sassen, as noted, indicates that there is a three-fold movement that include a process of 'disassembly', a process of 'development of capacities' by private actors and a process of 'reassembly'. This three-fold movement is not always useful to explain the politics of policing actors, such as vigilantes, militias, community policing, etc. Also, *Security beyond the state* places too much emphasis on globalization as the driver of pluralization of policing. But the claim to a policing role of most of the actors throughout the world is rooted in other drivers of pluralization including the processes of democratization, authoritarianism, decentralization, urbanization, the global discourse around religious revival or the empowering of customary rules, among others. Hence the 'partial' turn to politics in these texts.

Policing and the politics of order-making has taken this discourse further and, as we will see, it has overcome some of the limits of the two other books. Still, it suffers from other limitations.

The most important part of the edited volume is the introduction chapter in which the two editors, Albrecht and Kyed – two researchers of the Danish Institute of International Studies with long-standing interests, respectively, in security sector reform in Sierra Leone and state

formation in Southern Africa – outline their theoretical approach (Kyed & Albrecht, 2015, pp. 1–23). In a manner explained below, this is innovative and is the first framework able to engage with the politics of any type of policing actor.

The starting point of the framework is multi-choice policing, the already noted plural policing paradigm developed by Baker and which refutes a state-centred view of policing. This means taking into consideration the practices deriving from any actor, whether operating formally, informally or illegally. Kyed and Albrecht then stress the relational nature of policing, not just in regards to other policing actors, but crucially also in regards to the sociopolitical context in which they are embedded (2015, p. 15). It is this set of relationships that lays the foundation for Kyed and Albrecht's framework. In particular, the framework is developed by borrowing from Lund (2006a)'s concept of 'twilight institutions' and from the methodology and concepts developed by political anthropologists that have engaged with the fragmented and contested nature of de facto sovereignty.

The concept of 'twilight institutions' is based on the distinction between state idea and state institutions popularized by Abrams (1977/1988) who argued against the reifying of the state as an object of study, and in favour of studying the hidden political and ideological realities that make the state as an idea. In particular, 'twilight institutions' is meant to indicate the importance of the 'state idea' in shaping social relations even when state institutions are inefficient. As developed by Lund, it is an analytical tool to explain how public authority is exercised in contexts where it is not the exclusive possession of government institutions, and where institutional competition is intense and a range of ostensibly a-political situations become actively politicized (Lund, 2006a, p. 674). In particular, Lund (2006a) argues that in such contexts a number of actors act state-like not only by performing functions that are

usually the domain of the state, but also because they vie for public authority. He also argues (2006b, p. 686) that public authority – or 'stateness' – can wax and wane, and that as consequence state institutions are never definitively formed, but that a constant process of formation takes place. Such institutions operate in the twilight between state and society, between public and private (Lund, 2006b, p. 686). Lund (2006a, p. 674) argues that explaining how twilight institutions operate requires looking at public authority 'from below', from the variety of concrete encounters between forms of public authority and the more or less mundane practices of ordinary people. To do so, it is analytically important to observe how language, style and symbols of the state are reproduced or contested at local level (Lund, 2006b). Lund (2006b) thus argues that distinctions between state and non-state or public and private are unhelpful.

According to Kyed and Albrecht (2015, p. 5) policing actors are twilight institutions as they often take state-like functions by seeking to establish authority over a territory, based on the invocation of transcendent qualities such as community, tradition, ethnicity or religion. Kyed and Albrecht, therefore, use the concept to explain the political nature of policing actors as they engage in making and re-making public authority at the local level.

The second part of the policing as order-making framework borrows from political anthropological studies on vigilantism to explain the 'violent performances and moral ambiguity of policing actors' (Kyed & Albrecht, 2015, p. 7), or how policing actors are, at the same time, agents of security and insecurity. Particular useful for Kyed and Albrecht is Comaroff and Comaroff's concept of 'partial sovereignty'. As the Comaroffs argue (2008, p. 35):

Because of their historical predicaments, postcolonies tend *not* to be organized under a single, vertically integrated sovereignty sustained by a highly centralized state. Rather, they consist in a horizontally woven tapestry of partial sovereignties: sovereignties over terrains and their inhabitants, over aggregates of people conjoined in faith or culture, over transactional spheres, over networks of relations, regimes of property, domains of practice, and, quite often, over various combinations of these things; sovereignties longer or shorter lived, protected to a greater or lesser degree by the capacity to exercise compulsion, always incomplete.

This plural understanding of sovereignty allows Kyed and Albrecht to move from a *de jure* to a de facto conceptualization of sovereignty (Hansen & Stepputat, 2005), and explain the often visible role that violence plays in everyday policing as acts of sovereign practices.

Overall, the framework is aimed at explaining how policing contributes in order-making in urban Global South where citizens often consider public policing inadequate and organize themselves to fill the gap. Kyed and Albrecht call for a political ethnographic methodology that requires extensive fieldwork and direct observation of the language of stateness, symbols and practices that policing actors deploy in their attempts to establish, define and enact localized social order. In so doing, the frameworks engages with two levels of the relationship between policing and politics. The first is policing as an expression of the *political* in the underlying processes through which [localized social] order is defined and enacted (Kyed & Albrecht, 2015, p. 18), and the second is in how policing is often implicated in *politics*, via the relations between policing actors and politicians, bureaucrats, businesspeople and so on (Kyed & Albrecht, 2015, p. 18). The contribution of the framework to our understanding of the politics of plural policing is thus clear.

Policing and the politics of order-making suffers, however, from a lack of coherence that often plagues edited volumes. In this case, the usefulness of the framework transpires in some of the chapters, but not in others. It is evident, for example, in Telle's (2015, pp. 45–56) chapter where she explains how the vigilante group *Amphibi*, in the Indonesian island of Lombok, has progressively moved away from unrestrained violence and has become more state-like by producing artefacts of modern state power (laminated membership cards, ledgers, seals and military-style uniforms) and adopting a territorial form of organization that emulates those of state institutions, with departments for security, law, proselytization, economy, welfare and communication. It also clear in Jensen and Hapal's (2015, pp. 24–39) ethnographic analysis of how community policing in one of Manila slums has been affected by family and community relations as well as local electoral politics. This latter usefully explains how the result of local election may lead to changes to the beneficiaries of patronage and to who is allowed to play a role in policing. And in Kyed's (2015, pp. 57–17) chapter where she explains how a civilian community policing group in the low-income neighbourhood of Mbhuleni, Swaziland, turned itself into a political vehicle for some of its members via successfully combating crime. This, Kyed argues, has given the group status as 'informal sovereign' of the area, and granted the ability to both aid and challenge the *de jure* superior authority of the state police. In so doing they have become order-makers.

Coherence aside, *Policing and the politics of order-making* has taken the plural policing discourse further as it is able to explain some of the political dimensions of policing, regardless of the actors involved and the practices through which they play a role. Thus seen, it has broadened our engagement with the politics of plural policing. This notwithstanding, the scale of politics and the political ethnographic approach favoured in the book (and the

framework this is built upon) are ill-suited to explain the dynamics that shape the dialectic relations between the broad political economy and plural policing landscapes. In other words, and viewing *Policing and the politics of order-making* in relation to the other books, Kyed and Albrecht have deepened our engagement with the micro politics of plural policing, but the decision to focus on the 'local' inevitably reduces the utility of their analyses for understanding developments of the macro-political level provided by *The politics of private security* and, in particular, *Security beyond the state* in regards to the private security industry.

Once it is all taken into consideration, the three books have laid the foundations for a more meaningful engagement with the politics of plural policing. But as it stands, the turn to politics remains partial. In particular, gaps still exist in explaining the mutually constitutive relations between the broad political economy and complex plural policing landscapes.

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Disclosure statement
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Notes

1 On risk mentality see Beck (1992/1986).

2 On the latter, elsewhere Abrahamsen and Williams (2011, p. 126) argue that the notion of security as a public good is an almost inescapable aspect of modern politics and that 'one could claim that within the dominant traditions of modern political thought it is almost impossible not to think of security in this way'.

3 Elsewhere White admits that the state-centred normative position he endorses is likely to be patchy and uneven at best outside of the industrialized democracies of the North (White, 2012, pp. 100, footnote 105).

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