



The new political economy of private security

Theoretical Criminology

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Abstract

This article maps out a new research agenda for interpreting the trajectory and dynamics of domestic private security provision in advanced democratic countries: the ‘new political economy of private security’. It proceeds on the basis that the key challenge in this field is to construct an agenda which takes account of how both the economic context (shifts in supply and demand) and the political context (state-centric conceptions of legitimacy) of domestic security simultaneously serve to shape the conduct of contemporary private security providers. In attempting to meet this challenge, the article not only builds upon the important theoretical research already undertaken in the form of the nodal governance and anchored pluralism models, but also sheds new light on the nature of domestic private security today.

Keywords

agency, culture, economics, legitimacy, market, politics, private security, state, structure policing

Introduction

Domestic security provision is undergoing a significant transformation. In advanced democratic countries across the world, monopolistic and state-centred systems of security provision are increasingly giving way to more pluralistic systems in which public police forces and private security companies work alongside one another in fragmented security networks. This transformation affects the delivery of many core human goods—including peace, democracy and human rights—on a daily basis. Given the importance of these issues, the expansion of domestic private security has attracted considerable

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academic attention in recent decades, giving rise to a series of different empirical and theoretical lines of enquiry (key contributions include: Johnston, 1992; Johnston and Shearing, 2003; Jones and Newburn, 1998; Loader and Walker, 2007; Shearing and Stenning, 1981, 1983; Wood and Shearing, 2007; Zedner, 2009). While these lines of enquiry have served to deepen our understanding of this trend, there is a lack of joined-up thinking in this research area. Scholars pursuing different research questions have a tendency to talk past one another, leaving underexplored a number of important issues such as private security growth patterns, the dynamics of legitimation, the logics of security regulation and the relationship between security and the public good. One reason for this fragmentation is that there have been few attempts to link together these different lines of enquiry within a broadly pitched research agenda. The purpose of this article is to develop such an agenda: the 'new political economy of private security'.

The construction of this agenda is guided by a normative commitment to the 'new political economy' framework developed by Gamble et al. (1996).¹ In this framework, the traditional dichotomies between politics/economics, states/markets and structure/agency are consciously broken down and reframed within an integrated approach designed to give expression to the multiple bounded rationalities which drive social phenomena (Gamble et al., 1996: 5–6). This is a particularly useful approach with which to (re)order current empirical and theoretical research on domestic private security because this research is often characterized by such dichotomies. Some of the most pressing issues in this field are situated in the space where politics/economics, states/markets and structure/agency collide with and mutually constitute each other. Furthermore, this approach generates valuable insights by introducing a contemporary political science perspective into an area of research presently dominated by criminological enquiry, thereby leading to a more multidisciplinary understanding of these issues. As such, the prefix 'new' in the title not only reflects a normative affiliation with a specific analytical framework, but also emphasizes the fact that the article maps out important new empirical and theoretical terrain.

Against this backdrop, the article proceeds in three stages. First, it is argued that the majority of empirical research on domestic private security has (implicitly) been conducted within *either* an economic context which focuses upon the laws of supply and demand *or* a political context which emphasizes the deeply embedded cultural belief that security is an inherently governmental function. Consequently, it is reasoned that one of the main challenges in this field is to put together an agenda which encourages researchers to investigate how *both* of these contexts serve simultaneously to shape the everyday conduct of domestic private security actors. Second, it is contended that while the two main theoretical frameworks in this area—the nodal governance model (see Johnston and Shearing, 2003; Wood and Shearing, 2007) and the anchored pluralism model (see Loader and Walker, 2006, 2007)—both make useful contributions to the challenge of guiding researchers towards the political economy of private security, neither provides a balanced and integrated framework. Third, it is thus argued that a new series of research questions, methodological techniques and analytical propositions are required in order to steer future research more effectively in the direction of the political economy of private security.

Political and economic context

Over the past two decades or so, researchers from a range of disciplines have contributed important insights into the dynamics of domestic private security in advanced democratic countries. On the surface, this multidisciplinary body of literature appears to bring into frame a wide array of trends which defy simple categorization. From a new political economy perspective, however, it is possible to identify two meta-trends: the first relates to the economic context of domestic private security and the second relates to the political context.

Economic context

Economic context refers to the shifting laws of supply and demand in the domestic security sector. Research conducted in relation to this context tends to produce an economic narrative in which private security providers are conceptualized as economic actors whose primary motivation is to take advantage of market fluctuations so as to expand their commercial operations. This narrative begins with an examination of some well-known shifts in supply and demand in the immediate post-war era, before moving onto more contemporary economic developments.

During the middle decades of the 20th century, domestic security sectors in many advanced democratic countries were dominated by well-resourced public police forces. In accordance with post-war Keynesian economic policy, rising demand for domestic security was, at this time, usually met with an increase in the supply of public policing resources (Ayling et al., 2009; Braithwaite, 2000). As such, there was little demand for private security. However, cracks in this monopolistic system began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s with the onset of fiscal crisis in many advanced democratic (Keynesian) states. As investment in public services declined in line with resource constraints and an emergent neoliberal governing mentality, public police forces were no longer sufficiently well resourced to satisfy demands for domestic security, in turn creating a security vacuum which was duly exploited by business-savvy private security providers (see Jones and Newburn, 1998: 98–104).

Although this often cited scenario has a great deal of analytical purchase, it does not provide the full picture. While state investment in public services did decline during the 1970s and 1980s, in many countries state investment in public policing actually continued to rise. Braithwaite (2000: 49), for instance, observes that between 1970 and 1990 the number of public police officers in Britain and the United States increased by 35 and 64 per cent respectively. On the surface, this observation appears to invalidate the above scenario. Yet on closer inspection this is not necessarily the case. This is because the rise in spending on the public police did not in fact manage to keep up with demand for domestic security, which from the 1970s onwards accelerated at an increasingly rapid pace. As a consequence, there was still a supply side deficit which private security providers were able to exploit, but the deficit was caused by escalating demand for domestic security rather than by declining state investment in public policing. Why was demand accelerating at such a pace?

To begin with, crime rates in many advanced democratic countries were rising steadily during this era, stimulating demand for domestic security provision (Gurr, 1977; Maguire, 2007). Furthermore, as Reiner (1992) points out, patterns of crime in many of these countries were also becoming more complex in line with the gradual pluralization of class, gender, identity and religious social relations, making it difficult for monolithic public institutions such as the police to combat criminal activity. This explains not only why demand for security was increasing in general, but also why a sizeable proportion of this demand was being satisfied by private security providers, for the services delivered by these flexible market-based organizations could (in theory at least) be more effectively tailored towards the localized and particularistic security needs which were resulting from these trends (Wood and Shearing, 2007).

A further source of demand has come from the emergence of security fetishism. In many advanced democratic countries there has been an increasing desire to ameliorate subjective feelings of insecurity—which are spreading as a consequence of shifting patterns of crime and the rise of an increasingly individualistic neoliberal world view—through the accumulation of ever more security products and services (Jones and Newburn, 2006; Neocleous, 2008; Zedner, 2003). Importantly, this fetishism is self-perpetuating. The more public or private security officers there are patrolling publicly accessible spaces, the more citizens are reminded of their insecurity, thereby further stimulating their desire for security products and services (Zedner, 2003: 163). Whether or not the fuelling of such insecurity is a conscious business strategy used by private security providers to maintain a healthy demand for their services is a matter of debate. Some argue that it can be seen as a kind of conspiracy (Neocleous, 2008: 145–160). It is likely, however, that such insecurity is equally as much one of the many unintended consequences of private security provision.

Lastly, shifting property relations have also stimulated demand for domestic private security by enhancing the capacity of citizens to choose between different modes of security provision. The key trend here is the emergence of what Shearing and Stenning (1981, 1983) have famously termed ‘mass private property’—that is, expansive tracts of private property which are used predominantly as public spaces, such as shopping centres, industrial complexes, gated communities and so on (see also Kempa et al., 2004). On this property, Shearing and Stenning (1983) observe, landlords have the legal right to employ private security providers in order to control access to and behaviour within their borders. This in turn creates a latent demand for private security, which can easily be actualized if landlords are dissatisfied with—or simply want to supplement—public policing.

These economic fluctuations in supply and demand have a profound impact upon the conduct of private security providers. Importantly, though, this is by no means the whole story. As further research has demonstrated, the activities of private security providers are also shaped by the political context of the domestic security sector.

Political context

Political context refers to the deep-rooted political norms which are centred around the idea that domestic security ought to be exclusively provided by the state, entirely free from the interference of commercial interests. Research conducted in relation to this

context tends to produce a political narrative in which private security providers figure as political actors seeking to navigate their way through this complex political terrain in an effort to legitimate (and thereby enhance the appeal of) their commercial operations. This narrative begins with an exploration of the historical relationship between the public and private sectors in relation to domestic security, before moving on to the consequences of this relationship for contemporary private security providers.

While no state has ever actually exercised a true Weberian-style monopoly over security provision, a number of advanced democratic states came close enough to this ideal-type institutional arrangement during the mid-20th century to give the broad impression of one. Furthermore, the discourse of political leaders in these countries frequently drew upon the idea of a state monopoly in order to justify the state's activities, in turn serving to further reinforce this broad impression (Shearing, 1992). As such, populations across the globe have gradually come to expect that the state ought to monopolize domestic security provision and, by extension, to regard any institution which appears to undermine this monopoly as immoral and unjust (see Brodeur, 2007: 119–120; Garland, 1996: 448–449; Rawlings, 2003: 61). In many advanced democratic countries, these expectations have transformed into inter-subjective norms which mark out the socio-political contours of domestic security provision today. One significant consequence of these norms is that as private security providers expand their operations they tend to encounter resistance because their presence grates against popular expectations about how security ought to be delivered (Loader, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c; Loader and Walker, 2001, 2007). They have accordingly developed a number of political strategies designed to circumvent this resistance.

For example, many providers have openly sought to recruit into their ranks moonlighting and retired public police and military officers in order to incorporate (former) representatives of the state monopoly into their commercial operations. In some countries, such as the United States, moonlighting is especially common. Sklansky (1999: 1176) remarks, for instance, that in some US metropolitan police departments more than half of the police officers are employed by private security providers in some capacity. Furthermore, according to Stewart (1985: 761) 'some cities permit such officers to wear their uniforms, badges and guns on the theory that increasing police presence in an area is a public as well as private benefit' (see also Ayling et al., 2009: 133–156). This policy serves to blur the boundary between public and private policing in a manner which plays to the advantage of private security providers, since it confers upon their operations a degree of the symbolic state-like legitimacy which is widely expected of domestic security actors. In other countries, such as Australia, Japan and the United Kingdom, a parallel dynamic takes place with regard to retired public police and military officers, who are integrated into the ranks of private security companies in what seems to be a similarly conscious effort to create the general impression of 'stateness' (Ayling and Shearing, 2008; White, 2010; Yoshida, 1999).

A further (and related) strategy utilized by private security providers has been to issue uniforms to their officers which mimic the uniforms of the public police. Despite the fact that this practice is banned or severely restricted in many countries (see Bunyan, 1977; White, 2010; Yoshida, 1999), it goes on unabated across the world. This is an important trend because, as Thumala et al. (2011: 294) remark, 'the use of uniforms, badges and

vehicles that resemble those of the police (and are designed to do so) are all indicative of an attempt to secure legitimacy by association'. This visual sleight of hand once again appears to be designed to give private security providers an air of 'stateness' in anticipation that it will appeal to the deep-seated state-centric political norms which permeate the domestic security sector.

In addition to these largely symbolic strategies, private security providers have also made great efforts to develop legally grounded relations with state institutions through statutory regulation. In Britain, for example, a powerful alliance of private security providers lobbied in favour of regulation for almost 40 years before this institutional arrangement was finally codified in the form of the Private Security Industry Act 2001 (White, 2010). Similar scenarios have occurred in other such geographically diverse locations as France and Australia (see Ocqueteau, 1993; Prenzler and Sarre, 1998, 2006). In many respects, regulation represents the legitimization strategy *par excellence*, for although it entails the implementation of restrictive bureaucratic red tape upon commercial security operations, it also gives these operations a concrete semblance of 'stateness'. This in turn allows private security providers to market themselves not as commercial organizations working in line with private goods and profit margins, but rather as state-deputized institutions functioning in accordance with the state-guaranteed public good (White, 2010).

The political context of domestic security shapes the activities of private security providers to a significant degree. From a new political economy standpoint, however, it is critical to recognize that in reality this political context runs alongside and overlaps with the economic context examined above. It seems clear that the laws of supply and demand in the domestic security sector are mediated by a set of deeply embedded political norms about how security ought to be delivered. However, this is an under-appreciated dynamic. Researchers in this field rarely make explicit and systematic connections between these political and economic contexts, tending instead either to focus on these problems in isolation or to make only rudimentary linkages between them. Consequently, one of the key challenges in this field is to develop an agenda which encourages researchers to investigate how both the economic context and the political context of domestic security have the effect of jointly shaping the conduct of contemporary private security providers. The remainder of the article represents an attempt to meet this challenge from a new political economy perspective. It does so in two stages: first, it explores the degree to which the two main theoretical frameworks in this research area can be used to contribute towards this agenda, thereby taking advantage of the conceptual work already done in this field; second, it expands upon these frameworks in order to construct the new political economy of private security.

Nodal governance and anchored pluralism

Over the past couple of decades, two theoretical frameworks have come to dominate the study of domestic security: the nodal governance model and anchored pluralism model.² Both set out to conceptualize today's security landscape in a broad sense—focusing on the activities of state and non-state actors in both advanced and emerging democracies—and therefore provide numerous insights which fall beyond the scope of this article. For present purposes, however, these two models are important because—in the abridged

formulations set out below—they stand at the forefront of conceptual research into domestic private security in advanced democratic countries. As a consequence, they serve to mark out the terrain of what has so far been accomplished in meeting the challenge of developing a research agenda which explicates how both the political and economic context of domestic security simultaneously serve to shape the conduct of private security actors.

Nodal governance

The nodal governance model came to prominence in the mid-1990s (though its intellectual roots can be traced back to the early 1980s) as the first explicit attempt to conceptualize the increasingly pluralized domestic security sector.³ The key nodal governance theorists are Shearing, Johnston and Wood (see Johnston and Shearing, 2003; Shearing, 1996, 2006; Shearing and Wood, 2003; Wood and Shearing, 2007)—though many others have contributed towards the development of the model, taking it in a number of interesting directions (for example Dupont, 2004; Kempa and Singh, 2008; Kempa et al., 2004; Marks and Wood, 2010). Together these scholars have made a significant contribution towards the task of understanding contemporary security provision in its various forms. Importantly, though, when viewed from a new political economy perspective, it can be argued that these scholars have a tendency to focus more upon the economic context of domestic private security than the political context.

The model emerged as a way of interrogating and generalizing Shearing and Stenning's (1981, 1983) empirical findings from the early 1980s about the relationship between mass private property and the emergence of domestic private security. As a result of this focus, its proponents have primarily been concerned with first 'mapping' the pluralized security arrangements which exist in localized geographical spaces—or 'nodes'—and then working out how these nodes relate to one another in broad security networks. In order to construct such nodal maps, they have drawn upon the key concepts of governance theory, such as institutions, practices, mentalities, knowledge and resources (on governance theory in general see Pierre and Peters, 2000; Rhodes, 1997; Smith, 1993, 1999; on nodal mapping see Johnston and Shearing, 2003; Wood, 2006; Wood and Shearing, 2007). The key stipulation they make when constructing these maps is that no a priori emphasis ought to be placed on public security arrangements at the expense of private ones. To do so would, in their view, essentially mean falling back into the monopolistic system which is in the process of being transcended. Instead, they argue, the constitution of each node must be approached as an 'empirically open question' with no preconceived disposition towards either the public or private sphere (Shearing and Wood, 2003: 404).

Using this theoretical framework, the nodal governance theorists have set about the task of mapping out the contemporary security landscape. The breadth of this mapping is impressive and stretches beyond the focus of this article, covering parts of Latin America (Wood and Cardia, 2006) and Africa (Kempa and Singh, 2008; Marks and Wood, 2010; Shearing and Berg, 2006) as well as global terror networks (Shearing and Johnston, 2010) and global security institutions (Wood and Shearing, 2007). With regard to domestic security in advanced democratic countries, they have illustrated how in recent decades

many—if not most—of today's nodes are populated not only by public sector institutions such as the police, but also private sector institutions such as private security providers. So as citizens move between different nodes during the course of their daily lives—from shopping malls, industrial complexes and gated communities to airports, city centres and national border points—they encounter a variety of security regimes which are characterized by both public and private institutions, practices, mentalities, knowledge and resources (see, for example, Button, 2007, 2008; Kempa et al., 2004; Shearing and Stenning, 1987; Van Steden, 2007).

Within this broad framework there does appear to be space to accommodate both the economic and political context identified in the previous section. However, when analysing the dynamics of domestic private security, researchers using this model have a notable tendency to focus more upon the economic context of domestic security than the political context. In particular, they repeatedly explain the growth patterns of domestic private security by citing the emergence of mass private property set against the backdrop of changing patterns of crime and rising insecurity. To be sure, they do also discuss important political trends such as the shift in governing mentalities from 'welfare liberalism' to 'lean-state, market-orientated models of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism' (Kempa et al., 2004: 575; see also Ayling et al., 2009; Shearing and Wood, 2003). But such discussions—with their focus upon the deepening logic of the market and the shrinking of the political sphere—if anything have the effect of consolidating the centrality of economic context in their writings rather than balancing it against the equally important political context. As such, references to the political context of domestic private security are rare. To date there has been no systematic attempt by researchers working within this framework to investigate either the legitimization activities in which most private security providers are presently engaged or the political rationalities which lay behind them. Instead, these providers are generally regarded as being unconstrained by the state-centric political norms which structure the contemporary domestic security sector in many advanced democratic countries.

This is not to say, though, that the nodal governance model precludes analysis of this political context. Given the model's 'empirically open' standpoint, there is no reason why such legitimization activities—together with the causes which lay behind them—cannot be mapped onto security nodes where they occur. However, there is a plausible reason why this context has not featured prominently in nodal governance analysis. It is because the model has frequently been framed—especially by Shearing, Johnston and Wood—as an explicit critique of those state-centred 'Westphalian' analyses of domestic security provision which came to prominence during the monopoly era and continue to influence much social science research today (see in particular Shearing, 2006: 29–30; Shearing and Johnston, 2010: 496–498; Shearing and Wood, 2003: 418–419). According to these theorists, the problem with such state-centric analyses is that 'they attempt to grasp what is happening from the vantage point of what is being superseded' (Shearing and Wood, 2003: 418)—they seek to interpret the present and future through the prism of the past. With this in mind, Shearing, Johnston and Wood have explicitly designed the nodal governance model to conceptualize the post-monopoly era of security provision. This of course explains why the model is so effective at capturing many of the more radical trends in the contemporary security sector. The counter-critique of this futuristic

orientation, however, is that domestic security provision today—particularly in advanced democratic countries—is still shaped by the legacy of the monopoly era, as evidenced by the ongoing influence of those political norms whose origins can be traced to the discursive and institutional formation of the state monopoly over security provision. So while the model does not preclude analysis of the political context, the way in which it is framed may go some way towards explaining why no systematic analysis of this context has yet been advanced within the nodal governance literature.

Anchored pluralism

The anchored pluralism model is closely associated with the writings of Loader and Walker (2001, 2006, 2007) and has emerged as the main alternative to the nodal governance model as a lens through which to interpret the changing nature of the contemporary security landscape.⁴ This model too has made a significant contribution towards the project of deconstructing the dynamics of private security provision today. When viewed from a new political economy perspective, however, it can be seen that this model has a tendency to focus more upon the political context of private security than the economic context.

Like the nodal governance theorists, Loader and Walker regularly employ the language of governance theory and make reference to shifting economic forces in order to understand the trajectory of contemporary private security provision. The key point of departure between the two models concerns the role of the state in both normative and empirical terms. Whereas the nodal governance theorists adopt no consistent normative position with regard to the ideal role of the state, arguing that such questions ought to be addressed on a node by node basis, Loader and Walker do assume an explicit normative position in this regard. While appreciating the potentially hazardous nature of state security provision, they reason that a reformed and reconstituted state represents the most effective, morally just and socially responsible means of delivering security today. In their view, the state should ‘anchor’ the plurality of security actors in the contemporary security sector firmly in the public interest (Loader and Walker, 2006, 2007). This normative position runs alongside a strong empirical focus on state security provision, especially its influence on contemporary social relations. As such, Loader and Walker view the monopoly era and the state-centred ‘Westphalian’ models of security provision as having a continuing relevance for today’s domestic security sector.

The full reach of Loader and Walker’s writings goes beyond the scope of this article, since they extend from the domestic into the global sphere (see Loader and Walker, 2007). It is thus necessary to focus on that part of their work which seeks to develop further and generalize Loader’s empirical findings from the mid-1990s about the role of symbolism and cultural power in the relationship between domestic public and private security (Loader, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c). In order to understand this relationship, Loader and Walker have developed a series of innovative connections between contemporary domestic security provision and the deeply embedded political norms which have permeated this sector throughout the course of modern history. They focus in particular on those norms rooted in Enlightenment political thought—especially the social contract

philosophy of Hobbes (1996, Books 1 & 2) and Locke (1988, Book 2)—where the idea of a war-ridden state of nature in which each individual looks after his or her own interests (including security) is contrasted with a peaceful and prosperous civil society ordered by a benevolent state. Loader and Walker (2001: 20) develop this connection as follows:

[a]s an institution intimately concerned with the protection of the state and the security of its citizens, one that is deeply entangled with some profound hopes, fears, fantasies and anxieties about matters such as life/death, order/chaos and protection/vulnerability, the police remain closely tied to people's sense of ontological security and collective identity, and capable of generating high, emotionally charged levels of identification among citizens.

In this conceptualization, the public police are cast as representatives of the Enlightenment project to vanquish 'death, chaos and vulnerability' (i.e. the state of nature) and to maximize 'life, order and protection' (i.e. a peaceful and prosperous civil society). For Loader and Walker, the association between the public police and civility has for many people become naturalized: 'the most basic grid of meaning through which we see the world' (Loader and Walker, 2007: 44). It is because of this connection, they go on to reason, that today's police forces in many advanced democratic countries enjoy such high levels of symbolic power, cultural support and legitimacy, even in the face of repeated controversies (see also Loader, 1997b). Importantly, however, for Loader and Walker this 'basic grid of meaning' has the opposite effect on private security provision, for 'the logic of market allocation offends against the social meanings that have come to be attached to security in liberal democracies' (Loader, 1997c: 381). Because private security provision grates against people's cultural attachment to public policing—and by extension the Enlightenment project to build a peaceful and prosperous society—it is widely regarded as being immoral and unjust, enjoying very little symbolic power, cultural support or legitimacy.

Loader and Walker thus mark out important conceptual ground in relation to the political context of domestic security. They illustrate, for instance, why private security providers invest so much time and effort into legitimation activities, such as incorporating (former) representatives of the state monopoly into their ranks, appropriating the symbolism of the state and, in some extreme cases, lobbying for a system of statutory regulation. It is because they are consciously seeking to disassociate their operations from the commercial logic which so 'offends' against popular sensibilities about domestic security and to instead align their operations with the Enlightenment project to vanquish 'death, chaos and vulnerability' and maximize 'life, order and protection'. However, the economic context of domestic private security features less prominently in their writings. While they appreciate that domestic private security has expanded in line with shifts in supply and demand, they provide limited guidance on how to investigate this economic context. This is problematic because in leaving these supply and demand factors in the background they have a tendency to downplay the agency of private security providers. In their writings, these providers are engaged in a struggle to reconcile their activities with the political norms which permeate the domestic security sector, but it is not clear whether or not they ever make any progress. Indeed, it often appears as though they are

forever destined to lose out to the culturally superior and symbolically more powerful public police forces. Yet this is far from being the case, for these providers have capitalized upon fluctuations in supply and demand to the extent that they are now engaged in frontline security operations in advanced democratic countries across the globe. Despite the constraining influence of the deeply embedded political norms which structure the domestic security sector, they do have the power to change the constitution of this sector over time.

There is no inherent reason why such economic factors cannot be more fully integrated into the anchored pluralism model. Loader and Walker could certainly retain their insights about the way in which private security providers are constrained by inter-subjective political norms while at the same time placing more emphasis on the way in which these providers are empowered by the shifting laws of supply and demand. There is, however, a likely explanation for this omission. Building the logic of the market more comprehensively into their analysis does have the knock on effect of moving their empirical narrative ever further away from their normative ideal of a state-anchored security system and thus generates an increasing degree of tension between the empirical and normative dimensions of their model. Of course, this tension is by no means irreconcilable, but it does require a new balance to be struck. So while the anchored pluralism model does not preclude analysis of this economic context, the way in which the model is normatively framed may go some way towards explaining why no systematic analysis of supply and demand has yet been advanced within this literature.

The new political economy of private security

It is clear that one of the key challenges in this field is to construct an agenda which encourages researchers to investigate how both the economic context and the political context of domestic security have the effect of jointly shaping the conduct of contemporary private security providers. The purpose of this section is to map out such an agenda in the form of the new political economy of private security. This will be done by setting down a series of research questions, methodological techniques and analytical propositions which can be used to study the political economy of private security in a systematic, balanced and integrated manner. It is important to emphasize, however, that the rationale behind this agenda is not to reject the contributions of the nodal governance and anchored pluralism models, but rather to reformulate a number of the key insights articulated in these models within a new political economy framework.

When investigating the dynamics of domestic private security in advanced democratic countries, researchers should pose two sets of questions and then draw upon two interlinked methodological techniques in order to develop answers to these questions. The first set of questions should relate to the economic context of domestic security and to the corresponding economic rationality which emerges out of this context. What fluctuations in supply and demand are responsible for facilitating the expansion of private security providers? What business strategies are these providers using in order to capitalize upon these fluctuations? And how are these strategies impacting upon the delivery of domestic security? The methodological technique of nodal mapping—as developed by the nodal governance theorists—should then be used to develop answers to these

questions. In this way, it should be possible to explore how crime patterns, citizen insecurity and property relations vary between different nodes and to investigate how private security institutions, practices, mentalities, knowledge and resources have taken shape in response to these trends.

The second set of questions should then relate to the political context of domestic security and to the corresponding political rationality which emerges out of this context. What inter-subjective political norms are serving to constrain the activities of private security providers? What political strategies are these providers deploying in order to negotiate their way through these norms? And how are these strategies impacting upon the provision of domestic security? Next, the methodological technique of historically grounded cultural investigation—as developed by the anchored pluralism theorists—should be used to develop answers to these questions. In this way, it should be possible to understand both how and why private security providers are using a variety of legitimation strategies—including state-orientated recruitment policies, the appropriation of state symbolism and the pursuit of statutory regulation—in order to enhance the appeal of their operations to an often sceptical population which expects domestic security provision to be monopolized by the state.

Once these questions have been posed and corresponding answers have been developed using the appropriate methodological techniques, researchers should then seek to integrate these economic and political dimensions into a single narrative. This process of integration should proceed in line with two key analytical propositions. First, it is important to recognize that the conduct of private security providers in advanced democratic countries is not generally constituted in relation to a singular rationality, but is rather pushed and pulled in accordance with (at least) two different rationalities: one economic and the other political. Second, it is crucial to recognize that the differential conduct which results from these two rationalities is in many instances mutually constitutive. For instance, private security providers can often only successfully capitalize upon market fluctuations by simultaneously engaging in legitimation strategies. Conversely, they can often only successfully realize these legitimation strategies by using the resources and influence they have accrued from taking advantage of market fluctuations. As such, researchers should regard private security providers as political economic actors moving back and forth within a political economic dialectic.

Using these research questions, methodological techniques and analytical propositions, it is possible to shed new light on a number of key issues which are situated in the space where politics/economics, states/markets and structure/agency impact upon and mutually constitute one another. These issues include (but are not limited to): private security growth patterns and trajectories; the dynamics of legitimation; the relationships between private security providers and state institutions; the competing logics of regulation; and the connections between security and the public good. In order to provide a more concrete demonstration of how these issues can be interpreted through a new political economy lens, it is useful to explore briefly some of the core questions facing researchers in this field.

How have private security providers become so prominent? In economic terms, they have expanded their operations by responding to a series of fluctuations in the laws of supply and demand. In doing so, they have acted as successful businessmen operating in

line with an economic rationality which prioritizes the logic of the market. The progress of this economic expansion should be charted using the analytical technique of nodal mapping, which serves to delineate how security provision in localized spaces is increasingly being defined by the practices, mentalities, knowledge bases and resources of commercial actors. However, this expansion has not been guided by economic rationality alone. In political terms, they have engaged in a series of activities designed to reconcile their commercial operations with the state-centric political norms which structure the domestic security sector. In doing so, they have acted as skilled political strategists functioning in line with a political rationality which prioritizes the logic of legitimacy. This process should be interpreted through a historically grounded cultural lens designed to situate these providers within the broader socio-political trajectory of domestic security provision.

What is their relationship with the state? Private security providers often have a complex relationship with the state. In economic terms, the state is a competitor, contractor and partner. The balance between these roles is fluid and should therefore be mapped out node by node. In political terms, however, the state represents the primary source of the legitimacy needed by these providers to gain a firm foothold in the domestic security sector. In order to appropriate this legitimacy, they can either borrow from the symbolism of the state at a distance or they can steer their commercial activities into a position where they are directly controlled by state institutions through statutory regulation. This process usually takes place throughout the entire security network, rather than being isolated in particular nodes, and should be examined through a historically grounded cultural lens which cuts across the range of nodes under examination.

What is their relationship with the public good? Their relationship with the public good is similarly complex. In economic terms, this relationship varies contract by contract. This is because while public sector contracts usually direct private security operations towards some conception of the public good, private sector contracts often point them in a very different direction. According to this economic logic, then, the relationship between private security providers and the public good is determined externally by the preferences of their clients, and these preferences should once again be mapped out node by node. In political terms, however, these providers are simultaneously engaged in an ongoing effort to reconcile their operations with the state-centric political norms which permeate the domestic security sector, and it is important to note that these norms are intimately associated with the idea of security as a public good. As such, this process of reconciliation causes private security providers to internalize the logic of public good to a certain degree—that is, they essentially become the bearers of the public good when they attempt to appeal to the expectation that security ought to be delivered exclusively by the state. This political process generally takes place across the entire security network, not simply in isolated nodes, and as a consequence it should once more be interpreted through a broadly pitched and historically grounded cultural lens.

What lies ahead for security provision? It often seems as though the rise of private security signifies the emergence of a new (postmodern) era of pluralized domestic security provision in which nodal networks are fast eclipsing the monopolistic arrangements of the modern era. In one sense this is certainly true. It is also the case, however, that for decades private security providers have been actively reconciling their operations with

the state-centric political norms which are synonymous with the modern era. So while the reality of domestic security provision may have moved steadily away from these monopolistic arrangements, the popular idea of security provision has not. Many people in advanced democratic countries remain extremely attached to the idea of a state monopoly over security provision. This enduring attachment has compelled private security providers to advertise themselves not simply as commercial organizations delivering private goods, but also as state-deputized organizations acting in accordance with the public good. In decades to come, then, domestic security provision will no longer be dominated by the modern state as it once was, but neither will it rapidly progress into a postmodern system in which the idea of a state monopoly is long forgotten. The 21st century will see domestic security in a period of notable flux in which a nodal network of pluralized security provision overlaps with traditional, state-centred political norms whose origins can be traced back to the Enlightenment.

The common thread running through these answers is the dynamic interplay between politics/economics, states/markets and structure/agency—interplay which lies at the heart of new political economy analysis. It is important to note, however, that the nature of this interplay is likely to vary according to geographical location. This is because certain countries have experienced more pronounced shifts in supply and demand than others. For example, while private security officers significantly outnumber police officers in Canada, South Africa and the United States, this relationship is inverted in a number of European countries (Brodeur, 2010: 268–275), indicating different rates of expansion. Likewise, some countries (for example, the United Kingdom, Canada and France) appear to have more deeply embedded state-centric political norms than others (for example, the United States) (White, 2010).⁵ As such, researchers should be prepared to strike different balances between the influence of political and economic contexts and rationalities as they move between different countries. Nevertheless, elements of this new political economy narrative can be found in most advanced democratic countries. It is for this reason that there is great utility in drawing upon this research agenda.

Conclusion

The rise of domestic private security over recent decades has been driven by multiple and competing contexts and rationalities. In all this complexity it is easy to miss the bigger picture. This is why it is necessary to construct broadly pitched and ambitious agendas which guide researchers towards new and important lines of enquiry. The new political economy of private security constitutes one such agenda. By setting out a series of research questions, methodological techniques and analytical propositions for studying the space where politics/economics, states/markets and structure/agency clash with and mutually constitute one another, it has marked out significant new academic territory. Of course, no agenda or theoretical framework can capture all the processes at work—the social world is too infinitely complex for that. But in providing the tools which allow researchers to address core issues relating to domestic private security in new ways, the new political economy of private security should be utilized alongside other agendas and theoretical frameworks in this field so as to generate as many insights about this social phenomenon as possible.

Notes

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1. The 'new political economy' framework is comprehensively set out in the eponymously titled journal *New Political Economy*.
2. It is important to note that in reference to nodal governance and anchored pluralism the term 'model' does not relate to the formal, predictive modelling which is found in positivist—or behavioural—social science. Rather, it relates to the less formal, exploratory modelling which is found in post-positivist—or interpretivist—social science. This type of modelling is driven by the more modest ambition of developing a coherent set of conceptual propositions with which to help the social science researcher make sense of and interpret social phenomena.
3. It could be argued that there are Marxist analyses of the trajectory and dynamics of contemporary private security provision which predate the nodal governance model (see Spitzer, 1987, 1993; Spitzer and Scull, 1977). However, these writings were never galvanized into an explicit model as such, but rather stood more as isolated—though important—contributions towards this field of research.
4. It should be acknowledged from the outset that Loader and Walker often use the anchored pluralism model as a normative lens as opposed to an explanatory one. Following Crawford (2006), however, it is argued here that this model can be regarded as both an explanatory and normative lens.
5. It is important to acknowledge that the new political economy of private security is, for the most part, only relevant to advanced democratic countries precisely because in many other countries the existence of inter-subjective state-centric political norms is patchy and uneven at best—usually because domestic security provision in these countries has at some point in recent history been dominated by authoritarian states whose repressive actions have served to counteract rather than reinforce the presence of such political norms.

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