Reviews

Borders, Mobility and Technologies of Control, Sharon Pickering and Leanne Weber (eds), Springer, Dordrecht, 2006

'Terrorism', illegal migration or trans-national crime – and the related discourses of how states are increasingly subject to threats from external 'others' – are becoming increasingly common themes for criminologists. However, despite the fact that many of these crimes involve state borders, and their perceived breach, the actual significance of borders has been ignored. In response, this excellent book directly focuses on borders and 'their meaning to those who seek to defend or to cross them' (p17). The nine contributors provide rich theoretical insight and original empirical data from across 'global north' states. Albeit diverse in their scope, chapters build upon and explore key critical arguments on the trends in policy and practice on border control, and the experiences of border crossing.

Throughout this volume, contributors explain that borders are, by no means, fixed. Rather, borders are symbolic sites of power that mark out the state; they inscribe meaning about who belongs and who does not. Subject to social and political construction, borders are continually manipulated to fit the political, economic or strategic imperatives of powerful states or regional / global organisations. In their continual reworking, they are a constant theme in policing, criminal justice, nation-building and international relations. Overall, they are, as Kerry Carrington (p184) notes, 'politicised, uncertain, largely symbolic and also contestable'.

The ability to move across borders is deeply linked to the political management of travellers' identities. While some (especially those with social, economic or cultural capital) enjoy easy mobility, and continual encouragement to travel from the tourism industry or from governments that require certain types of workers for employee shortages, others find their movement continually denied and controlled. The authors clearly map the ways in which official and media narratives that sustain fear, anxiety and insecurity are organised, and re-iterated, to produce actions of exclusion for those cast as 'high-risk', 'non-citizens', 'illegals' or 'undesirables'.

Against this backdrop, the contributors (particularly Mona Danner, Leanne Weber and Dean Wilson) evaluate the plethora of domestic and trans-national controls and strategies invoked by 'global north' states to exclude unwanted populations -- to stop their arrival in the first instance and, if they do arrive at the border, to sort them and punish them. These contributions, which highlight the rise of technologies of control and surveillance, provide a timely reminder of: the normalisation and differential application of 'special power' technologies; the reconfiguration of law to create new legal identities and spaces which place many travellers outside legal protection; the guiding role of the burgeoning commercial security industry; the loosening of legal /moral standards regarding privacy and profiling; the symbolic significance of technologies in terms of building a narrative that the state can and will protect its citizens; the notion that technologies can advance solutions for social and political problems; and, the un-substantiated claims on whether these technologies actually work in terms of repelling threats to the state.

Moreover, authors show that these manifestations of state power can be expressed at, within or beyond state borders. While new arrivals may well find themselves subject to passport controls, iris scans, fingerprints or body searches, these border controls also operate within states (for example, in the use of state or civil service workers to monitor and curtail movement for certain populations) and beyond them (for instance, in the use of state interventions into other countries). The experience of exclusion – and the related aspect of how individuals are placed permanently outside state protection – can, therefore, be reproduced anywhere. Of course, such practices rest on a historical continuum of state repression. The policing, surveillance and control of 'suspect populations' – from criminals to colonised peoples – has been an enduring feature of state power-building activities across centuries.

While processes of globalisation have created a new freedom of movement for certain kinds of people, contributors to this volume also highlight that they compel mobility for many others. Advanced global capitalist economies – in which most countries are situated at the sharp end of economic inequalities – have forced travel for those seeking employment, education, health care or a 'good life'. Furthermore, many 'global north' economies are propped up by migrant, often 'illegal' labour. As Nancy Wonders argues, acts of border-crossing continually reflect social stratification. In their maintenance of economic, racialised and gendered inequalities, such movements reproduce global structural relations of power.

Notwithstanding these contexts of movement, the dominant security doctrine that dominates border-talk continually overlooks the politics of globalisation. The responses of 'global north' states to border-crossings, that seek to control movement and prevent future risk by initiatives at home or abroad, ignore the 'real' issues that underpin travel decisions – such as development, economic sustainability, conflict, climate change or health care. The lack of acknowledgement towards such continuing problems is dovetailed with state border-protection practices that create further harm and violence. Jan Carpenter, for instance, argues that US border policies result in the intimidation, rape and murder of Mexican women; Penny Green highlights the ways in which European states, engaged in programs that 'outsource' the management of asylum seekers to north African states, create new crimes such as inhumane conditions of detention, police violence and organised trafficking; while Carrington shows how Australian mandatory detention policies have resulted in numerous human rights and legal breaches.

Of course, as Sharon Pickering argues, such experiences can contribute to 'borderland' narratives that build a social solidarity, or common identification, between migrants and others. In addition, as Alice Hills shows, individual state actors can also perform in ways that do not reflect the dominant, official ideals of border management. Borders can, then, become sites of resistance, and control practices may be subject to challenge from diverse quarters.

In summary, this first-rate book presents a deeply valuable contribution to our thinking on the state, trends in criminal justice policy, emerging technologies of border control and experiences of border crossings. It is a compelling read.

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