

BOOK REVIEW

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN PUBLIC DISORDER David Waddington. Routledge (1992): 243pp. p/b. £12.99

David Waddington, in *Contemporary Issues in Public Disorder* attempts to provide a comprehensive and reasoned analysis of the main issues highlighted by recent riots and disorder of the 1980s.

Through the use of a general theoretical approach - the 'flashpoints model of public disorder', developed, detailed and empirically tested in a number of previous publications, Waddington attempts to replace and move beyond what he sees as the "recurring confusion and misunderstanding which typifies society's reaction to public disorder". The flashpoint model, inspired by theoretical approaches to the 1960's riots allows for the development of a theoretical analysis of the relationships between a precipitating incident (flashpoint), and a reservoir of grievances, and comprises six integrated levels of analysis: the structural, political/ideological, cultural, contextual, situational and interactional levels; encompassing the macro-mezzo and micro levels of analysis.

This framework is then applied to three major forms of civil disturbance: disorderly demonstrations, riots and strike violence. The significance supposedly of the theoretical framework outlined by Waddington, as opposed to other analysis of disorder, is the introduction of structural considerations - referring to the inequality of power, material resources and life chances between groups in society and the political/ideological level - referring to the relationship of politically or culturally dissenting groups to key political and ideological institutions, and how such institutions react to its activity.

The book provides a wealth of material on issues of public disorder - including American/British urban riots, strike violence, civil disturbance, football hooliganism, troubles in Northern Ireland, media representations and contemporary policing issues. Moreover, the book allows for an excellent insight into the failures of current Conservative

law and order policies, and of the gradual disintegration of the moral and cultural fabric of society. As a result, the book can rightly take as its claim that of *textbook* in contemporary issues in public disorder.

However, this book is not without flaws. The first major problem that Waddington has been unable to rectify concerns the difficulty of marrying such a wealth of material and range of issues into the theoretical framework outlined. Having already developed the theoretical flashpoint model in detail in earlier work, he does not notably expand on it here, and as a result, the framework sits uneasily within the whole structure of the publication, rather than appearing central to it. For those unfamiliar with Waddington's previous publications, this could become a central problem.

The second criticism that can be levelled at the book concerns its failure fully to develop and incorporate the macro level structural analysis despite its claim that this is one of the important contributions the book offers to the understanding of disorder. Unfortunately, such an analysis is at the best implicit and at the worst unexamined. Inevitably, rather than integration, what is left is a form of 'dualism', structural variables juxtaposed with interactionist accounts. This has major implications regarding operationalising such a framework of analysis. By definition, Waddington's framework explains 'flashpoints', and in many instances it is obviously useful to focus on such flashpoints as a focus of disorder. However, how far the model can explain what can be termed 'slow riots and disarray', that is outbreaks of disorder which do not have a clear 'flashpoint' and where development is slow, is much less convincing, and such a criticism makes the theoretical framework of the book, and its attractiveness as a theory of disorder, limited.

A third major problem of *Contemporary Issues in Public Disorder* concerns the fact that the flashpoints model is only applied to three major forms of civil disturbance: disorderly demonstrations, riots and strike violence. Discussion for the rest of the book centres

around singular or competing contemporary established academic explanations. This not only opens further the debate concerning the usefulness of Waddington's theoretical framework, but also questions further the lack of critical analysis concerning the explanatory potential of other theoretical perspectives discussed. For example, the chapter on football hooliganism, despite a review and evaluation of specific theoretical approaches, suggests that "it is possible to combine the most feasible aspects of a number of these theories into a reasonably coherent explanation of football hooliganism". Unfortunately, by so doing Waddington neglects analysis of the flawed understandings, inherent in current theoretical approaches to football hooliganism, of the process through which football related disorderly behaviour is created. Furthermore such an 'integration of theoretical perspectives' fails to develop a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the nature and impact of the cultural significance of, and complex structural relationship between, football, its audience, the public and the state.

Despite such criticisms, *Contemporary Issues in Public Disorder* provides an interesting insight into the wealth of material and breadth of issues relating to public disorder/disorder and crime and should serve to complement other publications in this field. However, where it is less successful is in its attempt to present a theoretically informed understanding of the complex structural and interactional variables which together generate disorder.

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