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## Introduction and aims

Securing a ticket for an event that is in demand is increasingly becoming a luxury. Consumers wishing to attend an important football fixture, or the gig of a favourite artist, are faced with a hurdle that has existed since as early as the 16th century (Courty, 2003), but which, over time, has grown from an occasional annoyance and minor inconvenience to an issue now perceived as a societal wrong by many artists, sports federations and MPs (Davies, 2018; Lee, 2015; Gibson, 2015). That hurdle is *ticket touting*, also known as *scalping* outside the UK. Although there is no definitive definition of the ticket tout or of the phenomenon of touting (James and Osborn, 2016; Ward, 2014), touts are widely acknowledged to be individuals who acquire tickets to popular concerts, theatre or sporting events, with the intention of reselling them for economic gain without the authority to do so (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2008: 58).

In the 1990s, ticket touting may have been mainly associated with "sheepskin-coat-wearing" characters (Jones, 2015; Collinson, 2015), loitering outside concert halls or football stadia and selling tickets as their main or sole source of income. However, behind the scenes, the practice has since developed considerably. This can be explained through the exponential rise in popularity of and demand for the live entertainment industry in the last decades. The increased demand, coupled with the arrival of the internet, has resulted in countless opportunities for touts and others to exploit (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2008). More specifically, the expansion of the primary and secondary ticket markets has enabled a new "deviant" actor (Hobbs, 1988; Adler, 1985; Polsky, 1967), in addition to the longstanding stereotype of the street tout, to become involved in the black market of ticket resale: the online or "bedroom"[1] tout (Jones, 2015).

The main concerns relating to ticket touting are the unethical profiteering and exploitation of consumers that can occur when touts obtain tickets in bulk from official sources and resell them elsewhere, such as on the streets outside venues or on the online secondary ticket market, at inflated prices. It has been argued that these practices may lead to some members of the public being excluded or "priced out" from attending events altogether (Bennet, 2014; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ticket Abuse, 2014). Also commonly associated with touting is the risk of becoming a victim of fraudulent activity. Ticket touting has been described as a "national disgrace" (Savage, 2015), bringing some artists to reschedule or even cancel shows (Denham, 2015; Chilton, 2014). Due to the many issues that surround the practice, ticket touting is a topic of increasing interest for the general public, the live entertainment industry and legislators.

This social uproar, however, has not been synonymous with regulation. Ticket touting seems to remain largely tolerated by law enforcement. For example, despite the touting of football tickets being a criminal offence contrary to section 166 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) 1994, police officers and stewards appear to be regularly turning a blind eye to the activity at football fixtures across the country. Several officers confirmed this to me in person during my observations of touting activity in multiple UK cities as part of this

[1] A "bedroom" tout is an individual who will buy and sell tickets exclusively online, from the comfort of his or her home, through websites such as StubHub or Viagogo. This way the tout can avoid face-to-face contact with buyers, with the company acting as an intermediary.

research. They referred to the higher priorities associated with managing large-scale events as an explanation for this[2].

A number of touts whom I interviewed confirmed the existence of an informal understanding with the officers[3], and official data seem to reflect this. Total arrests across the main football leagues in the UK, including the Premier League, fell from 104 in 2013/14 to 56 in the 2014/15 season, and to 40 the following year; continuing this downward trend, the latest data show that only 23 arrests were made in 2016/17, approximately one every 60 fixtures (Home Office, 2018). James and Osborn had previously noted that "the lack of enforcement of the anti-ticket touting legislation in football has demonstrated [that] the threat of punishment is not necessarily an effective means of preventing ticket touting from taking place" (2010: 3). At non-football events, ticket touts are even less likely to be apprehended due to the lack of a specific touting offence, though other justifications for arrest could be triggered. These include trading without a licence in the streets of London, tax evasion or even money laundering, but, again, are rarely enforced.

Moving away from the streets, the arrival of the internet has rendered the practice of buying and reselling tickets more accessible and widespread. When interviewed, one research participant, "The Chameleon", confidently stated: "All the tools are there for you, a broadband connection and some guile and off you go" (personal interview, 2014). While touting has become available to individuals who never would have dared to don the sheepskin coat, at the same time it is now much less visible, and thus potentially more tolerated still; the chances of new bedroom touts being apprehended seem slim given the longstanding laissez-faire attitude of law enforcement towards prolific street touts. The UK government's recent attempts to address the issue of online touting include measures such as requiring touts to specify the seat numbers of the tickets they are selling, and banning the use of automatic bots, introduced in the Consumer Rights Act (CRA) 2015 and in the Digital Economy Act (DEA) 2017 respectively. While the former aimed to make the secondary ticket market more transparent, rendering tickets that were listed for resale on websites such as Viagogo directly identifiable, the latter targeted sellers who are said to "harvest" tickets by purchasing hundreds of them in a matter of seconds via the use of automated software (Davies, 2017). Unsurprisingly, as with street touting, research has confirmed that legislation relating to online touting is not being sufficiently enforced either (Davies, 2019; Waterson, 2016). James and Osborn have gone as far as describing ticket touting as "tacitly encouraged by the state" (2016: 3).

This unsatisfactory status quo has led artists and organisations to take matters into their own hands. A group called The FanFair Alliance, for example, has attempted to combat online ticket touts by providing solutions for consumers where the law has been lacking. Founded by the managers of a number of leading bands and artists, the group has launched

[2] At Wembley Stadium, London, officers said to me that they were aware of the ubiquitous touting activity, but that issues such as public safety, crowd control, violence and racism, were of greater importance. At Hampden Park, Glasgow, I witnessed policemen ignoring touts who were audibly advertising tickets for sale, and instead stopping and searching an individual smoking what may have been marijuana. As a final example, at West Ham's old Boleyn Ground, London, I saw undercover officers issuing fines to several street traders who were selling scarves and pins without a licence for £10, but touts illegally selling match tickets for hundreds of pounds just yards away were not apprehended.

[3] "We build up rapport, nothing in it for them [police officers], we just respect one another. They know who we are; if I sell in front of a cop it's taking the piss. With concerts even though it's not illegal I still wouldn't do it in front of them, out of respect. They know we do it, [they] can pick it up a mile out". "Spartan" (personal interview 2014).

various campaigns and partnerships that promote ticket resale at face value cost, whilst trying to ensure consumers are more informed when purchasing tickets online. Attempts are effectively being made to dissuade consumers from using secondary market websites such as StubHub or Viagogo altogether. Recently, contrasting reports have emerged as to the success of these initiatives, creating further confusion for consumers and society at large (Snapes, 2018; Garvan, 2018).

Unfortunately, very little is currently known not only about how ticket touts operate, their methods or networks, but also about the touts' own views, ethos and justifications for their conduct. It is arguable that knowledge of these hidden aspects of the world of touting may assist stakeholders in curbing the practice somewhat; such knowledge, however, is currently limited and difficult to obtain. This article was borne out of ethnographic research involving a number of direct experiences with ticket touts in the United Kingdom. It presents the argument that participatory research methods which may require involvement with law-breaking activity can be justifiable where appropriate. Alongside this hypothesis, it contends that acquiring otherwise unobtainable knowledge in areas of social interest and injustice can be a valid justification for the use of such methods, within certain parameters. The article offers reflections on the ethical challenges and the practical consequences and risks in the field of a methodology that sits "at the edge" of legality and morality (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998). Its aims are to build on the existing studies on illegal research, and contribute to the limited academic literature on the subject of ticket touting.

## Literature Review

The lack of enforcement of current anti-ticket touting provisions and a scarcity of existing research on the subject have resulted in little being known about the individuals involved in touting, and how they truly execute their trade. Significantly, previous research, which can broadly be separated into two categories, has mainly been conducted from the position of consumers or industry stakeholders. On one hand, the government has reviewed the status quo primarily through online surveys or in the form of parliamentary inquiries at which stakeholders – but not individuals actively buying and selling tickets for profit – were invited to comment. On the other, a small number of academics has analysed the inherent contradictions and insufficiencies of existing laws, while two authors alone have exceptionally conducted research directly involving touts. Several criticisms can be made of these works, before considering the relevant literature on illegal or unethical research.

Examples of the first category are the inquiries held by MPs Sharon Hodgson and Mike Weatherley in 2014 as part of the report produced by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ticket Abuse (APPG), and Professor Waterson's (2016) review of the impact of the introduction of the CRA 2015 on online ticket touting. The two adopted similar research methods, gauging the opinions of staff and consumers within the sport, music and entertainment industries (2016: 188).

Both the report by the APPG and the Waterson review made recommendations as to how a variety of problems relating to online touting, ranging from a lack of transparency in the online secondary market to the use of bots, could be addressed. One recommendation, as an example, advised against the introduction of a price cap on resale websites; the justification for this was the perceived difficulty in enforcing such a restriction. In addition to

the weakness of the contributions' contents, which can be evidenced by an online secondary market that is still thriving in 2019, more significantly, both attempts failed to include ticket touts amongst their respondents. In the Waterson review, in particular, the author categorised different types of online sellers, yet the opinions and experiences of none of these – from the ones identified as "regular traders" to others described as "event attendees who have purchased more tickets than they wish to use in order to sell some others" (2016: 121) – contributed to the formulation of his recommendations.

It can be argued that considerations around imposing a price cap, or requiring ID[4] to be shown by a patron when entering a venue, could have benefitted from a deeper understanding of the impact, if any, that such restrictions might have on touts when they acquire tickets for resale. Additionally, both works completely disregarded the touting that takes place outside of the world wide web, failing to consider the original form of touting that still occurs outside stadia and on the streets. The insights, however valuable, of the consumers and industry stakeholders that formed these two publications, will inevitably fall short of any contribution made by a tout, whose methods are constantly evolving to elude the very restrictions that were being debated. Potter has argued:

> "The criminal's standpoint is of pivotal importance in understanding all aspects of illicit markets from seller's motivations, to how they go about 'doing the business', to consumers' demands for such illicit goods within the criminal retail market" (2018: 49).

Of course, it is easy to see why touts, "secretive … and mistrustful" due to the nature of their occupation, would never have participated in such an enquiry (Adler, 1985: 11). The difficulty in obtaining the views of touts may explain their absence; it does not, however, render these outputs any less flawed. The lack of such contributions, therefore, constitutes a large gap in the available literature.

A similar criticism can be made of the few academic contributions to the subject of ticket touting, which are also divisible into two subgroups. First, there exists a significant body of literature that has closely examined the law itself. Although these works also fail to involve touts directly, they are however able to provide a useful overall picture of the touting landscape. Secondly, the work of two authors who have singularly conducted first-hand research with touts, in the form of interviews and direct contact in the field, must be mentioned.

With regards to the law, James and Osborn's (2010) article on consumer rights and the 2012 London Olympics presented the concern that ticket touting legislation introduced specifically for the Games was disingenuously enacted more to protect the Olympic brand than the consumers or fans wishing to attend the Games. One year later, they extended this focus to the broader cultural significance of the Olympics, and in particular to its traditional aims of upholding the ethos and culture of sport. They outlined the "tension" between the games' "competing interests of commerce and culture" (2011: 411). Again, the authors concluded that anti-ticket touting legislation and other measures such as those addressing ambush marketing were mainly introduced to promote and maximise the commercial reaches

[4] Many artists, including Radiohead or Ed Sheeran, now regularly impose that ticket purchasers gain entrance to an event only by presenting ID that matches the card used to make the purchase. It is believed that, by putting in place such a restriction, resale could be deterred. However, once again, enforcement of these terms has been found to be inconsistent, weakening the threat somewhat.

of the Olympic Movement, and not to protect the sporting, cultural and educational values of the Olympics. In particular, they observed that the legislative model relied upon for these new laws was that of section 166 of the CJPOA 1994, above, which in its original form was designed to prevent public disorder at football matches only: other sporting or cultural events were specifically excluded from the legislation, as commercial concerns did not "form part of the Parliamentary justification for the provision" (James and Osborn, 2015: 107).

Across a number of publications, the authors present the incongruences and contradictions of ticket touting laws in line with the argument previously made by Greenfield, Osborn and Roberts (2008), that a law prohibiting the resale of solely football tickets could be discriminatory towards consumers[5]. In 2016, James and Osborn shifted from the perspective of the consumer to that of the primary rights holder (PRH), namely the governing body that organises the event in question. They argued, for example, that the CRA 2015 focuses on imposing restrictions on the secondary market without acknowledging that ticket resale would in any case be an unlawful breach of the original contract between the PRH and the first buyer. They go on to distinguish types of acts of touting, and convincingly argue that "differentiated legal responses" would be necessary, rather than the blanket prohibition of the existing criminal law, to reflect the range of identified activities (2016: 4).

While James and Osborn's extensive overall examination of ticket touting legislation can serve to piece together a wider contextual understanding of the lack of enforcement, the various failings and incongruences of existing laws, and the general laissez-faire attitude the government has consistently adopted towards the touting phenomenon, it does not assist in presenting ticket touting as a force to be understood or challenged. This is further evidence that securing the views of touts is inevitably a demanding task, achievable only via very specific means. The majority of existing contributions, therefore, lack the insight attainable only through discussion and direct involvement with those who actually practice ticket touting.

Two notable exceptions can be found in the works of Michael Atkinson (1997 and 2000) and John Sugden (2002 and 2007). Through ethnographic research, Atkinson was able to befriend and gain access to a group of scalpers in Canada. Sugden was equally successful in breaking into a network of "grafters"[6] in Manchester, England. Sugden's experience was even more similar to my own due to the extensive issues he faced relating to his proximity with illegal activity, in the form of receiving threats to his personal safety while negotiating access to his research subjects. Another similarity was the development of a relationship with a specific tout, who acted as the gatekeeper through which such access was temporarily facilitated.

An original contribution from Atkinson's work was his attempt to establish a typology of ticket touts. He broadly separated touts into two groups: those who undertook the activity

[5] Greenfield, Osborn and Roberts (2008) presented insightful arguments as to why the specific law on touting football tickets was dated, contradictory, and even discriminatory towards a fan who sells a spare ticket to a friend outside the ground simply to recoup his or her expenses, and in so doing is roped into the strict legal definition of being a football ticket tout. A supporter of a rugby team, a tennis or a cricket fan, would not face such restrictions. In the same way that one may consider a rogue seller profiteering from sales outside the Wimbledon courts a tout, a football fan selling a ticket to a friend is arguably *not* one, and should not be held criminally liable for an act of resale which has nothing to do with profiteering, and even less so with crowd control or public safety – the justifications for the enactment of the original legislation.

[6] While the term "scalper" is considered to be the translation of "ticket tout" into American or Canadian English, John Sugden (2002) used the term "grafter" to refer to individuals who committed other illegal activities, such as hooliganism or drug dealing, in addition to and beyond ticket touting.

professionally and those for whom scalping was a temporary foray into criminality. Further, his observations in the field led him to identify different types of seller-buyer transactions, and the range of skills required to perform the activity of the broker on the street. Importantly, Atkinson noted the levels of corruption present in the primary ticket market. He concluded that sellers were able to easily sidestep the various measures adopted to prevent touting, such as ID checks by venues, or purchasing limits imposed on buyers, and transform these deterrent practices into loopholes to exploit. In line with the model of the entrepreneurial deviant (Hobbs, 1988; Adler, 1985; Polsky, 1967), Atkinson's scalpers created "something from nothing" (Atkinson, 1997: 85).

Sugden's 2002 book *Scum Airways*, on the other hand, is a collection of episodes depicting the hedonistic and financial exploits of the touts in England and abroad. Sugden revealed the touts' strategies of profit-maximisation and the accomplishment of various scams that were part of the grafter's trade. Like Atkinson, he explored in detail the touts' extensive network of contacts with official ticket suppliers, through which they could acquire tickets that would then be sold for profit.

These findings, published more than ten years before the introduction of the CRA 2015, are evidence of the glaring omissions in both the APPG report and the Waterson review. Corruption within the primary market, which features heavily in the works of Sugden and Atkinson, is completely missing in Waterson's review. At the same time, Sugden and Atkinson's findings support the argument that direct contact with those under investigation is the only reliable method of obtaining such important and revealing data. In addition to insider knowledge of the touts' methods, the two authors were also able to conceptualise the touts' justifications for their deviant conduct. Through conversations with the sellers and by witnessing the daily work-like routine of the grafters, a deeper level of knowledge and understanding was acquired. This direct contact with ticket touts was an unprecedented contribution to the field, and the methodologies adopted by both Atkinson and Sugden were innovative in the context of black market ticket research. These uncovered the abundance of rich, empirical data, which completely surpassed the more recent research attempts.

However, crucially, neither Sugden nor Atkinson experienced the phenomenon of ticket touting from the point of view of the sellers. This was an option that was actively and purposefully avoided especially in Sugden's case. Argued in more detail below, his decision could be seen as a missed opportunity, as, in the same way that Waterson and the APPG left many stones unturned, additional layers of discovery may have been overlooked by Sugden and Atkinson too. The missing, final step would thus have been to actively engage in the buying and selling of tickets, which, of course, would have been illegal.

Illegal research as an investigative method often requires that the researcher place him or herself at considerable risk. Indeed, two main types of risk are often experienced by researchers conducting ethnographies of this nature. First, risks to one's physical wellbeing can be encountered when undertaking illegal research with the intention of imitating and understanding the actions of the individuals being studied. Cases range from Estroff (1981) taking psychotropic medication to share in the experiences of former patients, to Treadwell (2016) and Wacquant (1995) suffering blows during their experiences of MMA fighting and boxing, respectively. In more extreme examples, Jacobs (1998) was robbed at gunpoint by a crack dealer and Ken Pryce (1979) was murdered while studying Jamaican organised crime in Bristol.

The other identified risk with illegal research is reputational. The career of the researcher could potentially be compromised because of his or her engagement in illegal or

unethical conduct. In previous research, this form of participatory investigation has signified such extremes as actively assisting in the commission of violent crimes. A recent and controversial example is Alice Goffman's (2014) ethnography of policing in a poor urban neighbourhood in West Philadelphia. It has been argued that Goffman, in driving around one of the 6th Street Boys who was armed and looking to exact revenge on the rival 4th Street group, could have and perhaps should have been charged and convicted of conspiracy to murder (Lubet, 2015). Both defended (Volokh, 2015) and criticised (Lubet, 2015) by her peers, this episode represented a key challenge for ethnographers not only in terms of personal safety but also with regards to where to draw the line on one's involvement in criminal activity in the pursuit of knowledge.

Geoff Pearson, in his study of "risk" football supporters, broke the law numerous times. He consumed alcohol on trains that specifically prohibited the act, he participated in a pitch invasion (but avoided arrest by following the instructions of the officer who grabbed him) and he threatened to engage in violent behaviour in a pub, all in the interest of gathering new knowledge on the hooligan subculture. He, too, offered reflections on whether his conduct could be justifiable in this context, concluding that sometimes the "committal of offences can be unavoidable" (2009: 243).

Other studies did in fact result in researchers being apprehended. Armstrong (1993) was arrested, for instance, while studying gangs of football fans in Sheffield, while Ferrell (1995) was arrested and charged with "graffiti vandalism" for his participant observation with a group of underground "writers" in Denver. Humphreys (1970) was arrested for "loitering", after he refused to give his name to a police officer when stopped outside a "tearoom" during his study of secretive homosexual encounters in public places. More controversial than his arrest was the arguably unethical conduct that Humphreys employed to obtain his data. He initially played the role of a voyeur, taking notes without the consent of those participating in the sexual acts, and he pretended to be a health worker when interviewing the same individuals a year later. The interviews themselves, which he conducted in disguise so as not to be recognised, would not have taken place without his morally dubious decision to note down the licence plates of the individuals he had observed before attending their homes to speak to them. While he defended the study and his discovery of previously unavailable knowledge on human behaviour, particularly at a time when homosexuality was illegal in the United States, the question as to whether the results of his research ultimately justified his unethical methods remains unanswered (Hobbs, 2001; Warwick, 1973).

The subpoenas brought against Scarce (1994 and 1995) and Leo (1995) are further examples of the potential consequences of conducting illegal research, and the ethical dilemmas that researchers can sometimes be faced with. Scarce was a graduate student, undertaking research on members of a radical environmental movement, at the time of his arrest. He was interrogated by the FBI and, when forced to disclose information on the crimes of his participants, he refused to do so on ethical grounds. This resulted in a six-month sentence for contempt of court. Leo, a doctorial student, was also subpoenaed, this time relating to information he had gathered on police interrogation practices.

Returning to the case of John Sugden and the specific context of ticket touting, at one stage in his ethnography the author was invited by the touts to actively participate in a scam which would have enabled the group to enter a football ground without a ticket. He offered the following reflection:

> "On the one hand I wouldn't have minded seeing the game and actually living the scam from top to tail would have given my research an even deeper level of authenticity. On the other hand, there were legal and ethical issues. Thus far … I had managed to stay more or less within the law. Jibbing my way into the game … would have been illegal and from an academic researcher's point of view decidedly unethical" (2002: 107).

Analysed in more detail below, the arguments offered by Jeff Ferrell (1998) and others convincingly suggest that additional inside knowledge could have been gleaned if Sugden had adopted a more participatory methodology. Perhaps he would have achieved that "deeper level of authenticity", which eluded him (Sugden, 2002: 107). The authors go as far as saying that methods which involve law-breaking activity are not only justified, but *necessary* to uncover this new knowledge (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998: 25-26).

It was thus important for the purposes of my own study to define the exact level and extent of my participation in the world of the ticket touts and their illegal activities. The aim was to bridge the gap between remaining at a sufficient distance to maintain my position as an observer, and getting close enough to the "action" (Atkinson, 2000) to transcend mere objectivity, to gain and communicate "experiential insights into the situated dynamics of the deviant or criminal events under study" (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998: 13).

Lisa Potter, in her research on the illicit trade of pirated DVDs, noted that studies of this kind have been steadily declining due not only to stricter ethical guidelines imposed on academics, but also to researchers preferring "the criminal justice agency's perspective over the criminal's" (2018: 49). This is particularly noticeable in the case of the touts through the work of James and Osborn (2016), the APPG report (2014) and the Waterson review (2016), where the authors have relied upon "official sources and media-focused accounts, thereby providing an often one-sided account of more complex issues" (Potter, 2018: 49).

It is within this context of negotiating the legal and moral grey areas of participatory research that the present study is situated, aiming to move beyond the knowledge gathered through the contributions of Atkinson and Sugden, or James and Osborn, and filling the key gaps that Sugden's ethical considerations prevented him from further exploring.

## Methodology

Methodologically, the challenge was to identify an approach that would enable me to address the gap within the existing research and glean what it had failed to uncover. This included: the ticket touts' potential awareness and exploitation of loopholes within the primary ticketing market's purchasing mechanisms; strategies for sourcing large batches of tickets; their use of contacts and "insiders" within the entertainment industry; and their distinctive reselling techniques on the streets, online and through wider networks. In addition to these systems, I viewed discovering the touts' internal reflections, considerations, feelings, attitudes and justifications as an essential component to the furtherance of knowledge in this area.

Atkinson, in explaining his choice of methods, relied on Jorgensen's (1989) description of ethnography as "tailor-made" for a study on scalping or ticket touting. He argued that ethnographic methods are particularly useful when:

- "Little is known about the phenomenon;
- There are important differences between the views of insiders as opposed to outsiders;
- The phenomenon is somehow obscured from the view of outsiders;
- The phenomenon of investigation is observable within an everyday life setting;
- The researcher is able to gain access to an appropriate setting" (Atkinson, 1997: 41).

The topic of ticket touting seemed to meet all of these criteria, as evidenced in the previous sections. Ethnographic research methods, therefore, were identified as the most suitable to meet the objectives relating to understanding the ticket touts and obtaining previously unavailable knowledge on their operations.

While there is no single, conclusive definition for the term "ethnography", neither as a methodology nor as the final product of research (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, and Lofland, 2001), ethnography is commonly described as the study of a group of people who belong to "small, relatively homogenous, naturally or artificially bounded groups" (LeCompte, 2002: 287) within their "natural setting" (Noaks and Wincup, 2004: 93). The general ingredients of this approach appear to be group contexts, societies, gangs or subcultures, and a specific location that constitutes the group in question's natural habitat. This understanding of ethnography seemed to fit particularly well with a study on ticket touts working in groups outside a concert venue or football stadium. The "natural setting" would in this case be the locations adjacent to where in-demand events were taking place, their backstreets, car parks and tube station exits.

Observation and interviews were selected as the most appropriate options from a range of available qualitative approaches. Specifically, it was felt that observation of the touts in operation outside venues would offer first-hand and original evidence of the methods of performing touting on the streets, including: sourcing spare tickets; engaging in dialogue and negotiations with buyers; concluding sales; and, where relevant, doing so in a discreet manner. Conversely, to capture the touts' internal machinations, I chose to conduct in-depth, qualitative, semi-structured interviews with consenting research participants. These methods were not too dissimilar from those adopted by Atkinson and Sugden.

The point of departure from the existing literature can be seen through the use of Participant Observation (PO). This is understood to relate to situations in which the researcher is actually involved, to a degree, in the daily life of the subjects under investigation. This can mean attempting to adopt a certain lifestyle as one's own to gain closer familiarity with the world one is seeking to understand, and with its inhabitants. PO is described as

> "establishing a place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in that setting" (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2001: 352).

The ethnographic method of PO became an integral part of this research once the opportunity arose to actively experience ticket touting not as an onlooker or as a client, but as a *seller*, as described below. The experiential dimension is thus the key difference between this work and previous contributions. This element, of course, meant an excursion into the grey areas of ethics and legality within ethnographic research.

PO was chosen due to its unique ability to allow the researcher to become immersed in the mentalities and lived experiences of ticket touts, to understand the significance and values that touts attached to everyday, mundane actions and thus to be able to study "a way of life of a group of people" in line with ethnographic philosophy (Atkinson, 1997: 39). Max Weber's (1949) concept of *verstehen* guided my attempts to gain a sympathetic viewpoint of the touts' activities, transcending the position of an outside observer and aligning researcher and research subjects such that touting, both as an activity and as a lifestyle, would almost become a normality. "Deviants … develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close to it" (Goffman, 1968: 1). It was thought that PO through *verstehen* could also provide first-hand evidence of touts' online buying and selling techniques, which, due to these activities taking place in private homes, naturally could not have been obtained by observing the touting that was happening on the streets.

Overall, from May 2014 to July 2016, I completed 25 interviews with ticket touts and undertook more than 100 hours across 61 days of observational fieldwork outside music venues and sports stadia. Through the establishment of trust, a working relationship was developed with some interviewees. Three forms of PO were undertaken: the first, as a member of a larger group of touts who supplied tickets to unauthorised agencies, hotel concierges and overseas clients; the second, as a supplier of tickets to a tout based in London's West End; and the third, as an independent online seller via the secondary market platforms, with the assistance of an associate.

Each of these PO attempts was undertaken in the belief that acting as the touts did, to a degree, would yield fruits in the form of socially valuable new knowledge that would justify conduct that was undoubtedly in breach of the law (Pearson, 2009; Ferrell, 1998). However, due to the difficulty of negotiating and maintaining access with such a secretive and suspicious network of individuals, the first attempt – to fully penetrate the network of street touts with whom I was engaging – ended prematurely, causing moments of distress and unease to both the participants and me. The experiences around this attempt will be the focus of this article. The second form of PO entailed acquiring tickets independently of any group to sell to one individual, and the third was conducted entirely at home like a "bedroom" tout, as I attempted to explore the machinations of online touting. The second, and particularly, the third forms of PO were understandably much safer undertakings, due to the greater level of independence I enjoyed as a sole trader.

Ultimately, these additional approaches enabled the verification of large portions of the findings gleaned from the interviews and observations, and acted as an effective method of triangulation to evaluate and ascertain the validity of the data that were collected from the multiple sources (Potter, 2018). The combination of these methods enabled me to achieve what I had identified as severely lacking in the existing body of literature: an internal perspective into the world of ticket touting.

In this article, issues surrounding ethical decisions which impact research subjects and researcher alike are discussed, alongside further moral dilemmas involving the use of illegal activity as a means to access new knowledge. In it, I measure my own decisions and methods against the important set of ethical principles developed by Beauchamp and colleagues (1982). These are: Non-Maleficence, Beneficence, Autonomy and Justice.

The first two state that researchers should not harm participants and that the research should yield a positive outcome, rather than be conducted for its own sake. With regards to the risk of harm for the participants, this research was therefore "consequentialist" in its approach (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001). The central focus of this method is the outcome of

the research, such that considerations around potential harm being caused to participants, as well as ethical decisions surrounding my own conduct, were assessed based on the value of the research outweighing such consequences. The latter two principles, Autonomy and Justice, are more "deontological", highlighting the importance of the rights of participants in terms of their independence and how they should be treated by the researcher. The ultimate consideration would thus not be the outcome of the research, but the means (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001). These two subsets are not necessarily considered to be mutually exclusive (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001). While all four principles have been adhered to throughout this research, the study can be described as mainly consequentialist.

Regarding the risk of harm to the researcher, it was considered whether my methods to gain legitimate, otherwise unobtainable data on the secretive practices of the touts could be justified (Pearson, 2009; Ferrell, 1998). Opting to break the law was viewed as a "necessary" aspect of conducting research in deviant worlds (Adler, 1985; Polsky, 1967). Numerous reflections were made and considerations are offered below to assist in determining whether the methods adopted can be justified in the context of this research. This article posits that arguably contentious forms of research, within certain parameters, can be justifiable in the pursuit of knowledge, particularly in cases where such knowledge could be utilised to regulate a deviant practice in the furtherance of the common good.

## PO with a group of touts

Before offering some reflections on my willingness to navigate the grey areas of law and ethics in the pursuit of previously unavailable knowledge on ticket touts, and how this could be justifiable, it is worth spending a few moments to narrate what happened during the research.

The opportunity to engage in PO and to fully participate in touting activity presented itself for the first time when one interviewee, whom I shall name "Duck"[7], showed a certain eagerness in my research. An unemployed male tout, at the time of these events Duck was twenty-three and had been "in the game" for seven years. Unlike with other touts I had interviewed, he and I stayed in touch once the interview was over and continued to exchange messages on a daily basis. For months, he promised he would introduce me to his "crew", but nothing of note happened until I made the ethically difficult decision to offer to provide him some football tickets to sell. I identified the situation, and the rapport that had developed, as a unique opportunity to delve further into the world of touting. I therefore mentioned that I had a friend who had access to tickets[8], and was often unable to attend matches. With my friend's permission, I casually offered to buy tickets for Duck to those matches my friend could not attend, tickets which Duck could then resell to his client base.

Our relationship changed drastically and immediately. This is the exact exchange that took place, via mobile text messages:

[7] The name "Duck" was chosen as an homage to Whyte's (1955) gatekeeper "Doc". For a long time, I hoped that a similar relationship could develop and flourish.

[8] My friend was a paying member of a specific club, which entitled him to purchase tickets to all home games with relative ease, having priority access over general consumers who were not members. In the case of Premier League teams, there is often no possibility of buying tickets through official channels unless one is a paying member or season ticket holder.

By the way as part of the research I've got my hands on some tickets myself. Might pass them on to you if I can't sell them.
- *What you got?*
Mainly [team]. For [fixture] I got 4.
- *I'll take every [team] ticket off you. Home and away. Yeah let's meet up next week for a drink, I'll sort out with you tickets (sic).*

I was effectively "hired" as a "supplier" for the tout and his collective. Using my friend's memberships, I purchased tickets for Duck who then sold them on for profit giving me a nominal cut of £10 per ticket. When explaining to the others in his gang the source of these tickets, Duck stated that I was an old friend of his, and warned me from disclosing the true purpose of my involvement: he feared that revealing my research would raise suspicions amongst the group.

The buying and selling continued for approximately four months until the tout terminated contact with me very abruptly. Unaware of what was happening, I reached out for an explanation. He eventually stated that someone had discovered my true role, that I was indeed researching touting, and word had spread. The group feared that I could have been an undercover policeman, or perhaps a "copper's nark" (Armstrong, 1993: 31-32). Duck was initially sympathetic to my situation; he, unlike the others, knew the truth. His position quickly changed when pressure was exerted upon him to exploit my vulnerability. Although it is of course unclear to me exactly what was said amongst the touts once they realised I was not a friend of Duck's, but someone who was undertaking a study of touting, I believe they eventually came to the conclusion that I could not possibly have been a policeman. However, instead of readmitting me into the group, or just shutting me out altogether, they began to threaten me.

My contact made me aware that, unless I handed over my friend's memberships, he intended to report me to my university – and possibly to the police – for my illegal touting activity. These memberships were particularly valuable to the group due to their accrued loyalty points, which granted the holder access to the most important – and most profitable – fixtures. These were the text messages I received, after several weeks of uneasy dialogue:

- *I'm going to your uni about this. I'll call your professor.*
And say what that you're a tout? I don't think that's a good idea for you. My uni knows what I'm doing. I don't think you want all of this to come out.
- *As I said, Alex. It's not up to me now. It's gone further. It's up to other people now, mate.*

It is hard to describe the level of fear that was enveloping me at this stage. The above marks the beginning of the threats. He reiterated the position of the group: they demanded my friend's memberships.

- *That's what they wanna meet at. They're not happy at all. If it was up to them something else would happen but I've said no.*

The attempts to intimidate me grew, as can be seen above, as threats of "something else" happening were made, perhaps alluding to physical violence. Fortunately, this never quite

reached the levels experienced by Giulianotti, who, in his study of violent football supporters known as the "casuals", was warned that he may be returning home in a "body bag" (1995: 8). When I continued to refuse, Duck told me: "*Nah, leave it then mate. We will take it further. Spoken to solicitor already*".

When I decided to just stop replying for a while, I received the following, and responded thus:

> - *Well? Ignoring me is not going to solve this.*
> Did your solicitor advise you to blackmail me?
> - *Not blackmailing. Making an offer*.
> Ask your solicitor to define blackmail.

In hindsight, it may seem obvious to the reader that a criminal black market organisation, implicated not only in ticket touting but also money laundering, would not dream of reporting a student to the police for touting activity that paled in comparison to theirs. Had they attempted to incriminate me, "all of this" would have come out, as I responded to Duck during our exchange of threats. Yet I cannot deny that, at the time, I felt truly powerless in the face of such imposing texts and calls. The situation was surreal. When Duck started saying that my conduct amounted to a "felony", I eventually felt safe enough to respond with the appropriate confidence to make them back down; despite my state of panic, I fortunately recognised the bluff. He did not spare me further threats in the very final exchange:

> *- I'm put under pressure by people very high in my game and I am affected by pressure.*
> *- I'll leave it at that, but all I'll say is, when someone asked for your details the other day, I could've found them out and they'd have come round your house. But I didn't and said leave him be.*

## Ethical dilemmas, reflections and justifications

Let us now explore the ethical dilemmas that were faced, the risks that certain decisions brought upon both researcher and participants, and the potential justifications for these often inevitable aspects of conducting research in deviant worlds. In each section, I will outline the dilemmas, present how these were negotiated, and how I was able to conclude that the use of unorthodox or illegal methods could be justified in this context.

### *Risks for the research participants*

There are several issues to consider here. First, a dilemma could arise regarding the fact that the research may ultimately be beneficial for interested parties external to the study, and not for those that have participated in it. In fact, there is a risk that the research could be more than just unbeneficial: it could potentially be damaging to the participants and their trade. Linked to this, there was a risk the participants could be identified in some way, whether externally or internally within their group, after the publication of the research.

Lastly, it was important to note that participants could suffer either as a consequence of being identified, or, as in Duck's case, as a consequence of what happened, regardless of external or internal identification.

It is arguable that any benefits that may emerge from my study on ticket touts would serve those external to the research, such as stakeholders in the entertainment industry or perhaps the general consumer, and not the touts themselves. The acquiring of knowledge as to the touts' practices and the revelation of certain strategies and tactics could benefit artists or consumers and simultaneously harm the touts' business. It may, additionally, be beneficial to the researcher himself, through the publication of his work. It would thus benefit "the collectivity rather than … the particular individuals who [took] part in the research" (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001: 347).

Although the possibility of Duck and others in the study being identified externally is almost non-existent, there is a definite risk that this could happen internally (Ellis, 1995). Burgess (1985) and Tunnell (1998) observed that pseudonyms cannot give absolute guarantees for anonymity, while Murphy and Dingwall discussed the difficulty of making certain data "totally unattributable" (2001: 343), particularly in single or small research settings. While it is felt that no such risk exists due to the study having been conducted nationwide, within their groups it is certain that the individuals that have participated would be aware of their own quotes, and shared experiences.

Murphy and Dingwall spoke of the risk that "research participants may experience anxiety, stress, guilt and damage to self-esteem" (2001: 342). This may have occurred when the gang's attempt to extort me failed. There is no doubt that Duck could have failed to impress the more senior members within the group, having first accepted me as a supplier without informing them of the true nature of my involvement, and then with his threats leading to nothing but potential embarrassment. It is possible that, once my contact with the touts had ended completely, Duck could have been removed from the group, or lost certain privileges within it.

With regards to the issues identified, I endeavoured throughout the course of the research to respect the classic list of principles offered by Beauchamp et al. (1982) on conducting ethical research whilst upholding participants' rights. The first two principles are those of non-maleficence and beneficence. The former means that no harm is to be done to participants, while the latter maintains that:

> "research on human subjects should produce positive and identifiable benefit rather than being carried out for its own sake. These first two are often combined to argue that research is ethical if its benefits outweigh its potential for harm" (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001: 340).

Working alongside a participant to co-produce a report "between researcher and researched" has been suggested as a potential solution or ethical response to the dilemmas outlined above (McBeth, 1993; Horwitz, 1993). This could address both the risk of identification and the general contents of the final research product, and was in fact attempted with some participants, including Duck. Notes were shared in advance of the writing phase of the research, and care was taken to avoid disclosing anything that made him uncomfortable. Inevitably, communication broke down after the incidents that took place. Reflexivity on such issues did not wane, however, and the results of the research have been reported with sensitivity and ethical awareness.

Whether any harm is caused to the touts' trade remains to be seen, in the same way that any benefits to the researcher or to consumers are still an uncertainty. It could be argued that the two outcomes are dependent on each other, such that if benefits to the "collectivity" fail to materialise, no harm would have been caused to the business of the touts. Equally, if the touts' profits were to in any way suffer as a direct consequence of the information they revealed to me, the benefits brought about by the research to consumers and to the industry as a whole would surely outweigh the touts' financial losses, thus justifying the research and its methods in line with Beauchamp et al.'s (1982) first two principles of non-maleficence and beneficence.

The remaining issue was the potential harm that Duck could have specifically encountered within the group itself, not as a result of identification or the touts' methods being revealed, but as a consequence of me being let into the group in the first place. The final two principles in the list of Beauchamp et al. (1982), autonomy and justice, can assist with this dilemma. While the former relates to individual participants' rights to autonomy (Bulmer, 1980; Dingwall, 1980), privacy and self-determination, the latter requires the fair treatment of participants, without prior judgment. With regards to autonomy, I ensured that Duck was always in control of his decision-making. It must be acknowledged that it was his decision to avoid disclosing the real nature of my presence within the group, and it was this decision which led to the breakdown of our interactions. Also, in pursuing a relationship with me, he was undoubtedly benefitting in some way. There was a financial interest, of course, but I also believe that he enjoyed divulging secretive information that he could not normally have shared with anyone. His ownership of the knowledge I sought granted him power in our relationship. It gave him an unprecedented opportunity to boast about his deviant tricks and to feel superior. In the same way that I could make calculated choices as to my involvement, and as to the advantages and disadvantages of the decisions I made, he too enjoyed the liberty to determine whether the benefits of being involved in the research outweighed the risks.

Lastly, the justice principle "demands that the ethnographer should aspire to even-handed treatment of all participants or informants", both villains and heroes (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001: 346). Throughout my research I engaged with a number of individuals who many would consider to be of dubious character and morals. This was done with understanding and fairness at all times. Importantly, it was also done without suspending all ethical judgement, maintaining a level of reflexivity that enabled me to report my subjective experiences objectively for the benefit of the reader.

Throughout the research, I remained aware of the risks of carrying out fieldwork in close contact with participants, particularly in the context of PO, in which my world and the worlds of those studied merged. The incidents that occurred as part of my involvement with the gang of touts, which led to both researcher and research subject making mutual threats, certainly would not have been pleasant for my gatekeeper in the same way they were not for me. Ultimately, by adopting a consequentialist approach I was able to justify the small risks that my participants may or may not have been exposed to, in the hope that the enquiry yields benefits for the greater community that far exceed any minor harm potentially caused.

### *Law-breaking activity and risks for the researcher*

The main issue to consider in this section is the fact that my decision to buy and sell tickets was undoubtedly ethically and legally dubious with regards to my standing both as a university employee and as a law-abiding citizen. Here, I argue that the choice of methods was justified in the pursuit of new knowledge, and in the belief that the uncovered data could be beneficial to a wider audience.

Undertaking law-breaking activity is not unprecedented in ethnographic research, and neither is justifying it. During his study on hooligans, Pearson (2009) described the need to, on occasion, inject his PO with elements of trustworthiness by proving himself within the gang. By demonstrating that he was "up for" a brawl with rival fans in a pub, or by participating in pitch invasions with the others in the group, he was able to gain a level of trust and acceptance without which his research would not have been possible. Entry and sustained access to such a group are extremely difficult to negotiate and maintain. A parallel can be drawn with Armstrong's experience, as members of his supporter's group criticised him for not participating in fights. Some considered this to be highly suspicious, leading to the belief that he could be a "copper's nark" (Armstrong, 1993: 31-12). Breaking the law helped me penetrate the group of ticket touts in the same way that Pearson's access to the hooligans was facilitated by his illegal behaviour. Ferrell, similarly, "confessed" to social drinking, illegal painting and evading legal authority with positive outcomes. He argued that, without these, he would never have reached the level of "collective trust and experiential camaraderie" that was essential to conduct criminological fieldwork, and follow the principles of *verstehen* (Ferrell, 1998: 32).

Yet, unlike others who participated in car chases with the police (Ferrell, 1998), or potentially became aiders and abetters to violent crime (Goffman, 2014), Pearson's law-breaking pertained to specific laws with which he was not necessarily in agreement. He argued that his conduct was justified by outlining the contradictions of a law that did not permit football fans travelling on public transport to consume alcohol. In his view, not only was this provision unjust, it almost amounted to outright discrimination. His stance was analogous with Greenfield et al.'s (2008) argument against specific ticket touting legislation; they suggested that a law prohibiting the resale, whether for profit or not, of football tickets and no other, was discriminatory. James and Osborn (2016) subsequently adopted a similar position. Pearson, therefore, posited that his conduct, although strictly speaking illegal, was in breach of laws that clashed with his own personal ideology. Additionally, in his view, the conduct itself was not all that serious.

I would argue that the touting law that I contravened as part of this research falls within a similar category. To an extent, I largely relied on my own personal moral position and beliefs on ticket touting to make certain decisions. Not to say that I am in favour of the practice; in the same way that Pearson viewed drinking alcohol on public transport as relatively unserious, I considered ticket touting to be, although morally questionable, something I was willing to engage in. For example, I did not believe that, by selling football tickets to Duck, I was in any way endangering fans who might end up sitting in the wrong sectors of a stadium. This was of course the original reason for the passing of the 1994 legislation. My opinion on this provision tended to align with Greenfield and colleagues' (2008) on the need for such a dated and contradictory provision to be reviewed, in light of the social changes that have occurred since that law was introduced. Similarly to Pearson (2009), I established certain parameters within which law-breaking activity could be justified.

When the opportunity to engage in touting unexpectedly presented itself, I made a calculated decision as to the advantages and disadvantages of my actions. I was convinced

that the potential benefits that could arise from gaining access to otherwise unavailable information would outweigh any sense of remorse or guilt that I might feel when breaching a law I did not fully agree with.

Ultimately, if one adopts a more critical view of the law, rather than blindly accepting it as serving and resolving all social dilemmas, there can be some space for manoeuvre and interpretation. Ferrell argued that while "such field research may still pose professional problems, [it] will hardly present itself as a desecration of the social contract" (1998: 34). We do, of course, have a duty to "consider carefully which sorts of criminality are appropriate or inappropriate for study" (1998: 26). Ticket touting represented an ideal topic of research due to, in my own view, the relative lack of seriousness of breaching the laws in question. Most importantly, in light of the social injustice surrounding the topic, it was felt that infringing a relatively unserious provision could be justified in the pursuit of new knowledge that could prove to be beneficial for the wider industry and community.

In light of these reflections I did not shy away from the idea of breaking the law in these very specific circumstances. Assuming a "consequentialist" position, I thus attempted to engage in *verstehen*, a method that "all but assures the field researcher of physical, moral, and professional danger; it presumes deep involvement in criminal and deviant research situations" (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998: 13). In fact, the two authors go on to describe "the immersion and participation" into the "situated meanings … logic and emotion of crime" and deviance as "essential". Further, criminologists are obliged to be present "in the criminal moment if they are to apprehend the terrors and pleasures of criminality" (Ferrell, 1998: 28). In the context of ticket touting, this meant experiencing and understanding the rationality of seizing an opportunity, the rush and satisfaction of concluding a sale, as well as the fear of having gone too far with certain individuals, and of the potential legal consequences. Only through unlawful participatory methods could this have been achieved.

Further still, forms of PO and even *verstehen* are deemed mandatory by such authors, to the extent that an ethnographer almost has a *duty* to adopt these methods to fully explore the meaning of certain deviant acts as a way of understanding and learning from them.

> "As a wealth of field research has demonstrated … research methods which stand outside the lived experience of deviance or criminality can perhaps sketch a faint outline of it, but they can never fill that outline with essential dimensions of meaningful understanding" (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998: 10).

This quote illustrates the gaps in the literature that the methodology adopted for this research aimed to address. It is clear from the findings produced by, for example, the Waterson (2016) report, that the author did not experience the "terrors and pleasures of criminality" as I did (Ferrell, 1998: 28). A consequence of this was the report's inability to do little more than "sketch a faint outline" of the deviance of ticket touts (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998: 10).

PO, *verstehen*, and the potential law-breaking that comes with these methods, not only fitted extremely well with the particular study I was undertaking, but any other solution would have brought a severe injustice upon the subject matter. Choosing to step back and to deliberately avoid law-breaking activity, as in the case of Albritton (1991), or, even more relevantly, of Sugden (2002) himself in his limited participation in the world of the grafters, would have yielded less authenticity:

> "Close adherence to legality on the part of the field researcher doubtless shuts the researcher off from all manner of field contacts and social situations; a willingness to break the law may open a variety of methodological possibilities – obeying the law may present as much of a problem as breaking it" (Ferrell, 1998: 26).

Ferrell was in fact very critical of ethnographers or criminologists who act in the way that Sugden did:

> "Criminological field researchers cannot distance themselves from their subjects of study, or from the legally uncertain situations in which the subjects may reside, in order to construct safe and "objective" studies of them. Instead, criminological field research unavoidably entangles those who practice it in complex and ambiguous relations to subjects and situation of study, to issues of personal and social responsibility, and to law and legality. This approach to research methodology thus serves a both a report and a manifesto, as evidence and argument that conventional canons of objectivity and validity are not, and indeed cannot be, followed in the everyday practice of criminological field research" (1998: 25).

It was thus through these reflections that I was able to justify the morally and legally questionable decisions I made. I could rely on the combination of my own ethical considerations and the existing research to create parameters within which a specific type of illegal conduct could exceptionally be justified as a research method in the furtherance of new and important knowledge. My own reflections on the law itself and its incongruences, combined with the insistence by notable authors in this field on the "necessity" of adopting law-breaking methods, provided the starting point for my venture. These, coupled with the belief that the new knowledge obtainable exclusively through this very method could contribute to improving the unsatisfactory and unjust status quo of ticket touting legislation could, in my opinion, further justify the choice of methods. Curiously, the unlawful selling of tickets in the course of research is not entirely unprecedented: criminologist Dick Hobbs, when studying criminal entrepreneurs in the streets of London, confessed to selling a cup final ticket or two "in order to keep [his] trading instincts sharp" (1988: 4).

## Conclusion

Throughout the fieldwork, there were moments in which I inevitably paused to reflect on how far I was willing to push myself, and the boundaries of my research, both legally and ethically. Polsky (1967) spoke of the need to be clear not only with one's participants, but most importantly with one's self, as to how deep into the criminal world one is prepared to go:

> "In field investigating, before you can tell a criminal who you are and make it stick, you have to know this yourself … you need to decide beforehand, as much as possible, where you wish to draw the line" (Polsky, 1967: 123-132).

I must admit that, at times, I felt that I may have gone too far. I often look back and consider the risks that I put myself in, merely in the hope of achieving something important that could contribute to the field and make positive changes to ticket touting legislation. I felt that sometimes this goal superseded all others; in hindsight it became possible to recognise such recklessness.

The level of antagonism and mutual threats that was reached in the participatory experience with Duck and associates certainly made me think twice about whether any of this had been worth it (Schramm, 2005; Armstrong, 1993). Albritton (1991), in his study of the police, spoke of his ability to walk away from the scene at any time. I did not always feel that I was able to do this in my research, having at times lost sight of the boundaries I had tried to set. Polsky's (1967) warning of knowing where to draw the line proved to be extremely wise. In his words, "if you aren't sure, the criminal may capitalize on the fact to manoeuvre you" (1967: 132). Throughout the research I experienced moments of stress and entrapment. For some months I lived in fear of potential physical danger and felt the need to defend myself. Additionally, I was burdened with the awareness that I had acted unlawfully, and with the inevitable fears that are attached to such conduct, including losing a PhD scholarship or compromising any foreseeable future as an academic.

> "The interconnections between deviance, law, crime, and field research are complex indeed, cutting back and forth between the investigation of deviance and criminality, the field investigator's involvement in deviant or criminal behaviour, and the field investigator's subsequent vulnerability to legal, professional, and disciplinary disapproval" (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998: 7).

In this article, I have shown the dangers and pitfalls of using law-breaking ethnographic research methods, but also the advantages. Accessing individuals involved in ticket touting, and conducting a detailed investigation into their deviant strategies, attitudes and lifestyles, was never going to be an easy feat. I lacked pre-existing contacts and membership to a touting network, both elements that have assisted ethnographers in the past (see, for example, the autobiographical and semi-autobiographical nature of the works in Wakeman, 2014; Williams and Treadwell, 2008; Armstrong 1993; Wolf, 1991; Vigil, 1988; Hobbs, 1988; and Adler, 1985). Some individuals that belong to the world of ticket touting, whether for reasons of stigma or fear of sanction, often make it their utmost priority to conceal their conduct and hide their traces on a daily basis, not only from the relevant authorities but even from their friends or families. A few of my own participants fell into this category. Understandably, they were even more apprehensive when approached by a person who was attempting to conduct an intimate enquiry into a hidden aspect of their identity. It follows that reaching a position from which to engage in detailed conversations regarding their activity was not a straightforward task.

This became possible only through the use of ethnography, and specifically unlawful PO. Offering my services as a temporary ticket tout initially facilitated my quest for new knowledge. The same offer undoubtedly placed me in situations of personal and professional danger, showing the potential disadvantages of adopting an ethnographic approach of this kind. Despite recognising these risks, as well as those faced by the participants, I would argue that the results can justify the choice of methods. I find myself in agreement with authors of similarly challenging studies that law-breaking activity is an almost inseparable element from

the experience of researching deviance (Pearson, 2009; Ferrell, 1998; Hobbs, 1988; Adler, 1985; Polsky, 1967). As such, in certain circumstances, I believe this type of activity to be justified in the furtherance of otherwise unavailable knowledge.

Engaging in multiple participatory attempts enabled me to continue my journey even after the first one had been thwarted. Not only that, PO complemented the other methods which I had initially relied on, such as observations and interviews. Using multiple methods, I was able to obtain a deeper understanding of the deviant world of touting, using triangulation to verify the information gathered through the different methods and sources. In doing this, I have attempted to adopt a method of *verstehen* as imagined by Weber (1949), and strongly advocated by Ferrell and colleagues (1998), Adler (1985), Polsky (1967) or Hobbs (1988). I am now in a position to disseminate previously unavailable information on how ticket touts can exploit the loopholes within the primary ticketing market and purchase enormous quantities of tickets without reprimand. I can share important information as to their extensive networks of contacts and "insiders" within the industry. Additionally, I have gathered data on the touts' reselling techniques, both online and on the streets, and on their beliefs and justifications for their actions. None of this would have been possible without the use of the specific and controversial methods that were adopted.

Through ethnography, and specifically through participatory methods that involved engaging in illegal activity, I have reached a level of experience and knowledge that has surpassed the recent research attempts in grasping the complexities of the touting situation in the UK. I believe the new information I have obtained, and the potential benefits that may one day be enjoyed by the wider community as a result of this investigation, can justify the methods used to capture these data.

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