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<u>Ethnography and the Evocative World of Policing</u>
Special Issue of *Policing & Society* (Part II)

Matthew Bacon, Bethan Loftus and Mike Rowe

In our first, of two, special issues of *Policing and Society*, we reappraised ethnography as a methodology that has made a profound contribution to our understandings of policing. We presented a series of articles that focused upon police officers and other staff in the police institution, their working practices and cultures via an ethnographic approach. In this second issue, we do not repeat our editorial discussion on the enduring value of ethnography. However, it is noteworthy that in presenting our next set of articles, we sought to broaden our scope to include ethnographic research conducted with pluralised forms of policing. We also move beyond the Anglo-American focus of the previous issue in order to explore the conditions of policing in different parts of the world. Other aims of this issue are to consider policing from the point of view of the policed, and to reflect on our roles and experiences as policing ethnographers. Together, we hope that these articles remind us of the potential for ethnographic research to powerfully reveal the unfamiliar, to unsettle stable images, and attend to questions of perspective.

The Articles

In recent times, there have been major developments which directly and indirectly influence policing ideologies and operational practices. Central among these include the - real or imagined - threats of serious organised crime and global terrorism (Innes 2006; Thiel 2009) and the comprehensive shift towards future-oriented and directed approaches to policing. In their contribution, **Mike Rowe and Thomas Søgaard** explore the strategies employed by different policing agencies to combat organised crime, namely gangs and biker groups. The authors bring together evidence from two ethnographic studies – one conducted with a police force in England, the other undertaken with bouncers and partners working in the Danish nightlife economy – to illustrate how social control professionals pool resources and 'pull levers' with the aim to disrupt and deter the activities of suspected gangs and other organised criminals. As Rowe and Sogaard find, intelligence-gathering forms the backbone of targeted methods of policing - but this is often reliant upon flawed and selective levels of information. Rowe notes that in his ethnography, the police have become 'so steeped in the language and culture of disruption' that they employ the pulling levers approach to those people who should instead be receiving assistance to make better lifestyle choices. In Denmark, Sogaard provides a first-hand insight into how the police collaborate with third-party actors to expand their reach and exclude suspected bikers from local venues. Once individuals are associated with gang crime, it becomes very difficult to escape the resulting punitive police attention. Together, Rowe and Sogaard demonstrates the contribution of ethnography for understanding how similar domestic and international crimes and pressures have resulted in a convergence of police mindsets and priorities across comparative contexts.

The comprehensive strain on police budgets has provided an impetus for partnership work and inter-agency relations between the police and a variety of other public, private and voluntary organisations. Such is the focus of **Tessa Diphoorn** who, in this issue, provides a fascinating insight into partnerships between the state police and private security companies operating in Nairobi, Kenya. One of the key themes to emanate from her observations is how objects – in this case, firearms – influence and define the public-private policing relationship. From her patrols with policing actors, Diphoorn finds that the deployment of firearms brings state police and private agents together. The gun, she notes, serves as 'a bridging function between various

policing actors [since it] provides new possibilities for certain actions'. At the same time, however, the legitimate ownership of the firearm enforces the power hierarchies and inequalities between pluralised police. Ultimately, as Diphoorn suggests, the firearm ensures the state's hegemonic position within policing partnerships, reinforcing the dominance of the state and its ability to kill.

Yarin Eski also offers an intimate portrayal of the processes, structures and normative bonds that motivate and trouble private security agents – this time in the form of port security officers operating in Rotterdam and Hamburg. Eski carried out an extensive ethnography, participating in the daily lives of 85 participants involved in port security matters in two of Europe's busiest ports. In so doing, he provides a detailed account of the spaces, networks, cultures and imaginaries of ports policing. He reveals, in particular, a contradiction between the ambitions of the neoliberal state and the under-the-surface narratives and behaviours of security officers co-opted into representing and protecting 'hypercommercialism'. As he was 'walked through' the everyday occupational lives of port security, Eski found broad resistance amongst the officers towards the logics underpinning the neoliberal agenda they were supposed to enforce. Ultimately, the officers cynically viewed themselves as simple marketing tools, symbolically promoting the port as (appearing) safe, secure and good for business. It is telling that, for officers involved in ports policing, a 'sense of occupational worth is lost' because they are only too aware of their own role in sustaining the inequalities and human suffering which accompany global mobility. By revealing how port police resist hypercommercialism – manifesting in a sympathy with the suspect 'other' – Eski offers a refreshingly nuanced insight into how the mindsets and behaviours of pluralised police are shaped by the logistical operations they adhere to.

As **Will Jackson** notes in his article, the new police-academic collaborations are reshaping renowned problems of access and trust, but the trade-off appears to be a shift towards research that is *with* rather than *on* the police (see e.g. Goode and Lumsden 2018). He deliberately departs from the former type of police research by adopting a 'critical ethnography' position. This prioritises studying policing from the perspective of the policed in order to, first and foremost, provide a 'view from below'. Narratives underpinning the policing of political conflict are notoriously asymmetrical, characterised by strikingly contrasting accounts between police and protestors' versions of events. In order to allow the – often marginalised – accounts of protestors to be heard, Jackson set out to examine the (political) policing of anti-fracking protests in Barton Moss, England. He embedded himself within the protestors' camp, observing the day-to-day running of the camp, the social organisation of protests and, crucially, the police response to the protestors themselves. What he finds is the ongoing violence and intimidation inflicted on protestors by the police severely challenges the prevailing discourse that national public order policing - with its emphasis on human rights, dialogue and communication - has rebalanced and amended the thorny police-protestor relationship. The article ends with a poignant reminder to policing ethnographers that the social world of the police is but only one of the social worlds worthy of study.

Knowledge about the world of policing is geographically incomplete as it has been dominated by scholarship from the Global North. It is also geographically biased as knowledge is shaped by the environment in which it is produced. This is no doubt a consequence of ethnocentrism and the Western make-up of the field of police studies (see Carrington et al. 2016). **Melissa Jardine's** ethnography of policing in Vietnam therefore provides us with a much-needed view from the South – a 'Southern perspective'. Policing and the police can vary substantially across the world because of the unique conditions of policing in different regions, countries and localities. Jardine illustrates this point by identifying a number of ways in which the conditions of

Vietnamese policing differ from countries in the Global North. An obvious departure from the apolitical stance of police in Western democracies, she notes, is the context of a one-party state where officers must be (loyal) members of the Community Party of Vietnam. Her article examines the dynamics that have hidden, limited or excluded Vietnamese scholarship on policing. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in Hanoi, she also reflects on the methodological and ethical challenges (and opportunities) of undertaking ethnographic research as a former police officer and foreign, female scholar. In so doing, she considers how insights from 'appreciative inquiry' can facilitate undertaking ethnographies of policing in sensitive and complex political environments, noting its potential to 'contribute to the democratisation of knowledge for a more comprehensive and inclusive account of policing and police culture'.

Many ethnographic accounts of policing have sought to reveal the centrality of culture – the dispositions and values which officers (and other policing actors) bring to bear on their everyday interactions and work. Yet, as **Anna Souhami** notes in the final contribution to this special issue, far less attention has been paid to the role of *academic* culture in producing such ethnographic accounts of policing. The broader field, within which policing scholars undertake and write up their research, has the potential to play an important role in shaping the way ethnographies approach, understand and represent the policing world. As Souhami observes, 'the conception of the ethnographic self in this work is largely concerned with aspects of personal identity, subjectivity or location *rather than its situation in the professional field in which knowledge is produced'* (**emphasis added**). Thus, along with exposing the informal beliefs, narratives and practices of the police world, the fieldwork and ethnographic product may also reveal the latent - and often omitted - priorities and biases of the policing scholar. Above all, Souhami argues that such accounts reveal 'the preoccupations of ethnographic researchers as we attempt to demonstrate our authority'. To further examine this, Souhami retrospectively reflects on her own, unpublished fieldnotes derived from an ethnographic study - for which she was the key field researcher – from over fifteen years ago. Her aim is not to simply revisit the policing field but, rather, the academic field of police research through key fieldwork moments, notably those involving initiation tests. By (re)studying her fieldnotes, Souhami argues that a 'second layer of story' emerges, one which attends to her attempts to navigate both the police and academic world. They reveal an underlying and unarticulated concern to constitute and convey an authentic, authoritative fieldwork.

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