

Ethnographies of Global Policing

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Long before academic scholarship developed an intellectual apparatus that would make conceivable what this essay defines as ‘ethnographies of global policing’, something of their spirit existed in the annals of narrative writing. Among the most famous, and perhaps also the most instructive, examples is George Orwell’s 1936 essay, ‘Shooting an Elephant’.

In the essay, Orwell recalls a time when he was a young police officer in the Burmese town of Moulmein. A junior official in the outer provinces of the British empire, he was acutely aware that the people of Moulmein loathed him, ‘the only time in my life I have been important enough’ to hate, he writes.

One day, something happened, ‘a tiny incident in and of itself’. An elephant had escaped from its owner and was wandering through the town. Orwell was called to deal with the situation. He discovered on his arrival that the creature had trampled a man to death – indeed, the

elephant had ground the poor man into the rain-softened earth: 'his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long'.

Orwell called for an elephant rifle, but he did not intend using it. He had sent for the weapon merely to defend himself if necessary. But once the gun was in his hand, a large crowd gathered around him, and he discovered, to his immense discomfort, that his audience, not he, would decide what was to happen next.

Suddenly, he writes, 'I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly.'

And with that realisation came a greater insight into the nature the power he exercised in that town, and, indeed, the nature of British imperialism itself.

[I]t was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd – seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib.

Much that this review essay is to reflect upon is here. For one, the writing is ethnographic (albeit of the 'auto-ethnographic' variety). Whether one defines ethnography simply as writing about the world from the standpoint of participant observation (Burawoy, 1998), or, more ambitiously, as the capacity, after a long period of immersion, to 'occupy a third

position', neither one's own nor that of the people one is studying, but 'a view from in-between' (Jackson, 2013: 256), what Orwell is doing is ethnography.

As for 'policing', Orwell has, with great efficiency, worked his way to a series of questions at the heart of policing studies. Orwell's actions in 'Shooting an Elephant' are those of a person tasked with policing. But what exactly is he doing and why? He is not enforcing law, for none appears to have been broken. And yet he *must* act. What compels him to do so? Who is exercising power when Orwell acts and to what end? What sort of order is being created or re-affirmed or threatened? These questions, we shall see, are fundamental, and the flurry of ethnographic work on policing in various parts of the world in recent years has not so much answered them as exposed their difficulty anew.

Finally, we come to 'global'. Orwell has located his own practice as a policeman, not just in space and time, but in a history of imperial conquest. And he views his shooting of an elephant, not just as a manifestation of this history, but as a window onto its deepest characteristics. Although the concept was hardly available to him, Orwell was writing of policing as 'a transversal object' (Espange, 2012), as the historian, Michel Espange, has put it – a family of institutions, processes and ideologies that are dispersed throughout the world in part as a result of transfers that took place in recent centuries on the back of European imperialism.

Let me be a little more specific, for what is meant here by 'global' is to the questions this essay will ask of the literature under review.

At its inception, the anthropological project aimed to cross a frontier between the familiar and the unexplored – unexplored forms of social order, of political institutions, of family structures, lineage networks and religious rites – and to study them ethnographically. As such, anthropology rode on the back of the imperial project, for the places and people it studied had either just been conquered or where on the brink of being conquered. But if imperial expansion made anthropology possible, it ended up robbing it of its object. For the processes of expansion dispersed across the planet a host of ‘transversal objects’, in Espange’s phrase, which an ethnographer will confront wherever she cares to go. The frontier between the familiar and the unexplored, the very frontier that had motivated the anthropological project in its original conception, became much harder to find.

What does a world littered with transversal objects mean for ethnographic enterprises? How does one go about studying an institution when variants of it exist everywhere? One answer is to say that the ethnographer has not studied the object adequately until she understands its global history. Or, to make the same point a little differently, the object before her embodies aspects of its global history that must be comprehended if the object itself is to be understood.

This may sound like an invitation to an impossible exercise. And, indeed, ethnographers have for some time now been seized with its awkwardness. Ethnography by its nature inclines to the study of one place over a limited period of time. (There are exceptions: ‘ethnographic revisits,’ in which the ethnographer returns to a previous site of study, sometimes over the course of decades (Burawoy, 2003), and multi-sited ethnographies (Hage, 2005); but they are by their nature cumbersome and massively labour-intensive.) Is the *ethnographic* study of a

global object, some have asked, akin to attempting to put a saddle on a pig (Burawoy, et al, 2000).

And yet the study of an object, circumscribed in space and in time, that nonetheless takes in the salience of a much broader history, is in fact quite widespread. Since the 1980s, for instance, scholars of colonialism have understood the governance of the colonies in the imperial hinterland and of the new urban masses in the nineteenth century metropolitan cities as intertwined. It is not just that experiments in new tactics of governance, coercion and public welfare moved back and forth across the imperial world; the intellectual categories through which the world was apprehended moved back and forth too. The frameworks through which the nineteenth century British working class was understood, for example, bore traces of imperial experiences far away. (Stoler, 1995; Mitchell, 1988, Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997). And vice versa. So, for instance, Frederick Cooper's (1987) study of the management of labour unrest in late colonial Mombasa finds the situation there unintelligible in the absence of an appreciation how the British working class came to be understood over the previous century.

Two more brief examples before moving to policing. Many scholars of Christianity have long understood the object of their study to be 'global' in the sense I am using the term here, for the experience of its expansion across new frontiers over two millennia profoundly shaped its intellectual and institutional history *everywhere* (Sanneh, 2003; McCullough, 2010). Written constitutions, too, are prime candidates as 'global objects' of study; Bruce Ackerman's (2019) ongoing project to postulate three ideal-typical written constitutions according to the role they play in the establishment and maintenance of a regime's authority,

is an excellent example: no single constitution, by Ackerman's lights, is properly understood in the absence of an appreciation of constitutionalism's global history.

Is the same true of policing? Is policing not properly understood until it is studied as a global object? And, if so, how far has the study of policing as a global object come? Let us start with the latter question. The simple answer is: not very far at all. Or, at least, not yet. As my colleagues and I have recently argued (Loader et al, 2016), global policing is very much a prospective field.

To be sure, there has been a great – and greatly welcomed – proliferation of ethnographic work on policing over the last two decades on every continent on the planet. Much of this work comes from the discipline of anthropology, and this is no coincidence. As anthropology lost its traditional objects of study – exploring the unfamiliar on the other side of the frontier – it turned its methods upon the metropolis, and thus upon institutions earlier generations of scholars did not consider. And so we have ethnographies of Wall Street (Ho 2009), of Japanese finance (Miyazaki 2013), of *pied noir* Algerians in southern France (Crapanzano 2011), a best-selling ethnography of the English (Fox 2014), of the relationships between human beings and other living forms (Tsing 2015), and, indeed, of police officers in Paris (Fassin, 2013).

A list of some ethnographic work on police around the globe in the last two decades would include Graham Denyer Willis's work on policing in Sao Paulo (Willis, 2015); Steve Herbert's books on policing in Los Angeles (Herbert, 1997, 2006), Julia Hornberger's (2011), Andrew Faull's (2017) and Jonny Steinberg's (2007) ethnographic work on police officers in South Africa; Oliver Owen's ethnography of a police station in Nigeria (Owen, 2013); Beatrice

Jauregui's work on Indian police officers (2016), Mirco Göpfert's book on police detectives in Niger (2019); Jeffrey Martin's on policing in Taiwan (2019); Lawrence Ralph's forthcoming ethnography of police torture in Chicago (2020); Ian Loader and Aogan Mulcahy's ethnography of policing in England (2003). And there are also two recent collections of essays exploring ethnographic work on policing (Fassin 2017; Karpiak and Garriott, 2018).

This flurry of ethnographic work on policing from around the world has opened up the quotidian practices of policing, in their manifold variety, to unprecedented scrutiny. And I shall attempt to assess later in this essay what all of this new knowledge has taught us. For the moment, suffice it to say that while the work cited above is drawn from around the globe, little of it would constitute an ethnography of global policing as defined by this essay. In other words, little of it self-consciously understands its object as 'transversal' or asks what sort of methodological innovations studying policing as a transversal object might entail.

There are a handful of examples of scholars who have written of policing with a keen appreciation of the significance of its transversality, although little of this work is ethnographic. The project orchestrated by Anderson and Kilingray (1991) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, for instance, is a study of colonial policing that places its object in a matrix of imperial projects and institutions stretching across a long period of time and across of all of the world's hemispheres. It did not acquire the traction among scholars of policing that it might have, in part because the academy is notoriously siloed; the participants in the project were historians of empire and their voice was not heard in the silos in which policing studies was evolving at the time.

More recently, Bernard Harcourt (2018) has argued that recent developments in policing in the United States are best understood as an adoption of the strategies and mentalities of counterinsurgency military practices first developed to combat rebellious colonial populations in British Malaya and French Indochina. Harcourt's book is highly polemical and not at all ethnographic. Its strength, rather, lies in its account of how ideas travel, and, more especially, in the surprising variety of arenas in which they become serviceable. From the countryside of British Malaya to occupied Afghanistan and Iraq to the streets of American cities: Harcourt's book is a study of how far scholarship might venture, not just in space and time, but also into different arenas of history – military, colonial, contemporary geopolitical – to understand the policing of the streets in one time and place.

Sediments and Construction Sites

To my mind, though, the most full-blooded exemplar of what I define here as an ethnographic study of policing as a global object, a study, based on immersive on-the-ground observation, that takes policing's transversality as its most salient feature, is the anthropologist, Thomas Bierschenk's, work on policing (and other) bureaucracies in West Africa.

Bierschenk begins one of his essays describing a gendarmerie brigade in a remote region of the West African state of Benin. Covering an area of 4,500 square metres with a population of almost 100,000, the brigade consists of five men. Its sole vehicle, a Nissan pickup truck, is broken, and the members of the gendarmerie will pay for its repairs from their own pockets. 'In order to maintain a minimum of service,' Bierschenk writes, 'the brigade needs the help of what one of the gendarmes calls "well-disposed" people... The townhall recently gave them

a computer, and one of the small Igbo merchants has given them a care tire' (Bierschenk, 2014: 221-222).

As counterintuitive as this may seem in the light of the quotation above, one of Bierschenk's premises is that 'practices in Europe in Africa do not differ in nature' (Bierschenk and de Sardan, 2014: 17). Indeed, he and his co-author, Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, argue that all bureaucracies (especially police bureaucracies, as we shall see) are characterized by a degree of informality – by a gap between what the organisation states it does and what it actually does; the gap is much more visible, though, in sparsely-resourced African organisations. Therefore, they argue, 'it is in the interests of researchers working on European bureaucracies to familiarize themselves with the findings of anthropologists studying African bureaucracies' (ibid: 18).

And so, immediately, one can see, Bierschenk understands the organisation he is studying as a global object, in the sense in which this essay has defined it. Its connections to the faraway practices of police officers in, say, the German town in which he lives, Maintz, are closer than may appear at first sight.

The most efficient way to get to the heart of Bierschenk's method is via a distinctive metaphor he uses. In the organisations he studies, he writes, old practices do not die; new ones are simply conjoined to the old. An organisation thus carries within its practices a simultaneity of past and present. Sometimes, he expresses this idea in the form of the metaphor of the building site:

Any observer will know that in many places in Africa, construction sites in particular for private homes may exist for many years. To the untrained eye, they may even look like abandoned sites. However, closer inspection usually reveals that there are, in fact, people on the site. The initial temptation is to assume that they are squatters, however, in most cases, they are the owners. And suddenly, out of the blue, a truck arrives with sand and cement, a room is added to the half-finished building, a wall goes up, or make-shift windows are replaced with glass ones... [T]he house is very different to the way it was originally conceived and looks like an unfinished, apparently perpetual building site where construction, repair, abandonment and re-purposing proceed simultaneously, with the inhabitants not always agreeing on what to use the building for, the different parts of the site apparently having had completely different architects...; and these different architects often disagree both with each other and with (some of) the inhabitants about what the buildings should be used for and how it should be used (Bierschenk and de Sardan, 5-6).

Or, using another metaphor, he suggests that various moments in an institution's history are 'deposited like sediments...: the effects of a particular reform do not usually replace the results of the previous one,' (Bierschenk 2014: 229).

When I first read Bierschenk's work, I found his metaphors enormously illuminating. I had for some time been conducting ethnographic work among South African police officers and was struck, above all, by the simultaneity of clashing practices I witnessed. A police officer I was shadowing might spend the evening partaking in a highly aggressive paramilitary invasion of an urban neighbourhood. Earlier in the same day he may well have attended a community policing forum in the very same neighbourhood in which sophisticated forms of co-operation between civilian bodies and police were orchestrated. The following day, he may attend a meeting with other government agencies to talk about co-ordinating measures of situational crime prevention. At times it seemed as if every iteration of policing practised through the

course of the modern era was condensed into his daily practice, no matter how uncomfortable the relationship between them.

In Bierschenk's schema, the practices of a single police officer do indeed reveal an archaeology running several generations deep. The sharply hierarchical practices of the colonial era; the myriad projects of institutional reform launched by various international partners during the period of structural adjustment; the flurry of police reform initiatives attempted during the era of democratisation. All of these can be detected in contemporary police work.

Bierschenk, I mentioned earlier, suggests that practices in Africa and in Europe 'do not differ in nature'. All bureaucratic organisations, he argues, sediment their practices to some degree. But in parts of the world that have been buffeted periodically by uncertainty and change, practices seldom have the time or the weight to bed down before others are transplanted on top of them, and the sediments are therefore more numerous and more prominent.

Among Bierschenk's interlocutors are scholars who argue that the informality of the practices of African bureaucrats, economic actors, and, indeed, police officers, are best understood by reference to African culture. He is arguing that informality is better explained by institutional history – for the more sediments in an institution's practices, the less the institution can offer its agents a coherent idea of how to act. Hence, improvisation, and thus, informality, become the order the day.

Bierschenk's innovation is to suggest that large slices of global history are wedged into the practices of a street-level police officer, or, indeed, of other state bureaucrats. Colonialism, the debt crisis and structural adjustment; these global events and processes are preserved in current practice. In this sense, police officers carry the burden of a global history on their backs. It is a somewhat pessimistic view.

New ethnographic work, old theories of policing

I have argued that little of the new ethnographic work on policing can be called 'global ethnography' in the sense in which I have defined it. But that hardly means that there is nothing more to say about it. When it is all read side by side, one of the most striking things about the new ethnographic literature from across the world is the implicit conversation it conducts about an old and unresolved question – what is policing?

It is common cause among scholars of policing that there is a wide gap between the practices of police officers as they are represented in law and in regulation and the empirical, quotidian practices to be observed on the streets. Any extended observation of police work soon concludes that very little of a police officer's time involves law enforcement; a great deal involves 'policing' in its older and much wider definition as the maintenance of order. And this is by its nature a far murkier terrain, one that is underdetermined by law or regulation, that involves a great deal of police discretion, and that has to do with a matrix of unwritten rules and meanings in the relationship between police and civilians.

But if scholarship on policing agrees about this, it diverges on what precisely happens in the gap between law and practice. One strand of theory is perhaps best represented by the

canonical work Egon Bittner conducted in the 1960s and 1970s. Both a fine ethnographer of policing and a concerted theorist of what policing is, the crux of Bittner's argument is that policing practice is shaped by the norms of civilians. Or, put more starkly, policing only exists at all insofar as there is a demand for it.

In the ideal-typical world Bittner imagines, the people who pass one another on the street are strangers, but they do not bear hostile intentions. Their relationship is one of mutual anonymity, not estrangement. They endeavour to share their city peaceably.

The inhabitants of the city understand, though, that despite their shared commitment to order, breaches of peace do arise. Citizens view these breaches as temporary, not as a threat to the underlying order. And it is precisely from this common commitment to order that the idea of police arises, for citizens accept in the midst of disorder that an agency must be called, one that can arrive on the scene and deal with the emergency, and that to do so, this agency must have licence to use asymmetrical force over others.

This is the police's role. The inhabitants of the Bittner's imagined city understand that the police are uniquely entitled to use force, that when they arrive on the scene, everyone else relinquishes the right to use force against them. The function of the police, Bittner argues, is to create 'conditions for the orderly coexistence of strangers,' or, more specifically, to 'control ... predatory violations of those conditions,' (Bittner and Brodeur 2007: 111). Or, in a much-cited phrase of Bittner's, the police is the agency citizens call, and to whose authority they submit, 'in any situation as long as it could be said that it involved something-that-ought-

not-to-be-happenening-about-which-someone-had-better-do-something-now!' (Bittner 1990: 249).

The crucial point, for our purposes here, is that daily police work 'absolutely depends on cooperation [by civilians]; it is, in large measure, not "policing of the law" but "policing by consent"' (Bierschenk, 2016: 167). And police officers are attuned to the values of civilians because they are guided less by law than 'by common sense, localized, verbally derived and relayed background knowledge,' (Bierschenk, 2016: 167); or, as Bittner himself put it, police work is 'playing by ear' (1967: 715).

If policing requires civilian consent, a corollary question immediately arises: what if that consent is withdrawn or is present unevenly? A great deal of the ethnographic work produced in various parts of the world in the last decade provide answers to this question.

The notion that the power police exercise is contingent on what is acceptable to civilians, even poor and socially marginal civilians, is particularly prevalent in the ethnographic work coming out of South Africa. Nicholas Rush Smith (2018), for instance, asks why vigilantism persists at such high levels in South Africa since the country's transition to democracy. He argues that vigilantism persists, not because criminal justice institutions are weak and vigilantes step into the breach opened by such weakness, but because much of the citizenry rejects the principles undergirding the formal justice system. One of the results, Smith continues, is that formal justice institutions begin to mimic vigilante practices; the latter thus acquire an uncomfortable, unacknowledged imprimatur from the state itself. In Smith's argument, civilians' norms exert a more powerful weight over the justice system than the

norms embodied in law. The result is that the work of the justice system drifts from its own self-description and comes to embody far more the institutions civilians imagine they want.

Sarah-Jane Cooper-Knock's (2014) work on South Africa proceeds in a similar vein. In a close analysis of incidences of crowd justice in South African townships, Cooper-Knock observes an intricate, implicit and strictly unacknowledged division of labour between vigilantes and police. A widely observed norm of street justice, Cooper Knock argues, is to resist inflicting mortal injury on a victim who is local and whose family is known. The way death is avoided is subtle, intricate and involves the co-operation of the police. Typically, the way those guiding a crowd to put an end to the punishment is simply to call the police. The police arrive, the crowd parts, and the victim is arrested and taken to the police station. And so the police come to play a familiar and predictable role in street justice, albeit a role not entirely of its own choosing. Indeed, it could be said that the crowd has divided the punishment inflicted on the suspect: first it beats him, then it outsources his possible imprisonment to the justice system.

Cooper-Knock (2018) asks in a later piece: who exercises sovereignty when police go to work? Her answer is that sovereignty is negotiated and thus shared. The question of who precisely gets to share in it is of course crucial. And in this regard, Smith's and Cooper-Knock's work contains some irony. It is commonplace to observe that policing in newly democratised regimes is heavily path-dependent insofar as the police services of the new era battle to shrug off the legacy of the authoritarian institutions that preceded them (Hinton 2006, Sozzo, 2016). But in Cooper-Knock's work, and much more explicitly in Smith's, the legacies that shape policing are quite different. It is not the shadow of the old apartheid state but the norms that evolved among ordinary people in the struggle against apartheid that reflect themselves in

policing. In their understanding that policing is deeply sensitive to the norms of civilians, these scholars are thus suggesting that police practice is suffused with the legacies of past struggles waged in society at large.

While the idea that police power is heavily modulated by civilian norms is especially prevalent in South African ethnography, it is by no means confined to work conducted in that country. In her ethnography of policing in Uttar Pradesh, India, Beatrice Jauregui finds, in the course of the many hundreds of hours she spent with police, that 'their authority to intervene with coercion in various "situational emergencies" was actively negotiated, forcefully doubted, and regularly defied among a variety of actors'. She writes of police beating 'a hasty retreat in the face of a challenge to their authority by a wide range of citizens, sometimes crowds of villagers, sometimes known criminals, sometimes wealthy youth who could call on relatives with ... influence.' (Jauregui, 2016: 9-10). As her work proceeded she thus became increasingly interested in the provisionality of police authority; by provisional she means that authority is 'a relational force configured by compounded and competing demands' (15). Police authority, then, is dispersed and intermittent, and, above all, fluid, for it is subject to an interminable and uncertain contest among civilians themselves.

This brings to the fore a question that has been implicit all along. The process of nation-states monopolising the legitimate exercise of force began in the seventeenth century; it entailed incorporating an array of old policing institutions into government bureaucracies and subjecting them to public control. But this process of condensing police work into the state has nowhere been completely achieved. And the incompleteness of the project, as we can see above, takes many forms. In Smith's work, policing institutions begin to imitate the extra-

legal practices of vigilante formations and the boundary between state and non-state blurs in the form of the very practices of state agents. In Cooper-Knock's writing, vigilantes and police distribute the labour of punishing between themselves, with the result that those accused of crimes are subject to a hybrid punishment, some of it at the hands of a crowd, some in a court. In Jauregui's work, whose interests capture the imprimatur of state policing varies considerably from one situation to another.

The question of who decides on who is punished and in what form is raised in trenchant form in Graham Denyer Willis's ethnography on policing in Sao Paulo. Denyer's book – among the most conceptually ambitious and narratively compelling of the recent police ethnographies – begins with his shadowing of a homicide unit in the city. Willis discovers, as only the time and intensity of ethnographic work allows, that extra-judicial killing in the city is in fact shared between the police and a crime group called Primeiro Comando de Capital (PCC) which itself arose in response to the killing of its members by police. Cyclical periods of peace and violence in the city's slums, Willis argues, 'can be understood through an unspoken but mutually observed consensus on the right to kill,' (Willis 2015: 7).

In terms of the discussion this essay is orchestrating, two of Willis's arguments are of much importance. The first is how promiscuously the police power is shared and how widely it strays from legal constraints. In this sense, Willis's work is of a piece with much of the literature discussed immediately above; it shares with them the deepest scepticism that modern states have appropriated legitimate violence, instead offering yet another iteration of the breadth of its dispersal.

But Willis makes another point. He places his ethnographic work in the context of a deeply unequal city, one in which health, well-being, safety and the rule of law are dispersed with stark unevenness. The sovereignty the police and the PCC share is not over the distribution of killing people, but over the distribution of killing poor, mainly black, people, the killings in question confined to the slums, the lives of the middle classes largely undisturbed by the prospect of murder. He thus raises a connection between policing and the unequal distribution of safety, and between policing and extra-legal violence. Much of the remainder of this essay will explore precisely this question.

Police and the enforcement of order

I said earlier that there is general agreement among scholars of policing that there exists a wide gap between the practices of police officers as they are represented in law and in regulation and the empirical, quotidian practices to be observed on the streets. Thus far we have looked largely at ethnographers who argue that the authority of police is ineluctably weak, that by its nature it is shared with civilians.

But there is another strand in recent ethnography that goes very much the other way, suggesting that power is all too heavily concentrated in the police. I wish to introduce it by way of a story that happens to be in the news in the UK on the day that I write these lines.

In March 1972, four black men were arrested at an underground train station in London for snatching women's handbags. They were held overnight, beaten in the cells and charged with theft and assault of a police officer. After a five-week trial they were convicted and jailed for two years. Now, after nearly five decades of campaigning, their names are finally to be cleared.

The detective who arrested them, Derek Ridgewell, had been found serially to have approached young black men on the subway, accused them of theft and then attributed incriminating remarks to them. If they resisted arrest, a charge of assaulting a police officer was also thrown in.

The most astonishing aspect of the story is that Ridgewell's practices in fact came to light decades ago, in 1973, when a trial judge found that two young black men standing trial for robbery were devout Jesuit students at Oxford University. Ridgewell was quietly moved to a post investigating mail theft while many of the men he had arrested remained behind bars (Campbell, 2019).

Recent ethnographic work on policing is replete with reporting of systemic police violence targeted at particular categories of people. Among the most striking is Laurence Ralph's (2020) forensic examination of the torture of hundreds of the black citizens of Chicago by police officers working under the city's former Police Commander, John Burge. Ralph also documents the impunity with which the practice of torture became endemic in Chicago and the travails of the activist movement that arose to draw attention to it.

Torture is among the most extreme practices upon which recent ethnographic work has turned attention. But other forms of violent management of particular populations has also been the subject of recent work, most notably Didier Fassin's (2013) ethnography of the policing of the Parisian banlieues. Much scholarly attention has also turned to the targeting of particular populations in regard to the police practice of stop-and-search, although little of this work has been ethnographic (Belur 2011, Bradford and Loader, 2016; Delsol and Shriner,

2007; Tyler, Fagan and Geller, 2014). And a recent study of policing in New York concludes that through the inauguration of a system of 'mass misdemeanours' the city began using its courts, together with its police, as 'a managerial tool' to 'sort and regulate' targeted populations, completely abandoning the criminal justice system's most fundamental self-justification: that is arbitrates individual cases before administering punishment (Kohler-Hausmann 2018).

(It would be remiss not to note, too, that as police violence has grown as a source of great public contention, most notably in the United States, it has become a recurring and potent theme in popular culture, a development that ought to be of great interest to policing scholars. The work of hip-hop star Kendrick Lamar, for instance – a sustained moral self-examination of a black man who came of age in a Los Angeles ghetto, saturated in references to cultural and political history – is (thus far) an untapped source for scholars investigating the cultural history arising from the experience of being policed. There is, though, a very fine essay on television police dramas by a leading ethnographer – Fassin, 2014).

How best to place this recent work in the history of police scholarship? If one way to understand the ethnographies discussed in the previous section, which stress the weakness or provisionality of police authority, is to read them through the work of Egon Bittner, a useful way to read the work currently under discussion is through the work of Markus Dubber (2005).

It should be said that Dubber's book is not only, or even primarily, about public police organisations. The 'police power' of his book's title refers to a conception of policing that predates uniformed police forces, and that indexes the power to regulate people and things

to produce and sustain a social order. It thus might refer to the work of any number of public institutions and social processes. The template upon which the police power draws is the family patriarch whose prime responsibility is the welfare of his family. One of the key features of such governance is that it operates outside of law, for its fulcrum is the patriarch's discretion. The police power is thus indefinable, for it is discretionary; it is a human, for it treats people as objects to be managed; it is hierarchical, for it invokes subjects who are managed, not citizens who decide; and it is illegitimate, for it answers to efficiency, not accountability.

Ian Loader and various of his co-authors have used Dubber's work to powerful effect to understand formal police organisations. In their work on stop-and-search practices in England and Wales, for instance, Loader and his co-author, Ben Bradford, argue that this practice is animated not primarily by the quest to prevent or detect crime; rather, it is intimately involved in the manufacture of a symbolic order, largely through the theatricality of its displays of power, in which marginal population and managed, controlled and made to understand their place.

And this managerial role, they argue, is *constitutive* and *necessary* in societies structured by inequality. It is not an unfortunate development that can be reformed away. 'Social order in capitalist democracies..' they write, 'is made possible because the police are given potentially limitless, uncontrollable, and extra-legal powers to do what is necessary to monitor and control marginal populations, whoever they happen to be – blacks, Muslims, white working-class youth, Roma, migrants, and so on (Bradford and Loader 2016: 256-7). And to redouble their emphasis on the *necessity* of police in this role, they conclude: 'We doubt that the

abolition of stop and search 'is either a feasible *or even a desirable* approach,' (ibid: 257 emphasis added).

Embodied in their short piece on stop and search is Loader's career-long project to examine the symbolic dimensions of policing. Police perform ordering and cultural work, Loader and co-author Aogan Mulcahy write in a seminal ethnography on policing in England, that 'enables individuals and groups to make sense of their pasts, form judgments on the present, and project various imagined futures' (Loader and Mulcahy 2003: 45). Police performances are thus 'important definers of the boundaries of moral community serving to draw and patrol the line between belonging and exclusion,' (Loader 2019: 3).

Thus, four black men framed for theft by a police detective while going about their ordinary business in London are made to understand that to be black is to be subjected to capricious and arbitrary power against which there is no reprieve; what is happening here, with some brutality, is a process of ordering by which people learn their place in a social order. The same applies to the young black men of Chicago who are tortured in police detention; or, for that matter, albeit less dramatically, to the young, white working-class men on the streets of Glasgow who can expect to do stopped and searched (Bradford and Loader *op cit*).

In his ethnography of policing in the Parisian banlieues, Didier Fassin writes of three young men, who, while waiting at a bus stop on New Year's Eve, are swooped upon by police, handcuffed, taken to a police station, made to stand in an identification parade, interrogated for four hours, and then finally released to get on with their evening. Their experience, Fassin writes, 'created a sort of accelerated apprenticeship, not only in a particular social order in

which they had just been assigned a place, but also in their own individual condition of subjects with no choice but to resign themselves to accept it,' (Fassin 2013: 7-8).

This resignation, Fassin writes, occurs prior to reflective thought, prior to language. When young black men take flight upon sight of a police vehicle, he writes, no matter that they have done nothing wrong, they are responding to 'an embodied memory: before we even have time to think, the body remembers' (ibid: 9).

Tensions between Policing Ethnographies

What to make of these diverging ethnographic accounts of policing: one set that insists that police have little choice but to bow to the norms of those they police, another that police are a primary instrument in the subjugation of entire categories of people?

It is certainly possible to place them in direct competition with one another. 'The trope of "no-go zones", writes Fassin, 'into which the police no longer dare to venture and where they need to re-establish themselves is, with rare exceptions, much less a description of reality than a rallying slogan based on a fantasy of danger as well as reconquest, the image of danger magnifying the courage of those who face it, and that of reconquest justifying the action aimed at realizing it.' (Fassin 2013: 37).

Thus one might, from this vantage-point – although I do not know of a scholar who has done so – argue that ethnographers who write of the provisionality of police authority, of police surrendering to the hegemony of the norms prevalent among the people they police, of police who share the role of punisher with crowds, and so forth, have committed among the gravest

lapses an ethnographer can: mistaking the ideology that justifies a practice for its real functions. For the professed power of ethnography (its ideological justification, perhaps?) resides in the intensity, the intimacy and the sheer duration of the research process, which gives scholars privileged insight into the gap between what policing professes to be and what it is.

I doubt, though, whether matters are quite this simple. For one, the tension between the divergent ethnographic findings described above is in part a reflection of the different intellectual traditions out of which ethnographers work; and the different preoccupations of these traditions, in turn reflect, at least in part, real, empirical unevenness in the development of public institutions across the world.

In general – and there of course are exceptions – the literature that emphasises the precariousness of police authority emerges from a long pedigree of scholarship that has documented the shallowness of colonial state formation: Colonial states that never managed the documentary exercise of registering births and deaths (Breckenridge 2014); that never gathered sufficient data on individual income to institute an income-tax regime (Cooper 2002); that did not ever acquire sufficient aggregate knowledge of its populations to establish the semblance of a social state (Nattrass and Seekings 2005). Such scholarship has also been preoccupied with how shallow states must of necessity govern through allies: how governance crystallises through collaboration, co-option, bargaining, the forging of tenuous consent and all the strange institutional creations that emerge from such processes.

At precisely the same time, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, in Europe, a very different process of state formation was underway, one animated by the quest to 'see' (Scott 1998) populations in order to manage them (or to 'police' them, in Dubber's sense), a gargantuan project of deepening, involving no less than the creation of a society rendered visible through the unprecedented amassing of data concerning birth, morbidity, nutrition, death and, indeed, crime, and much else besides. (Hacking 1990). It is these very processes that attracted the attention of the likes of Foucault, Bourdieu and others, instituting a powerful cluster of intellectual traditions concerned with the ubiquity of power, its propensity to flow through discourse, through a vastly dispersed filigree of practices, and through the disciplines, frameworks and mentalities lodged in people's heads. In a sense, the trend in police ethnography described in the section directly above is evidence of this influential set of traditions finally alighting upon the institution of formal public policing.

Perhaps an anecdote, one that spans a wide geography, is fitting at this point. In the late 2000s, when I was in the thick of ethnographic work on policing in South Africa, I did a short trip to London. Sitting one afternoon on a park bench in the heart of the city, I watched three police officers walk up to a group of young Asian men and search them. I had spent the better part of the past year watching South African police officers at work, and the differences were striking. The most salient, I thought, was the formalism and the bureaucracy of the procedure. The paperwork took considerably longer than the searching itself, the young men forced to stand and wait for an age while police filled in forms; this very process of waiting for so long, it seemed, was an important element of the power being exercised over them. And the searching itself was routinized and performed with what seemed habituated precision. Once the police had done their work and were a good 100 yards or so away, the young men shouted

expletives at them, a hollow attempt, it seemed to me, to retrieve some dignity from the encounter.

The stops and searches I had witnessed in the townships of Johannesburg in the preceding months were 'the same in nature', as Bierschenk might have said; but how different the ecology that shaped them. After dozens of successive nights on patrol, one begins to get a sense of the judgments officers make before conducting a stop-and-search. For one, it would not happen at all unless the police officers outnumbered those they were searching; and, even then, they would not conduct searches if people were about, especially young people, for hostile crowds might form.

Once the decision to search was made, the operation would begin with a heightened act of aggression. The patrol car would ramp the pavement, wedging the young men who had been targeted against a wall. The officers would jump out of the vehicle and surround them, their rationale being that they did not want to give their targets the opportunity to draw weapons.

The idea that any of this would be recorded was entirely foreign. Bureaucracy, recordkeeping and paperwork were not part of this scene; in its place was unfettered discretion, tamed only by the judgments that came from prior experience.

In fact, most of the stop and searches I witnessed took place during high-density, paramilitary style operations which, in many townships, occurred at least twice a week. Here, in the safety of numbers, the police owned the streets, and young men were stopped and searched at will. This spectacular display of force seemed a compensation for the patchiness of police

authority, and a symptom of how widely the capacity to exercise violence was dispersed. Indeed, among my central findings was that, apart from these high-density operations, police on patrol avoided the managerial, ordering functions described by Loader and Fassin; they instead gravitated towards spaces where their presence had been demanded, largely by women attacked by their partners.

I am not for a moment suggesting that the policing described by Loader, Fassin and others is discreetly confined to the developed world. South Africa, the site of the descriptions of policing above, has a long, brutal and notorious history of managing its urban black population through coercion. Nor am I suggesting that the importance of civilian norms to policing is exclusively confined to places where state formation has been shallower. It is nonetheless clear when comparing the scene I witnessed in London to the encounters in Johannesburg that policing in the two cities arises from long, deep and different histories: differences in levels of bureaucratisation, in the capacity of states to gather mass data, in a phenomenological history of what the appearance of state agents in everyday life has come to mean.

In understanding what is common and what is different between these juxtaposing scenes, there is no substitute, I believe, for the sort of archaeological work Bierschenk advocates. For what I observed in both cities were practises that had been sedimented over time. All police practices everywhere arrived at one moment or another, the conditions of their arrival and their endurance all questions of global political economy, among other things.

The value of this sort of ethnographic study of policing, if it is to begin in earnest, is immense. For the sort of comparative work required to render ethnographies of policing truly global would by necessity grapple with some of the oldest and deepest questions in social science: how is order enforced; and how does the answer to this question change over space and time?

These questions are asked in a world that is changing quickly and dramatically. In recent times human behaviour has become predictable to a degree previously unthinkable thanks to the density of the information about ourselves that we deposit into digital domains and the algorithmic analysis of that information. This technological revolution has far-reaching repercussions in so many domains, not least for the capacity to manage populations. Scholarship is emerging on the relationship between these new technologies and the work of formal police organisations (Huq 2019), but ethnographies of policing have, to my knowledge, not yet properly entered this domain.

And it should be added as a sobering coda, if not also as a great irony, that ethnography, whether 'global' or otherwise, is difficult to conduct at all in those authoritarian societies that are highly managed. Probably the most dramatic example of the management of an entire population in current times is taking place in Xinjiang province in China where the autonomy required to practice ethnographic scholarship as we know it does not exist.

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