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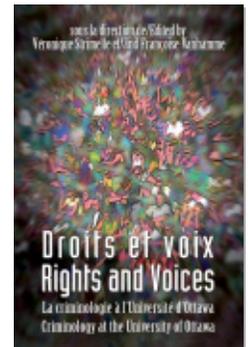
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The Political Economy of Human Security: A Conceptual Approach to Policing Studies and Reform

by

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INTRODUCTION

What is policing, and how should we study it? Further, should academics attempt to reform policing and, if so, how should they do so? In this paper, I outline the utility, and justify the normative desirability, of a particular approach to answering these broad problems. To do so, I first trace an idiosyncratic story of empirical discovery over the course of conducting my own studies of policing and its reform, from the perspective of a criminologist with a particular focus on Northern Ireland. In essence, my studies in Northern Ireland led me to the well-established notion that policing is a deeply political-economic process. Moving on from that point, I uncovered—and now present to the reader—competing instrumental, structural and conceptual approaches to linking policing with politics and economy. The purposes of this rather personal story are therefore twofold. First, I seek to illustrate to graduate students and others the iterative process through which empirical discovery leads on to still further reading (most often of scholars who have already outlined arguments that the initiate scholar

may naïvely identify as “new”), and so the advancement of one’s own conceptual problems and approaches for further research. Second, I seek to advance the more specific argument that conceptual approaches to linking developments in policing to shifts in dominant ways of thinking about political economy are particularly helpful, both in terms of yielding rich explanations of how we have moved from one system of policing to another, and in terms of pushing normative debates about where policing should go to address contemporary threats to human well-being in fruitful directions.

1. EVOLUTIONS IN POLICING STUDIES

The study of police, policing, and the governance of human security broadly conceived has undergone massive conceptual change over the past fifteen years. Over the course of the rise of state governance and the focusing of “expertise” that both characterize “modernity” (see Weber 1905/1930), the study of the “governance of human security” had been divided into constituent parts reflecting the established disciplinary boundaries of the social sciences (see Foucault 2007, Chapter 12; Dubber and Valverde 2008; and Kempa 2010). Thus, sub-state security and law enforcement were understood as principally public policing activities, and more recently, also private security activities, to be examined by criminologists. National and international security was understood as principally military and diplomatic activity, to be studied by political scientists and international relations scholars. Human well-being, health, wealth, and development were understood as principally civil-society matters that functioned with state support, to be investigated by economists and development studies scholars.

In the context of globalization and the rise of the “network society” these pieces of human security have widely come to be seen as interconnected issues that are best studied and responded to as integrated problems, drawing upon the insights of multiple disciplines (see Castells 2000; Krasner 2001; and Burris, Kempa, and Shearing 2008). Within universities, among governmental practitioners, and across the population at large, it is widely considered that climate change, resource

scarcity, competition between groups, the rise of violent politico-religious zealotry, economic instability, and organized crime are all interrelated phenomena that support one another in an endless feedback loop (see, for example, Kaplan 1994; and Homer-Dixon 1999). Thus, the governance of human security or well-being—consisting of policing, military action, corporate security, national security, foreign trade, and development assistance—has come to be regarded as an integrated problem requiring integrated study and cohesive practical responses.

While this integrated perspective may appear at first blush to be something “new,” in fact conceiving of, institutionalizing and carrying out “policing” in the very broad terms of “the right management of society and economy so as to pursue (what is considered to be) the well-being of people” is the historical norm in the Western experience (see especially Foucault 2007, Chapters 12 and 13). Before elaborating upon this approach, which I shall dub “conceptual,” I shall trace the empirical path I followed that led me to international relations scholars, political scientists, sociologists, and, most especially, political economists who were wrestling with policing issues in precisely these terms.

2. CRIMINOLOGICAL POLICING STUDIES: EXAMINING PUBLIC POLICING REFORM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Like many students of criminology, my earliest policing focus centred upon public and private agencies that are engaged, explicitly, in the governance of security at the sub-state level. This began with an analysis of the major policing reforms implemented as part of the peace process in Northern Ireland, which culminated in the historic Belfast Agreement in 1998. Northern Ireland has long been a contested statelet, with Irish Republicans and Nationalists (currently a strong minority at over 40 percent of its population) seeking union with the Republic of Ireland to the South, while British Unionists and Loyalists want it to remain a full part of the United Kingdom. The question of policing reform had long been at the centre of efforts to resolve this conflict: the police had for decades served as both symbols and stalwarts of British sovereignty in Northern Ireland, and thus had for decades been strongly supported by many Unionists, while being loathed by many Irish Nationalists

and Republicans (see Hillyard 1993; Weitzer 1995; Williams 2003; and Kempa 2007).

In examining the nature and public reception of the reforms put forward by the internationally composed Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland (also known as the Patten Commission after its Chair, Chris Patten), it was obvious that the ideas for democratic policing reform in Northern Ireland that came up in 1999 were remarkably similar to those that had been mooted yet never fully implemented for nearly thirty years. They, in turn, were nearly identical to those that had already been implemented in Great Britain (see Jones and Newburn 2001; and Kempa and Johnston 2005). Further, an international comparison revealed that initiatives in these two parts of the United Kingdom (Great Britain and Northern Ireland) paralleled those in Canada, Australia, the United States, South Africa, and elsewhere (see Kempa 2007). This led on to the straightforward empirical point that policing reform practitioners within government and public policing organizations across (principally) Anglophone Western liberal democracies conceived of the policing problem in very similar terms, which proved to be largely technical/scientific rather than political. As such, these practitioners had developed very similar models for policing reform. The consensus was for the need to develop community policing and civilian oversight, where the public could both shape policing policy and hold the police to the objectives and standards of that policy, as a means to inspire public trust in the police and the broader political dispensation (see Goldsmith and Lewis 2000; and Goldsmith 2005).

This approach to thinking about and setting up policing reform resonates with the classical criminological “police science” tradition, which focuses upon what the public police, as agencies of the state, contribute to the good or ill of society, and, thus, how best this public institution might be formed, trained, and rendered accountable so as to be constantly improved. Police scientists have promoted largely similar community policing and public accountability models at home for decades, and hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent supporting similar initiatives throughout the developing world, both for philanthropic reasons, and because it serves security and economic needs (for critiques, see Brogden and Nijhar 2005; Kempa and Johnston 2005; Bayley 2006; Kempa 2007; and Neocleous 2008; Chapter 3).

That so very many resources have been expended on researching and implementing very similar public institutional models is hardly surprising. There are only so many ways that one could set up a public policing organization and render it publicly responsible. The Devil will always be in how policing practitioners and society interpret, apply, and so carry out the business of these organizations on the ground, where social life is never neatly consensual. This sentiment is wonderfully captured in a quotation from Denis Bradley, the former Vice-Chair of the Northern Ireland Policing Board and a long-time political activist, speaking in 2002:

We don't have to reinvent the wheel. . . . Ultimately policing is about making people feel safe in the houses they live in, in the streets which they walk, and the neighbourhoods where they shop. And it is not a greater science than that; but in many ways it is the science that most civilizations in the third millennium face and have the greatest difficulty with.

Given that social, political, and economic life is so chaotic and contested in this third millennium, it is not surprising that there is an ongoing lack of consensus and support for an organization that is essentially charged with upholding the status quo.

Indeed, critical criminologists have long challenged the supposed "neutrality" of democratic "police science." On the one hand, those critics who can be labelled "instrumental" in their focus have charged that the neutral enforcement of the law in practice on the part of the police has always been a fallacy, owing to such individualistic reasons as abuse of public authority for personal and in-group financial, cultural and political gain (see especially Pue 2000), and abuse of discretion for smaller-scale institutional and cultural reasons (see especially the debates between Melchers 2003; Waddington *et al.* 2004; and Wortley and Tanner 2005). On the other hand, those critics who can be labelled "structural" have charged that the foundational orders of society, such as "the law," "the public sphere," and "the market," are inherently capitalist, classist, racist, and/or gender-biased, and thereby unstable in the long term. For these scholars, the structural inconsistencies and long-term instability of the dominant order, defined variously in terms

of capitalism, patriarchy, or white/Christian privilege, force policing agencies to “get nasty” whenever the dominant system is threatened, whatever may be the good intentions of individual policing agents (for an emblematic text, see Hall *et al.* 1978; see also Barlow and Barlow 1999; Crowther 2000; and Daleiden 2004).

Policing can therefore be considered to be a “political” issue in either instrumental or structural terms, where the police are either considered to be, respectively, directly in the pocket of the capitalist, male or white/Christian power-holders, or caught between a rock and a hard place because of liberalism’s general attempt to govern through freedom and consensus, while upholding the foundational orders upon which such consensus is considered to be possible. Given that policing serves power one way or the other, it has always been experienced and contested as such by stakeholders in reformatory processes (see Reiner 2000).

The wide variance in responses to essentially globally generic policing reform proposals across the different segments of society in Northern Ireland made sense in the terms established by instrumental and structural critical criminology. For nearly two years after the Patten Report was published, in 1999, the public remained wholly fixated upon the personal politics of identity—the “Irishness” versus the “Britishness” of the police—and argued loudly and protractedly over the partisan political and symbolic meanings of Patten’s proposed reforms of policing. Over the summer of 2001, however, such a focus rather suddenly gave way to a pitched *ideological* battle within Patten’s new bipartisan accountability structure, the centralized Policing Board charged with developing policing policy and holding the Chief Constable to those plans. The biggest fight turned out to be over whether local representative bodies or the British central government would control policing budgets, and over when any changes in this regard ought to be made. All parties to the argument were concerned about controlling the flow of money so as to support different plans for local economic and social development as a means to undermine terrorism (see Kempa and Johnston 2005; and Kempa 2007). These particular findings led to the idea that policing was a deeply political-economic problem, not only in the established terms of instrumental and structural critical criminology regarding the ways in which power is sought and abused to variously serve the interests of powerful groups and/or the imperatives of the

imperfect capitalist system, but also in the *conceptual* terms that the ways in which we *think about* and so institutionalize and contest policing are reflective of our *broader political economic beliefs about how states best ought to relate to markets and to civil society so as to realize humanist aims.*

At the conclusion of the doctoral process, my own meagre empirical observations in Northern Ireland led me to uncover a burgeoning literature that addresses the history of the political economy of policing in precisely these conceptual terms. Much of this discussion falls within the aforementioned subject domain of multidisciplinary (sometimes referred to as pre-disciplinary) policing studies, to which I now turn.

3. MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND PRE-DISCIPLINARY POLICING STUDIES

Within this approach to policing studies, the subject of analysis has turned to all state and corporate efforts to govern the full range of state and non-state bodies that make either a positive or negative contribution to what is understood and defined as “human security” at particular points of history. To study the logics and the actions of so many state and non-state institutions, which range from very local to global in scope, it is widely deemed that a “multidisciplinary” approach is necessary (see, for example, Wood and Shearing 2007; Burriss, Kempa, and Shearing 2008; and Dubber and Valverde 2008). Mark Neocleous, however, contends that the alternative conceptualization of “pre-disciplinary” policing studies is most conceptually apt because the term “multidisciplinary” seems to reaffirm the utility of the distinctions drawn between disciplines to begin with, and, further, for the deeper reason that holistic ways of thinking about and examining human safety and well-being pre-date the rise of the social science disciplines (Neocleous 2007, 19).

In shorthand, one can refer to pre-disciplinary studies of the exercise of police power as the *genealogy* of police power, thus immediately signalling the centrality of the bedrock genealogical approach of Michel Foucault to this enterprise. “Genealogy” in this sense can be simply defined as tracing the history of dominant ideas about various social phenomena through the window of emblematic programme texts from particular periods of history. Contrasting the ways in which influential

practitioners—those who provide “serious statements” from history—conceived of and set out to institutionalize practices of governance, education, and social relationships is very revealing of shifts in dominant “rationalities” in society over time. Further, focusing upon the key “conditions of possibility” that enabled certain competing rationalities to cover over alternatives enables us to tell a detailed practical story about the development of the “history of our present”: *how* things got to what seems natural today, what options were cast aside, and how that casting aside occurred at particular points in time (see Foucault 1969/1997).

To trace the genealogy of notions and practices of policing, Foucault and his interlocutors have revealed that throughout much of Europe “police” historically translated literally as “policy”: the entire domain of what the government does to ensure what it considers to be the integrity of the polity and the well-being of the people (see Foucault 1979/1991; and Foucault 2007, Chapter 12). With shifts in ways of thinking about society, the economy, and the polity, definitions of “good policy” have changed, and so has understanding of what “police” is. Critical for Foucault for the evolution of the policing concept is the rise of “the population” and “the economy” as measurable objects. As soon as populations and economies could be thought of as observable things to be governed in the details of their measurable processes, strategies for police/policy became much more complicated. Coupled with the subsequent birth and rise of liberalism, which holds as its heart the foundational value of private property as the space for individual liberty and an overarching desire not to interfere in market space beyond the bare minimum, *police* as a concept came to reflect the limited meaning of “enforcing the law and upholding rights in public space,” at least in the ideal case. During the late 18th century and the whole of the 19th century, all other *policy* that was directed towards controlling the private realm came to be known as *regulation* (see Gill 2002).

Two major conclusions follow from the genealogy of police power. First, it is clear that contests around the planet over policing forms will be reflective of competing aspirations for political economy: different ideas held by practitioners and ordinary citizens on how best to build society, and relate it to markets and the state, so as to produce benefits to “human well-being” as conceived by practitioners and other agents for change themselves. Key to this would be different understandings of

what markets are, how they tend to behave, and what they are capable of doing in terms of achieving humanist aims (see Mavroudeas 2006). Second, given that so many threats to well-being are the often unintended results of the dominant neoliberal political economy, characterized by massive corporate power and ever-expanding markets in a world of finite resources, the legal frameworks and institutions designed during the heyday of that political economy would always already be inadequate, despite anyone's good intentions.

Following these theoretical leads, I set out to look for governmental policing programmes on the edges of the dominant political economy, with a view to identifying new ways in which stakeholders are thinking about exercising "police power" beyond the public-private divide in the interests of human well-being. One project examines the regulatory structures designed by the Canadian and South African governments to reach into the market sphere to ensure that the private security industry does not undermine the public interest. The other project is an examination of recent governmental efforts in Canada to link policing agencies with market regulators to prevent and punish the kinds of rogue trading, unethical lending and other banking practices that undermine the stability of markets and thereby the whole foundation of civilization. It is hoped that these projects will yield insight into how people in different areas of the world are thinking about the problem of policing, as it relates to their visions for the future of political economy. Increasing awareness of the number of points of view regarding the future of political economy as it relates to how best to institutionalize policing programmes can only be valuable in a world desperately in search of security, and deeply ambivalent about the prospects of neoliberalism specifically, and capitalism more broadly, ever delivering it.

4. ENGAGING THE WORLD: APPLYING CONCEPTUAL POLICING GENEALOGIES TO PRACTICE

Publishing material illuminating a diversity of existing ideas is one thing, but what else can or should academics do to engage policing reform as an agent for change? This is perhaps the most difficult question for all critical scholars, who walk a fine line between seeking the betterment of

society and seeking to avoid overcontributing their own “expert” voices to supporting current “regimes of truth” and dominant power relations (see Kempa 2010).

Adherents to classical “police science” would say that, despite an imperfect political economic order, controlling the worst excesses and promoting the best practices of our contemporary policing agencies *vis-à-vis* other agencies that are involved in promoting order and human well-being is the most realistic goal that critical scholars can hope to achieve, and does actually serve the interests of marginalized groups today and tomorrow in the “real world” of daily policing and governance (for some very distinct leading programmes, see Lea and Young 1993; and Waller 2006). At the other extreme, there are those who would prefer no practical policy engagement, for fear of being trapped within the limited terms of modernist institutions’ debates and actions. Although he was not an extreme postmodernist, Michel Foucault was very wary of engaging existing institutions for these reasons (see Foucault 1969/1997). He himself reported that he intended his genealogies of various concepts, institutions, and practices to simply furnish a conceptual history that would enable other practical participants to ask themselves “What does it cost existence to affirm its reality in this way?” (O’Malley, Weir and Shearing 1997, 508). As Foucault stated (1980/1997, 323):

I can’t help but dream about a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring an *oeuvre*, a book, a sentence, an idea to life. . . . It would multiply, not judgements, but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would invent them sometimes—all the better. . . . I’d like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination.

Elsewhere (Rabinow 1997, xxxix), Foucault has been quoted as saying:

What can the ethics of an intellectual be . . . if not . . . to render oneself permanently capable of self-detaching [*se déprendre de soi même*] (which is the opposite of the attitude of conversion)? . . . To be at the same time an academic and an intellectual is to engage a type of analysis that is taught and received in the university in

a way so as to modify, not only the thought of others, but one's own as well. This work of modifying one's own thought and that of others seems to me to be the intellectual's reason for being.

Thus, Foucault presented alternatives for thinking and action that had been covered over in the course of history for the illustrative purposes of confronting his readers with the fact that there are other ways to do things that might be considered, in the hope that they might at once be more modest in their faith in modernist pursuits and more courageous in their willingness to recognize and experiment with different ideas, while not necessarily abandoning all that has been successfully invented to date (see Foucault 1984; Rose 1999; and Kempa 2010).

Such a conceptual critique of the history of the present is clearly of value to those who must plan policy futures. Should academics simply supply practitioners with their published works, or should they become embroiled in the "messy actualities" of policy design? An interesting sub-question here is whether or not academics should focus on engaging predominately or exclusively state agencies (the government and the police), exclusively non-state agencies (civil associations and non-governmental organizations such as victims' and other marginalized group advocacy bodies), or both state and non-state agencies.

The scholar who has perhaps been most clearly recently identified with non-state engagement is Mark Neocleous, who uses a Foucauldian and partly Marxist approach to develop the argument that the very term "security" has been hijacked by the state/capital framework (see Neocleous 2008). This has happened, he argues, for both instrumental and conceptual reasons. On the one hand, powerful people promote a conception of security that corresponds with safety for private property because they profit from doing so. As part of this, powerful government actors have deliberately taken control over the security studies agenda throughout the Anglophone Western academy through controlling funding, and, where necessary, applying naked pressure upon academics to produce knowledge that is useful for the "police science" of security for private property and capital (Neocleous 2008, 160–86). On the other hand, and more subtly, the *conceptual* sanctity of private property and capital trumps, in the last instance, the rights of individuals and their practical well-being from the perspective of any liberal "security"

agency (see Neocleous 2008, Chapters 1 and 2). This is to say that any programme for liberal security begins with the *belief* that protecting private property and the infinite growth of capital is the accepted means through which to achieve human well-being. Thus, for Neocleous, to do any kind of project that seeks to engage state agencies to promote “human security” or even “critical security” tends to result in getting locked into the state/capital framework that, in his view, currently produces so many of the threats to human well-being and even species survival in the present.

If for the moment we accept Neocleous’s view, it follows that there is nothing to preclude attempting to identify and support completely alternative dispute resolution and non-state local peace structures that reflect alternative political economies. A key example here, and the one I am most familiar with, is the work of Clifford Shearing on developing and rolling out the Zwelethemba dispute resolution and peace committee model, which promotes security in poor shantytowns in South Africa through training, hiring and paying members of the local community to resolve disputes and support safety within the limits of the Constitution. One of the things the Zwelethemba model is doing is working totally outside the established “security” paradigm, to speak in terms of organizing governance programmes that promote human well-being and safety, using a set of concepts that has no lineage connection to liberal-democratic security notions of enfolding and solidifying private peace to make safe spaces for capital growth (on this model, see Kempa and Shearing 2002).

But what about working with the state? While I definitely share with Neocleous a healthy degree of scepticism about the ability or desire of state bureaucrats to think in alternative political-economic terms, I am not as pessimistic about engaging these actors as he is. In saying this, I am indicating an important point of connection with state optimists, notably Ian Loader and Neil Walker (2007), and Lucia Zedner (2006), for whom there is a default role for the state in leading its citizens in “civilized” debates about security in order to check the worst excesses of marketized security services that actively promote public fear and intolerance, on the basis that these negative emotions are a source of profit. These scholars thereby consider that efforts to “decapitalize” security *must* begin with the state.

What can be said from my perspective is that the questions of whether or not, and whom, to engage towards institutionalizing programmes for human well-being and safety boils down to a pragmatic question of aligning available opportunities and personal strengths at any given moment. Is there any realistic opportunity for working beyond the known conceptual limits of capital and private property, through engaging a particular organization at a particular moment? What opportunities do we actually have?

These themes form the basis of my developing collaboration with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to review evolutions in Canadian international policing assistance, with a view to illuminating the connection between the aims and understandings of the political economy underpinning these efforts. This will permit the International Branch of the RCMP to ask itself if it wishes to persist with its current course, ask how best to organize to pursue these or alternate aims as effectively as possible, and promote a level of self-awareness that will enable the RCMP to hear alternative proposals emanating from the international communities they work with, in the terms of the political-economic aspirations they represent. A vital part of this enterprise is to develop the measurement tools required to evaluate the efficacy of their programmes in terms of the values they are explicitly and consciously seeking to promote. There is no use promoting interesting alternative aims if we cannot demonstrate the benefits of such programmes to governments in a language they can understand (see Kempa 2010).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this paper I have told the story of how my own pathway of empirical discovery led me to situate my scholarship within conceptual, pre-disciplinary studies of policing power. I have argued that a conceptual approach to linking policing to political economy yields valuable insights at the level of description and practical policy engagement. The fact that I am seeking to work with state policing agencies in largely conceptual analytic terms does not necessarily mean, however, that I am either for or against exclusively state or non-state research/intervention, or that I do not recognize the value of highly critical instrumental and

structural analyses. To the contrary, I am confident that colleagues with different skills and liabilities from my own will undertake a broad spectrum of such critical research into all the ways in which policing is connected to power and economy, for good and for ill, which will, collaboratively and over time, lead to interesting models for governing human safety and well-being that are non-describable using our current political-economic vocabulary.

NOTE

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