

Police culture in a changing world

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Book Review by Sally Ramage, editor, *The Criminal Lawyer*, Bloomsbury Professional



This book had been published in hardback format in 2009 and has now been published in paperback, making it more accessible. It is based on Bethan Loftus' doctoral thesis¹ in which her project was a study of the police in two very different settings, one a multi-cultural city suffering deprivation, and the other a rural police force. As such, it is theoretically sound and no doubt, the author has observed all the methodologies that illustrate academic rigour and good research. For example, the author shows awareness of new civil service methods of management (New public Management (NPM)), noting research from 1985 (Ralf Dahrendorf)² to 2007 (Reiner)³. Studying Northshire Police Authority and drawing on her observational research in this English police force, she examined how greater political recognition of cultural and gendered identities has impacted the police subculture. (Not wishing to dissuade anyone regarding conclusions reached, one small niggle is that in mathematics, especially, one is taught not to go from the particular to the general, that is, to extrapolate unilateral conclusions from the study of a small part of the police body alone). However, the author's conclusions are concurred with almost everywhere.

The author's conclusions were that 'two broad and opposing perspectives on the contemporary police working environment are identified. One perspective involves resistance to and resentment toward the new promotion of diversity in police recruitment, a perspective held primarily by white, heterosexual male officers. A contrasting perspective embraces and benefits from diversity and is held by female, ethnic minority, and gay and lesbian officers. Policing in England remains an overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, male-dominated occupation, and this poses significant challenges for females, ethnic minorities, and gays and lesbians who are already in the police force or aspire to be police officers. This circumstance persists despite two decades of equal opportunities legislation and policies aimed at changing traditional assumptions about the characteristics and practices of police officers. The recent history of the Northshire Police has involved a top-down drive to produce cultural change and diversity within the agency. Very few women, members of minority ethnic groups, or openly gay and lesbian officers occupy posts, particularly supervisory positions; and officers in these groups report experiences of discrimination

¹ Keele University.

² Dahrendorf was a German-British sociologist, philosopher and political scientist. See Dahrendorf, R. (1985) *Law and Order*, London: Stevens & sons. Essentially, his theory is that moral education cannot proceed effectively in an economically unjust society.

³ Robert Reiner is Professor Emeritus at the LSE. See Reiner, R. (ed) (2007) *Law and Order: An honest citizen's guide to crime and control*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

from White, heterosexual male officers. In the Northshire Police force it is clear that the extension of recruitment and hiring of hitherto marginalized groups does not sit well within the entrenched culture of the traditional demographic of officers. They continue to express a resentful attitude and opposition to the presence of the new and diverse demographic being promoted for officers. Clearly, ways must be found to achieve a more extensive reform and erosion of the persistent traditional police subculture in order to achieve a welcoming acceptance and appreciation of an emerging diverse police culture.'

In chapter two, the author entered the field of law, examining the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and begins by reminding the reader of the many miscarriage of justice cases, as written about by Dixon (1999)⁴, Maguire (2003)⁵ and Naughten (2004).⁶ The author states (at page 23) that PACE created certain requirements for police practices, namely, investigative procedure inside police stations, including the appointment of a custody officer. PACE places strict time limits of duration in custody and the codes of practice of PACE place restrictions on the manner in which suspects can be questioned by police officers. However, she realizes that studies of the practical operation of PACE do show the tendency to conform to the letter of the law, ie form over substance. In a change of police culture the author acknowledges that today, there is a new approach to victimisation. As the study progresses, the author begins to paint a new picture of police. She found that the way officers talked about aspects of their jobs provide an important insight into their value and belief systems compared to the way they conduct their policing.

Very useful as it is in conforming what is commonly felt about British policing in terms of its persistent masculinity, it is time for another study of police culture because many changes have taken place since 2009 when this work was first published. Diversity is well embedded in policing. Changes afoot include allowing people to vote for the services they want, although protocol is yet to be established. Localism and local democracy is here to stay. There is more transparency in police procedures. Chief police officers by and large see to the proper policing conducted by their officers and ministers of the government by and large make policing policy and scrutinize police budgeting plans. There has been published the Windsor Report and police are expected to engage very strongly with that report. Changes since 2009 include the new National Crime Agency. Today police do not only prevent crime. They also try to prevent suicide, as an example. Their brief is that, by working with others, they continue to maintain partnership with the local community, businesses, etc, although there still remain tensions between uniformed officers and detectives and conflicts between regional and national police. The police force face the same financial crisis as the rest of the country and this involves painful redundancies, reduction of waste, and a reduction in overtime payments. Police are today well equipped to set up policies if the government does not, but they must not be allowed to do that. There is talk of a chartered institute of policing, which will also bring changes as officers become better educated.

Finally, it is observed that much academic work has gone into this study, which in parts is very pertinent, although we must never forget the British policing is the best in the world, being restrained, humane, sensible and non-violent in the main.

⁴ Dixon writes about drug users and the detrimental impact that new police policies on drug crackdown have on drug users, exploring the ramifications on drug abusers practice of harm reduction. Conducting open-ended interviews with 40 illicit-drug-injecting residents of a New York City police precinct undergoing crackdown. Particular crackdown tactics, notably frequent police searches of participants' bodies and elevated surveillance of the precinct's public spaces, reconfigured participants' experiences of their bodies and the public spaces comprising the precinct in ways that adversely affected their capacity to engage in harm reduction. Frequent police searches discouraged participants from carrying the injection equipment they needed to ensure that they could inject with a sterile syringe. Constant monitoring of local public spaces made it difficult for homeless women and men to inject safely. Simultaneously, participants expressed support for police actions that reduced public drug activity, and conclusions were that there should be a reduction in public drug activity without imperiling injectors.

⁵ Maguire, E.R. (2002) *Organisational structure in American police agencies*, Albany: SUNY Press. It is Maguire who gives us a rigorous and sophisticated statistical analysis of the subject and well illustrates the meticulousness with which his work moves from the general to particular and from the theoretical to the empirical.

⁶ Dr Michael Naughten is known for the *Innocence* project. He is a senior law lecturer at Bristol University. What precisely constitutes a 'miscarriage of justice' in England and Wales? He revived two complimentary human-rights-based perspectives that have lain dormant for almost a decade and brings them into dialogue with Foucault's theoretical note on the need to unearth subjugated discourses that interrupt and disturb dominant ways of thinking and states that miscarriages of justice must be refined to include all successful appeals against criminal conviction, to provide a more adequate depiction of 'justice in error'. It emphasizes the need for future research on routine successful appeals, to unearth and give 'voice' to a plethora of 'anti-discourses' on wrongful criminal conviction that are not currently articulated.