Researching the policed: critical ethnography and the study of protest policing

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This article seeks to consider the value of critical ethnography for the study of policing. Specifically, the article explores the benefits and challenges of using ethnographic methods to explore protest policing from the perspective of the *policed*. Drawing upon a longitudinal study of the policing of protests against 'fracking' in England, the article examines the process of conducting research with groups who are being policed in extended protest situations. Writing from a critical criminological perspective, the article suggests that this approach to studying policing from below can help advance our collective understanding of both protest and policing. In this sense, ethnographic research can play a vital role in exploring the experiences of groups marginalised in current debates and this approach provides us with an alternative viewpoint from which to examine the development of police policy and practice. The article suggests that to make this contribution to the study of protest policing, we require research that maintains a critical distance from police forces to gain access to those groups who, due to their negative perceptions and/or experiences of policing, are reluctant to engage with research. Reflecting on the development of ethnographic research *on*, but not *with*, police, the article suggest that this critical distance brings both benefits and challenges to academic research.

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Introduction

This article reflects on the value of critical ethnography for the study of policing. It considers how critical ethnographic research can advance our understanding of protest policing and seeks to make a contribution to existing work that reflects on the ways in which policing can be studied. Recognising the extensive contribution that ethnographic work has played in the study of policing since the 1960s (Manning 2014; McLaughlin 2007; Reiner and Newburn 2008), this article suggests that there are alternative applications of ethnographic methods that can contribute to the study of contemporary policing. The central argument here is that ethnographic methods provide a useful means of studying policing from the perspective of both the police and the *policed.* Furthermore, by studying policing from the perspective of the policed, critical ethnographic research

can challenge established understandings and make an important contribution to the scholarly literature. Building upon existing work that has sought to explore the experiences of the policed in a range of contexts, this article argues that, despite the challenges, we can gain valuable insights into the way that protest policing is done, how it has changed, and how it could be done, by examining it from 'the other side'. Crucially, this approach involves a conscious effort to include those groups of protesters who are, due to their relationship to the police, very often inaccessible in studies of protest policing.

To do this, the article draws upon a longitudinal ethnographic study of the policing of protests in England in the period 2013-2018. Focussing specifically on a case study of the policing of protests against hydraulic fracturing – better known as 'fracking' – in Greater Manchester in 2013-2014, the article demonstrates how the use of ethnographic methods to study the experiences of protesters provides us with a different, critical perspective on police policy and practice to that set out in much of the recent academic literature.

Ethnography and policing

The remarkable developments in police ethnography in the last ten years (Fassin 2017) can be seen as part of wider developments in the ethnographic study of crime and control (Fleetwood and Potter 2017). Through a period of unprecedented creativity and vitality in ethnographic research, the study of crime and control has been renewed and this is reflected in what Didier Fassin has referred to as a 'reinvention of police ethnography' (2017, p. 2) that has further highlighted the salience of ethnography for the study of policing. This process of renewal has meant that ethnography is once again understood to be of great value to police studies after a period of decline in the late 20th century (McLaughlin 2007). The value of ethnography lies essentially in its ability to penetrate the low visibility of key aspects of police work (Reiner and Newburn 2008) and to 'see it

how it is' (Westmarland 2016, p. 52). As policing is reformed, transformed, debated and challenged in the 21st century, ethnography can facilitate the exploration of a world that still requires close, in-depth examination.

Police ethnography involves entering the world of policing and communicating the experiences of those responsible for police work. For academic researchers seeking to explore policing from the position of outsiders (i.e. not as current or former police officers), this provides a unique means of making police work visible and thus intelligible (see Loftus 2009). Whilst there have been key contributions from those on the 'inside', or on their way out (Holdaway 1983), the bulk of this sort of research has been done from the position of 'outside outsiders' (Reiner and Newburn 2008, p. 357) – researchers not employed by or commissioned by the police – as these methods provide a way to explore an unfamiliar world. This has been done to great effect to explore a multitude of different dimensions to police work over the last 50 years, making a significant contribution to academic and public understandings of policing.

As police studies has expanded significantly in the last thirty years, the relationships between police and academic researchers have changed (Reiner and Newburn 2008). Strategic links between the police institution and universities in countries including US, UK, Australia and New Zealand have facilitated the proliferation of partnership working between police and academics (Goode and Lumsden 2018). The co-production of research has been integral to the advancement of police research not least because central questions of access and trust are answered more easily in this new context. However, these new relationships have also arguably effected a general shift to research *with* rather than *on* police, and the status of many researchers as 'outside outsiders' has been changed through co-production. For Manning, this general change in

police research has intensified the development of a sociology *for* rather than *of* the police (Manning 2005).

The effect of these changes on the discipline of police studies has been considered at length (Loader 2011; Manning 2005) and there are serious implications for the ethnographic study of policing. Eugene McLaughlin (2007, p. 58) has explained that the first wave of ethnographic studies were 'unwelcome to police administrators because they demystified a number of problematic issues concerning police work'. Ethnographers are arguably always critical of the practices they observe (Herbert 2017) and contemporary police studies is not without its critical edge (Cosgrove and Francis 2011), but the relationship between police and police studies raises questions about what is gained, and what is lost, when police research, and police ethnography in particular, becomes a more welcome intervention. This does not infer that police research should be in conflict with police to be productive; research with police can be done in a mutually beneficial way advancing academic knowledge whilst also revealing 'what works' for the institution. Instead, the issue here lies with the status of police ethnography within a sociology *for* police.

The aim of this article is to reflect on the value of what is referred to as *critical ethnography* for the study of policing, taking protest policing as it focal point. In championing a critical approach, the article seeks to make a renewed case for the study of policing from the outside and to demonstrate the continued importance of ethnographic research *on* rather than *with* police. However, this is not a novel claim. There is of course a long history of ethnographic research of criminal and 'deviant' groups, but studies have also long demonstrated the utility of studying policing, in a range of different settings, from the perspective of the policed. Scholars have studied a range of groups – from African American youth to English football fans – who are the target of police but whose

perspective are rarely 'utilised as a legitimate source of social inquiry' (Brunson and Miller 2006, p. 614). These groups, missing from, or misunderstood in, existing studies (Pearson 2012), have been explored in such work to consider policing from a different perspective and to rebalance the literature (Brunson and Weitzer 2011). By providing what Alice Goffman has referred to as an 'on-the-ground account' (2014, p. xii) this type of work has sought to investigate how policing is experienced, and for some scholars, this process is key to better understanding how policing could be done differently (Carr, Napolitano and Keating 2007). Scholars have also demonstrated the benefits of considering both sides in the study of policing. For these researchers, studying the interaction between the police and the policed is key to understanding the behaviour of both (Hobbs 1989, Ellefsen 2018, Welsh 1981) and therefore, it has been argued that multidimensional ethnographies can provide 'distinctive results' (Ilan 2018, p. 686). By adopting a dual perspective, this work has been able to demonstrate, in very different settings, how the experiences of the policed can challenge understandings about policing and the possibilities for reform (Choongh 1998, Stott, Hoggett and Pearson 2012)

Recognising that there remains excellent ethnographic work done with police (both with and without partnerships), the article suggests that there is an under-appreciated role for research on policing conducted not just from the outside but from 'the other side', especially in the context of recent protest policing research.

Critical criminology and critical social research

This approach to ethnographic research is underpinned by an understanding of the value of critical social research within criminology. Critical social research 'seeks out and champions the 'view from below', ensuring that the voices and experiences of those marginalised by institutionalised state practices are heard and represented' (Scraton 2007, p. 10). This approach to research has been central to a critical criminology that has sought,

at its core, to explore the experiences of marginalised groups and expose injustice (Hudson 2011). Critical criminology is a 'fluid and vast field of study' (Ugwudike, 2015, p.11) that draws upon a range of theoretical perspectives and has contested points of origin. The sub-discipline is, however, defined in part by its opposition to mainstream criminological theory and research for its perceived failure to challenge dominant understandings and official measures of crime (Taylor, Walton and Young 1975; Hudson 2011; Stubbs 2008). Critical criminology is best understood as a collection of perspectives that seek to think differently about crime and responses to crime. Pat Carlen has summarised the contemporary meaning of the term:

> Nowadays it is used to denote any theoretical position which, in saying 'No' to old ways of knowing and taken-for-granted hierarchies of knowledge, also challenges the taken-for-granted social or political arrangements which give rise to inequalities of wealth, knowledge and power with their accompanying exploitative criminal justice systems (Carlen 2018, p. 7).

Critical criminology offers alternative way of investigating and understanding key criminological issues; it seeks to expose and respond to the 'persistent silences' (Hillyard et al 2004) in criminology that result from a failure to consider alternative perspectives on crime and crime control. From the perspective of critical criminology, 'too much work in criminology is done by scholars who lack a critical distance from the subjects of their study' (Vitale 2017) and the aim of critical research in this context is to reorient the discipline by changing who and what we study.

Critical research is not wedded to any particular method and a diverse range of research methods are utilised by those who see themselves as critical criminologists (Stubbs 2008). However, the selection and application of method is usually underpinned by the drive to explore marginalised voices. By considering the experiences of those

generally marginalised or excluded in mainstream debates, the goal is to highlight the partial and skewed understanding that informs much of criminological theory and underpins official policy. In Phil Scraton's terms, critical research exposes the 'yawning gap between official discourse, inquiries or [inquest] verdicts and alternative accounts provided by bereaved families, [prison] regime survivors, rights lawyers, community workers and critical researchers' (Scraton in Scraton 2007, p. 12). This disjuncture is laid bare when researchers engage with those whose viewpoints or experiences are generally held in low regard. As Barbara Hudson has explained, critical criminologists 'take seriously Howard Becker's question of 'whose side are we on?' and the answer is, usually, the side of the powerless, the marginalised and the excluded' (2011, p. 333). In taking Becker's 1967 proposition seriously, critical criminologists assume that 'subordinates have as much right to be heard as superordinates' (Becker 1967, p. 241) and argue that the views and experiences of those ranked low on a 'hierarchy of credibility' should be investigated and taken seriously.

This approach to research arguably offers us a great deal in our drive to develop our understandings, but it brings with it the risk of being accused of bias. As Becker recognised, when we approach research from the perspective of the subordinate group we open ourselves to accusations of bias that are particularly prevalent when we are researching the operation of official institutions. Recent work by Rune Ellefsen (2016, 2017, 2018) has demonstrated the benefits and challenges of researching the policed when examining all sides in a conflict situation. Ellefsen follows other scholars (Choongh 1998, Hobbs 1989, Ilan 2018, Welsh 1981) in arguing that policing should be considered from more than one perspective and he has sought to explore the 'relational dynamics of protest and protest policing' (2018, p. 751) through a case study of the policing of animal rights activism in the UK. Through this approach, he has been able to examine the relatively

unexplored world inhabited by these groups of protesters. Taking Becker's essay as a reference point, he has considered at length the challenges inherent in studying conflicts between the police and the policed, arguing that in 'negotiating antagonistic social worlds' (2017, p. 234) inherent in the study of social movements, accusations of bias are to be expected when the researcher appears to side with the subordinates. He has suggested that, 'questions about bias and taking sides are seemingly more frequently directed at scholars defining themselves as part of a critical tradition, those with an activist background, or who make their standpoint (in the various meanings of the word) clear' (2017, p. 238).

Policing research, and police ethnography in particular, inevitably involves taking sides (Hornberger 2017) but I want to suggest, following Ellefsen (2017), that we should take Becker's proposition seriously and consider what we might learn about protest policing if we considered it from the perspective of the policed. In his classic study of the East End of London, Dick Hobbs referred to this approach as 'policing from below' (1989, p. 2), and it starts from an acceptance that those who are the target of police have something to offer our attempts to understand policing. The use of ethnographic methods to challenge injustice and disturb dominant understandings of social worlds is not new, but in recent years, ethnography has once again become a central tool for critical criminologists seeking to offer an alternative to the perceived dominance of positivist approaches in 'mainstream' criminology (Fleetwood and Potter 2017). 'Critical ethnography' is therefore a specific approach to the application of ethnographic methods that, in line with the wider principles of critical social research set out above, seeks to 'unsettle' (Fassin 2013b) established understandings. The critical part of critical ethnography relates to the aims of the research rather than any specific revision to the methods employed. Critical ethnography 'takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts

the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions' (Madison 2011: 5).

This approach to ethnographic study enables us to 'reestablish some symmetry and also consider the narrative of the dominated' (Fassin 2013b, p. 122) and it does this by 'giving more authority to the subjects' voice (Thomas 1993, p. 4). In the context of policing research, this perspective suggests that studying the policed – those generally seen to possess only partial and skewed understandings of what the police do and why they do it – may actually offer us a way to develop, and perhaps rethink, our understanding of key areas of police work. We are encouraged to expand our approach and consider policing from below in an attempt to (re)establish some symmetry.

Researching protest policing

To develop this argument, I want to draw upon a case study that took this approach and, as a result, has provided a challenge to established understanding of contemporary protest policing in the UK. This case study focussed on the policing of a series of protests that took place between November 2013 and April 2014 at Barton Moss, Salford in Greater Manchester. These protests focussed on 'fracking' which is a highly controversial technique of shale gas extraction. The nascent onshore oil and gas industry in the UK has been the target of protests since the first attempt to frack in England in 2011 resulted in two minor earthquakes. After a brief moratorium, exploratory drilling to determine the viability of fracking resumed in the summer of 2013 and the protests at Barton Moss followed protests earlier in the year at Balcombe in Sussex. As part of a team of academics[i], I was involved in conducting research at the Barton Moss site from late 2013 until April 2014 and this developed into a longitudinal study of policing at the site and the subsequent criminal justice response to those arrested (Gilmore, Jackson and Monk 2016, 2017, Jackson, Gilmore and Monk 2018, Monk, Gilmore and Jackson 2019). This

work has since been extended into an on-going, collaborative national study of the policing of anti-fracking protests. The discussion below draws upon the experiences of the research team at Barton Moss, but also reflects on the broader implications of this research for our current research and the wider study of policing.

The arrival of IGas Energy, an onshore oil and gas extraction and production company, at Barton Moss in November 2013, led concerned residents from Salford and the wider Greater Manchester area, as well as some from further afield, to set up a protest camp at the site of the drilling operation. Over the period of protest, the camp established itself as a community-led protection camp, a non-hierarchical unit with no leader or centre, that was sustained by support and donations of food, fuel and general supplies from people living in the local area. The protest involved approximately equal numbers of men and women and a wide age-range from infants in pushchairs and school children attending with parents through to elderly men and women who attended to both support the camp and to take part in the protests. Those involved adopted several protest techniques, including the use of lock-ons and blockades, but relied most heavily on slow walking in front of convoys of trucks arriving at, and departing from, the IGas site in order to delay the drilling operation and to provide a visible and constant opposition to fracking in Salford. These slow walk protests took place usually twice daily for four days per week, for the duration of the drilling operation. The camp remained in situ until mid-April 2014 with the protest covering approximately 20 weeks, involving over 75 days of protest and upward of 140 protest events. The protest was responded to by Greater Manchester Police [GMP] who conducted an operation, codenamed Operation Geraldton, which ran for the duration of the drilling operation at Barton Moss. This operation cost in excess of £1.7 million and by its conclusion there had been 231 arrests (relating to 115

individuals) and 77 complaints to GMP, 40% of which related to the misuse of force by GMP officers (Gilmore, Jackson and Monk 2016).

The incentive to conduct research at Barton Moss arose from a prior interest in the policing of protest on the part of the research team and a growing realisation in 2013 that fracking was going to constitute an area of significant political conflict and public protest. The research team were also encouraged to study the events at Barton Moss as it became clear from very early on in the protest that there was a 'yawning gap', to use Phil Scraton's term, between police and protesters' opposing accounts of what was happening at the site. As a team, we resolved to explore the events at Barton Moss and our decision to use ethnographic methods was based on our perception of the need to enter and communicate the experiences of those involved. The public discussion in the media about what was happening at Barton Moss was dominated by the police account of the protest and their explanation of the policing. The accounts provided by protesters were, in our view, marginalised in this debate and we took the view that the lack of symmetry in representation of events at Barton Moss required redress. We were also cognisant of the fact that the vast majority of academic work that had explored the effects of recent changes to protest policing policy in England and Wales had been conducted solely, or at least predominantly, from the perspective of the police (see Gilmore, Jackson and Monk 2017, Jackson, Gilmore and Monk 2018). Barton Moss therefore presented an opportunity to enter and communicate the experiences of protesters through the application of ethnographic methods.

Our previous research experience suggested to us that the account of protest policing in the UK presented in a great deal of the policing research did not account for the experiences of all groups of protesters, in particular those involved in direct action[ii] protest (see Jackson, Gilmore and Monk 2018). It became clear to us, based on our own

observations, and our reading of the early accounts from protesters at Barton Moss, that these events provided an example of the types of direct action protest not considered directly in the literature. Therefore, the research at Barton Moss sought to make two contributions. Firstly, at the local level, to examine protest policing in this specific setting from the perspective of protesters; and secondly, on an (inter)national scale, to provide a distinct contribution to the broader debate about the changing nature of contemporary protest policing in the UK – a debate which has implications for the wider consideration of policing in liberal democracies.

This was a critical ethnography employed by critical criminologists. We sought to consider policing from an alternative perspective to challenge established ideas about the nature of protest policing in the UK. Starting from a recognition of the utility of giving voice to the voiceless, we sought to explore the experiences of marginalised groups to provide a 'view from below'. It was our view that a critical ethnography could potentially (re)establish some symmetry in the current academic literature and help to keep open the debate about the reform of public order policing.

Method

One or more members of the research team visited the camp on 15 separate occasions to observe the protest at length and interact with protesters at the site. The research team made extensive field notes during these visits. Interviews focusing on protesters' experiences of policing were also conducted on site with 28 protesters, each interview lasting between 45 minutes and 2 hours. The number of protest events at Barton Moss, and their close proximity, meant that these events enabled a different type of observation to that usually conducted in protest policing research. We were able to observe the way that the protest and the policing changed over the course of days, weeks and months. Our approach was longitudinal as we supplemented ethnographic fieldwork at the protest site

with additional research that tracked the criminal justice response to the protests into 2016. This involved observing over 20 hours of video footage collated by activists at the site, attending court hearings and defence campaign meetings and analysing legal case files (see Gilmore, Jackson and Monk 2017).

Our work conformed to the definition of fieldwork set out by Manning in his explanation of police ethnography:

> [Fieldwork] means observing and experiencing the setting, group, or organization; interpreting the meaning to participants of what is seen; and then presenting an argument about the coherence, logic and emotional tone obtained in the environment (2014, p. 522).

The key difference was that our fieldwork was conducted with those who experienced policing. We observed the everyday activities of camp residents and visitors, including the establishment of the camp, as well as the protests, and we spoke with them at length on site about their experiences of both protest and policing. Our visits to the protest site involved long periods of observation focussed on the running of the camp, the organisation of protests, and the policing of the camp and specific protest actions. We spent time during the winter months with protesters in their caravans and tents discussing the camp, the protest actions, and the policing, and spent many hours on the roadside in-between protest marches and actions.

We did not interview police officers during the course of this research. The decision to focus solely on the experiences of protesters was taken initially as a methodological decision following our first engagements at the site, but was a decision taken in accordance with our approach as critical ethnographers. As this extract from research field notes documents, it was made clear to the research team that many of the

protesters involved would be unwilling to engage with our research if we were also doing research with the police:

> December 2013 – first visit to camp. Barton Moss Community Protection Camp is a collection of tents, caravans and makeshift buildings constructed from pallets and other reclaimed materials. Functioning camp kitchen and toilet facilities have been installed and it is clear that people are prepared for a long protest through the winter. We are greeted by M, a contact that J has from previous research on protest in Greater Manchester. Conversations take place stood in the lane. Quiet today and the setting feels rural despite being less than 500 yards to the M62 hidden in the near distance and the A57 at the end of the lane. Not an expected site for an industrial installation or a protest. No deliveries today as its Wednesday so no protest walks. Deliveries and accompanying slow walks happen usually on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday in a morning and afternoon. Our contact introduced us to a group of four protesters, three of which are living on site and one visiting as they live locally. We explained the aims of the research and emphasise the desire to document the experiences of protesters. M explained that she had canvassed opinions on us doing research at the site. General consensus among protesters is that it would be beneficial but several people are not willing to engage if we are also 'working with police'. M explains that people fear that confidentiality would be compromised and the protest negatively affected if we are doing interviews with police as well. We have agreed that we will not be doing interviews with the police as our focus is to document the range of experiences of those living/protesting at BM. Arranged to go back on Wednesday next week to interview M and 2 others.

The idea that researchers engaging with police were complicit in the policing they are studying is not unique to this setting. Like many police ethnographers, Julia Hornberger has considered the idea of complicity in terms of the relationship between researcher and the police:

> There is a form of complicity that has less to do with questions of our own consciousness and responsibility (subjective complicity), or with our factual involvement or not in actual acts of police violence (objective complicity) – instead, it is complicity that exists foremost in the eyes of the beholder, in how

> people being policed see us and see what we do and represent as we observe and participate in policing (2017, p. 43)

This reflects the perception of many protesters that we encountered at Barton Moss and many of those that we have engaged with in our research since. In the eyes of many protesters, researchers who worked with the police were complicit in the policing and were thus not to be trusted. As is widely acknowledged, effective ethnography relies upon trust between researcher and subject(s) and this is further heightened, in the context of police research, when those who are not police officers wish to enter the world of police (Fassin 2013a, Loftus 2009, Reiner and Newburn 2008, Westmarland 2016). The question of trust was no less important to the success of our research. Those who had been involved in the policing of previous protests at Balcombe, or had simply heard about events from other protesters, often had very negative impressions of the role police were playing at fracking protests. In addition, the revelations about undercover policing in protest communities in the UK (Evans and Lewis 2013) were very fresh in many protesters' minds and meant that many people were suspicious of 'outsiders' seeking to enter the protest group. Whether these perceptions about the police role and the extent and nature of police infiltration were accurate or not did not matter, issues of trust were of central importance to our ability to enter the world we wished to study. While researchers such as Hobbs (1989) and Ellefsen (2017) have been able to utilise their prior affiliation with the policed to establish trust, we were not able to do this in the same way. In these cases, the researcher's status as an insider in the subordinate group has enabled them to examine both sides – being trusted by 'subordinates' whilst also speaking to 'superordinates' – but this was not possible in our case. Whilst agreeing with Ellefsen's argument that there is a need to consider all perspectives in a conflict situation, we were compelled to 'pick a side' if we wanted to be accepted and allowed to fulfil the aim of

our critical ethnography which was to explore the experiences of all groups of protesters in this context. What could be described as a 'one-sided' approach was in part a trade-off to enable access to marginalised groups, but also accorded with our understanding as critical ethnogrpahers that this perspective could offer an important contribution to a body of recent literature on protest policing in the UK that has so far failed to consider policing from below.

Providing a view from below

Barton Moss provided us with an opportunity to research the experiences of 'transgressive' protesters who are those that 'articulate more abstract demands, use unpredictable and often illegal tactics, do not negotiate with police, and are generally younger' (Tilly in Gillham, 2011, p. 640). In the US, work on transgressive protesters has suggested that the tactics, organisational structure and decision-making processes employed by some protest groups has posed a significant challenge to police (Gillham, 2011, Gillham and Noakes 2007, Gillham et al 2013). In recent police research in the UK, there has been an acknowledgement that 'transgressive', 'militant', or 'anti-systemic' protests do pose a different challenge to police (Gorringe and Rosie 2013, Stott, Scothern and Gorringe 2013, Gorringe, Rosie, Waddington and Kominou 2011). However, there has been no systematic attempt, by researchers considering changes to protest policing in the UK, to engage empirically with these groups among. Based on the perceptions of complicity shared among many transgressive protesters, those researchers conducting research with police will not have been able to engage with these groups even where they have tried, like Stott et al (2013, p. 215) to avoid a 'police-centric' analysis.

We were particularly interested in the potential of critical ethnographic research to explore the experiences of protest policing from the perspective of transgressive protesters. It was our belief that the views and experiences of these groups have been

marginalised in both popular and academic debates about protest and protest policing. Where they are considered in public debate around fracking protest, we believed, based on our experience of protest situations, that they were represented in ways that did not accurately reflect their role in protest movements, including at Barton Moss. In response to the research at Barton Moss, we have discussed elsewhere (Jackson, Gilmore and Monk 2018) the impact of police perceptions of protesters and apparent attempts by police in the UK to (re)define what constitutes acceptable forms of protest. Protest can take many forms, and perceptions of where the line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour lies differ widely in public debates about both historic and contemporary protests. The place of 'direct action' on a continuum of protest types has historically been a source of debate as political and social movements have sought, in varying ways, to undertake 'some form of positive physical action' (Joyce 2016, p. 87) to advance their cause. It was our view that ethnographic research could play an important role in exploring the motivations of these groups. We followed Erving Goffman here in our understanding of the power of ethnography to make sense of that which appears incomprehensible:

> It was then and still is my belief that any groups of persons – prisoners, primitives, pilots or patients – develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close to it, and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject (1961, p. 7).

We sought to add transgressive protesters to this list. The aim was not to celebrate or excuse the behaviour of protesters, but to understand their motivations, and question the view of them as unreasonable or irrational in both their campaign against fracking and in their opposition to the behaviour of GMP at Barton Moss. The aim of critical ethnography

in this sense is not to romanticise the behaviour studied, but to understand why marginalised groups do what they do; in our case, understanding why protesters do what they do is part of an attempt to understand how policing is experienced and to understand how protest policing is changing.

Findings

i. Motivations of protesters

Through extended conversations with camp residents and visitors, and in interviews conducted both on site and after the protest, we heard clear explanations of why people, including those involved in direct action protest, were opposed to fracking and why they felt the need to protest:

> I first got involved personally because I'd seen it on the news and stuff and didn't think it that much of an issue. Then David Cameron turned round and said, "Fracking will be forced upon communities," and when he used the word "forced" I thought, "Hang on, something's wrong there, I need to look into it." And then I went and did my own research and thought, "Right, I need to do something about that. I can't have that go ahead." So, that's how I got involved; it was that statement really – Scott, protester.

For many of the protesters, a dual emphasis – opposing both fracking and the type of policing they encountered – emerged over the course of the protest:

> For some people there's definitely been a shift of focus, because obviously none of us that came up here originally were here against GMP or against that kind of behaviour. But then obviously, with their kind of behaviour, it's left no choice for us but to also campaign against the police, the way they've been treating people that are up here – Lee, protester.

Protesters' perception of the policing was not only effected by specific experiences of police behaviour but also by the general nature and scale of the police operation. The scale of the police operation in particular was difficult to understand without being there. Regular visits and long periods of observation on site helped us understand specific complaints about the nature of policing but also allowed us to get a general sense of the scale of the policing:

> January 2014 – morning visit with S (a colleague). S was keen to observe policing at BM having read much about the scale and nature of the police presence. We arrived around 10am and the morning convoy of trucks had already arrived. Slow walk was in progress and all trucks on Barton Moss lane. Parked in layby and greeted by a sea of fluorescent yellow. +15 police vehicles on site. Convoy stationary as we started down BM lane (protest was nearing the gate site and slow walk coming to an end). Police lining the road on both sides. Police positioned in such a way to appear as defenders of trucks as protesters have described. S was amazed by number of police deployed to essentially 'watch trucks drive down a lane'. Even though I have visited several times before, and seen large deployments of police officers at the site, I was struck by the scale of the police presence on a quiet lane in suburban Salford this morning. Slow walk ends at the gate and has started to disperse by the time we arrive at the end of the lane. Uneventful slow walk – no arrests or significant confrontations between police and protesters reported this morning. Protesters return to camp and police draw back once convoy enters drill site. Police appear to outnumber protesters this morning by a ratio of more than 2 to 1.

In trying to understand the motives of protesters engaged in direct action, it was important that we could speak at length with many camp residents and visitors about their experience of policing. Through our longitudinal study, we were also able to understand how protesters' views changed over days, weeks and months as the protest developed. For many we spoke to, their turn to direct action protest, often from a position of more passive opposition, was a response to the way the protest was policed:

> My direct action has been a direct response to the TAU [Tactical Aid Unit] marching people in in under 15 minutes. That is not facilitating peaceful protest.

> That is dismantling the protest. It shows us no respect and that is what brings on direct action – James, protester.

The relationship between the policing and the protest was something that we were able to explore through our observations and interviews. In his study of the 'relational dynamics of protest and protest policing (2018: 751) Ellefsen has argued that the actions of both protesters and police need to be understood in relation to one another. We also found that protesters changed tactics as result of what Ellefsen has referred to as 'strategic interaction' (2018: 754) and this appeared to be reflected in changes in policing as well. As this field note also demonstrates, the impact of the policing affected protesters' involvement in both direct actions and in our research study:

> February 2014 – Wednesday morning visit. No trucks today (as is usual on Wednesday) so aim of visit was to conduct interviews. Two long interviews conducted. Very cold. First interview conducted in caravan, second (group interview) in a tent with open fire in the doorway. Details of yesterday's slow walk and police response was inevitably the focus of the interviews. Questions covered a range of topics as per interview schedule but invariably we return to a discussion about the way that the police responded yesterday. The perception from most people I spoke to today in interviews, and in conversations on the lane, was that the police response – the arrests and the violence from TAU officers – was a response to the lock-on the day before that delayed the delivery of trucks to the site for several hours. The general view among those in the tent is that direct actions will be stepped-up in response. One of the protesters who had previously agreed to do an interview with me declined today as she said she wasn't ready to talk about what was happening at the site. Emotional fatigue is something that is regularly described. People at the camp are generally keen to be involved in the research and see an importance to getting their story heard but many feel that doing a formal interview requires more energy than they currently have. We sit in the tent round the fire for nearly 2 hours. Part of the time was spent doing the interview with 3 protesters, but the rest of the time was spent avoiding the cold discussing fracking and the local and national government position and the apparent links to what is happening at Barton Moss. Lunch is offered from the camp kitchen. I decline as I have brought my own and warm food is clearly needed most by those who are living on site. The organisation of a community at the camp resourced predominantly by donations from the local community is quite

amazing. A donation of firewood arrives as I make my way back up the lane to the car at 4pm.

Without entering the world of the protest camp, and engaging directly with those involved in direct action protest, our understanding of why people protested at Barton Moss would have been very different. The nature and length of the protest action at Barton Moss lent itself to a longitudinal ethnographic study and this enabled hours of observation, which informed our understanding of the experiences of the policing and the effects this had on the development of the protest.

ii. Dialogue and facilitation

Following the death of Ian Tomlinson, a 47-year-old newspaper vendor, at protests against the G20 meeting in London in 2009, a number of changes were proposed to public order policing in England and Wales. A new 'human rights compliant' framework for public order policing, based on dialogue, communication and a commitment to 'facilitating' peaceful protest, was proposed as a necessary response to help the police service 'adapt to the modern day demands of public order policing' (HMIC 2009, p. 27). This new approach to protest policing led to the introduction of new policing initiatives, the most notable of which was the introduction of Police Liaison Teams (PLTs) whose role is to build links between police, protest organisers and protesters through the establishment of dialogue and relationships based on trust. PLTs are therefore understood to play a key role in 'reducing disorder, facilitating peaceful protest and balancing human rights' (Smith, 2015, p. 25).

The successful implementation of these changes has been documented in a number of academic studies that have sought to contribute to the 'direct empirical "testing" of the new HMIC reforms within police operational practice' (Gorringe et al

2012, p. 114). These studies have sought to evidence the shift in operational policing based on a new commitment, on the part of police, to facilitation and dialogue. This work has also recorded the effective introduction of Protest Liaison Officers (PLOs) based on their commitment to a '"non-repressive" approach before, during and after crowd events to establish relationships of trust with protesters' (Stott et al 2013, p. 214). The success of these changes has been found to be based on effective communication (Waddington, 2013) and PLOs are seen to be 'no isolated innovation but part of a wider UK move toward proactive and dialogue-based policing' (Gorringe et al 2012, p. 122). The overall success of this new model of dialogue policing 'requires demonstrators to be willing to talk to police' and have 'representatives with requisite authority to enter into negotiation' (King and Waddington in Gorringe and Rosie 2013, p. 2). However, in relation to transgressive protesters, it has been argued that if their hostility to police is accepted, and some disruption is tolerated, the new approach to public order policing still has the potential to 'improve mutual understanding and reduce the potential for violence between police and protesters' (Gorringe and Rosie 2013, p. 7).

Our contribution to the 'direct empirical "testing"' of these reforms challenges the idea that protest policing has undergone a universal transformation. The respondents in our study provide some insight into why these changes may only be partial, and why this has not been apparent to other studies of public order policing. In the first instance, our research brings into question the commitment to effective communication, which is the cornerstone of the dialogue policing model. Prior to the commencement of the drilling operation at Barton Moss, GMP had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IGas Energy and other strategic partners who had an interest in the successful completion of Operation Geraldton. The MoU was initially brought to our attention by protesters and it demonstrated that IGas had insider access to Gold and Silver senior

police command meetings, daily briefings or video conferences with GMP's Silver Commander and shared police and local council information and intelligence. Furthermore, the MoU demonstrated that IGas took a lead on all media communications, "both proactive and reactive" in liaison with GMP Corporate Communications team (see Gilmore, Jackson and Monk 2016). No protest groups were invited to enter into the MoU and proactive communication prior to the police operation was restricted to only one of the 'sides' in this clash of competing rights claims. The commitment to dialogue and effective communication professed in police policy would suggest that even if some protesters had the intention to engage in protest activity that police could not tolerate, attempts at communication with some groups of protesters should have been made prior to the start of the operation.

We heard several accounts of protesters seeking to establish lines of communication but, in their view, this was not reciprocated by GMP:

> On so many occasions people have tried to speak to the Bronzes on the site, and speak to them about what's immediately happening there and how to open up a dialogue and communicate, to try and stop people from getting hurt. To try and stop unlawful actions from being committed. To just try and maintain a peaceful protest that they can facilitate and we can partake in without there having to be pushing, shoving, people being assaulted, people shouting, people feeling threatened. There shouldn't be that on a peaceful protest. I personally, myself, so many times have tried to speak to the highest-ranking officers on the site and they have no interest at all in communicating. I think the question is, why do they not care that they're not communicating? They're clearly not doing their job of facilitation by clearly showing me they don't want to communicate with me – Ian, protester.

For some, these early attempts at communication with police illustrated that the police could not be trusted and communication was therefore withdrawn:

> The thing is we don't want any communication because we don't trust them. We found that in the past we tried to make some kind of agreements and the police have always broken them first – Maria, protester.

A lack of trust of police was widely reported and visible in observations of interactions between protesters and police. In particular, the PLOs, tasked with establishing dialogue and relationships based on trust, were widely, if not universally, mistrusted. Most participants we spoke with grew to see communication with PLOs as, at best fruitless, and at worst, counterproductive as this field note demonstrates:

> March 2014 – Morning visit on Thursday, weather good, warm for March. Arrived after slow walk. No arrests this morning. Interview conducted with two visitors to the site. Interview conducted in the middle of the adjoining field, 100m from camp as both interviewees keen to be as far from police liaison officers as possible during the interview. Liaison officers are an almost constant presence at the site. Some people engage them in general conversation but we are told repeatedly by protesters that they are not to be trusted. On many occasions I have been told that the 'blue bibs' are intelligence gatherers working alongside the TAU, whose aim is to collect information that is relayed back to other officers to inform arrests. This comes up in interviews, but I have also been told on several occasions in general conversations on the lane (including again today) that PLOs are both untrustworthy and ineffective. Many protesters have given up engaging with them as complaints reported to them 'come to nothing' as I'm told today whilst on the lane. It is clear that some of the PLOs do try to maintain friendly relations but there is a general sense among camp residents and visitors that their function is indistinguishable from the other police officers, in that they are key to the general aim to undermine the protest. Many of the protesters and many of the police officers have been on this lane together since November, and through a Salfordian winter, and the relationships between them are coloured by the last 5 months of protest and the police response. The continued presence of liaison officers is not helping to build relationships and while the policing at BM takes very different forms at different times, the PLOs make the policing of the camp feel continuous and unrelenting.

The PLOs were seen as central to the overall function of the police operation, which was, in the view of protesters, to limit the ability of protesters to exercise their rights to protest. PLOs were not seen as a mechanism to change the policing. Instead, they were viewed as ineffective in any attempts to respond to the violent policing conducted by the Tactical Aid Unit. The Barton Moss case study provides a very different view of the PLT from that detailed in recent literature.

iii. Violence

Recent studies have also suggested that the iron fist that defined police responses to protest in previous decades has been clearly replaced by a new model based on facilitation (Gilmore, Jackson and Monk 2017). At Barton Moss however, the experiences of protesters were defined by the physical and violent means by which direct action protest was policed. As noted above, 40% of the 77 complaints made to GMP during Operation Geraldton related to the use of force.

The focus of protesters' concerns were the TAU officers from GMPs police support unit who were regularly deployed at the site. The TAU were, according to Chief Constable Peter Fahy, available to help regular officers with 'unusual incidents' (Fahy, 2014) but as the protest continued, these officers were involved on a regular, almost daily basis. In our site visits, we were able to see how often the TAU officers were deployed and how, over time, their intervention became normalised as a response to slow marches. Observing the routine deployment of these specialist officers, we were able to see how the police response appeared to rely upon the physical and often violent intervention of public order officers rather than effective dialogue and negotiation. The turn to TAU officers appeared to us to be based on the tolerance levels of police commanders in relation to slow marches, rather than a response to any particular incidents.

For many protesters, the use of force by TAU officers at Barton Moss marked them out from other officers, and the normalisation of their deployment typified the policing of the protest:

> As soon as they bring in the TAU it changes dramatically – people are getting injured, severe injuries have happened. They've thrown us down the road, pretty much. The tactics totally change; the atmosphere changes - Sam, Protester.

> We're walking, we're just walking peacefully, nobody wants to get arrested, nobody wants any violence. But there's a lot of goading tactics. And then in the line, with their jackets really loose, to us, obviously everything's in a huddle, and the TAU have done this to me, they've just grabbed my jacket, twisted it round and just punched me really hard in the back. And then I just say to them, "Will you please stop assaulting me? It's on camera, the world's watching this, you need to stop assaulting me – Jenny, protester.

For many people we spoke with, the use of the TAU and the very physical nature of the policing was aimed at dissuading people from getting involved in the protest:

> But the slamming people into the face and the methods of the arrest by the TAU is to try to get rid of the numbers, once somebody's, you know, been injured, face down in the dirt, knelt on the head, it's a big incentive for somebody not to come back. And then you lose the right to peaceful protest because you're too scared of the treatment that you'll get, and for me that's absolutely what it's about – Amber, protester.

One dimension of the policing that we heard about from a significant number of protesters was a form of gendered, and even sexualised, violence experienced by women protesters (Monk, Gilmore and Jackson 2019). We did not directly observe the types of

sexualised violence reported to us by protesters, but the multiple accounts we recorded did suggest there was a specific pattern of violent behaviour directed at those women active in forms of direct action protest:

> I did have an officer so close behind me, his entire body was pressed against mine the entire time. It was only me and him and two officers on the side just walking, because there's only, like, three of them and a few of us. And because I was walking the slowest, he was pressed right into me and just walked me the entire road and a lot of people said they would have sued for sexual harassment, because that felt very, very inappropriate. I did tell him all the time I would try to move to one side or another side, he just stayed exactly almost glued to my back, and it felt very, very violating, very violating – Maria, protester.

There was a widely held view that women experienced the very physical nature of the policing of slow marches differently. The close proximity of police officers and protesters in these daily marches meant that very close physical contact between police and protesters was a regular, often daily, experience. The reliance on public order officers to physically push protesters down the road to speed up slow marches meant that the experiences of protesters were affected by this regular and intense physical contact in a very hostile environment. The gendered dynamic of male officers being used to move female protesters requires further consideration:

> It seems different how they handle men and women, sometimes. Sometimes, you know, in certain ways if they're trying to push you down the line as a woman. There is one particular officer with a great big belly that sticks out, and he'll just push his belly into you and shove you down the line with his body, pushing into you. You know? They know it's not what they're supposed to be doing. And there's one that always has his elbow and his hand there, and he's like pushing it

and pushing it in. Well, you feel a bit disgusted really. A little bit disgusted – Joyce, protester.

There is provision under the dialogue model for police to use force where necessary in response to violent protests. However, the Barton Moss protest demonstrated that the police remain the primary definers of what constitutes 'unreasonable' or violent protest. By entering into the world of the protest camp, and observing the protest, it became apparent to us that the definition of unreasonable protest utilised by police is linked to the focus and form of their protest and not the tactics employed (see Jackson, Gilmore and Monk 2018). By being there and seeing it how it was, we were able to deconstruct the police representation of the protest. Critical ethnography here has a central role to play in challenging the construction of certain groups of protesters as illegitimate that appears to be central to the attempt to legitimate the deployment of violent policing in response to specific types of protest.

Challenges

Public order policing has long been one of the most controversial aspects of policing. While there is wide agreement in the literature about the changes to policy and practice, the research considered above suggests a need for more work in this area. Against the backdrop of continuing revelations about the history of political policing in the UK, it is vital that we continue to explore this area of police work. Our research raises serious questions about the nature and extent of changes to national public order policing and the research also highlights problems with the way that police at a local and national level have sought to define acceptable forms of protest. It suggests that the idea that police responses to protest in England have changed significantly, as argued in many recent studies, is based on an incomplete view of police work in this context. Critical

ethnography, implemented in the way described above, provided us with a very different picture of this area of police work. The different approach led us to different findings.

We do not suggest that our work presents a full picture of police practice, or that it leads us to a clear vision of what protest policing should be, only that it challenges the idea of a universal shift in approaches to political protest in the UK. These key findings suggest that our attempt to empirically test these reforms, and our wider quest to make key areas of police work in this context more visible, and perhaps therefore more accountable, must continue. Ethnographic research is key to this work. Research done in partnership with police is important but so too is work done from both 'the outside' and 'the other side'. The research at Barton Moss was conducted at a critical distance from the police to enable us to approach the issue of public order policing from a different perspective and to include voices that are too often excluded. It was, as a result, arguably an unwanted intrusion into the protest situation, and although GMP officers never prevented us from conducting our fieldwork, we did encounter difficulty in obtaining information from both GMP and the Crown Prosecution Service on the outcomes of cases resulting from Barton Moss (see, Gilmore, Jackson and Monk 2016). On publication of our report, GMP commented that 'this report gives one version of events of what was a very long and complex policing operation' (in Gayle 2016). To be criticised for only giving one version of events (and by inference for being biased) is expected when work prioritises the perspective of the subordinate group.

The approach we advocate here encountered many of the same challenges as other police ethnographies. This work was both time consuming and labour intensive and building relationships based on trust were difficult. Questions of access were similar, as we needed to be able to prove ourselves as trustworthy outsiders. The revelations about police infiltration in the UK have arguably made it even more difficult for researchers

who are not themselves members of protest groups to enter the unfamiliar world of transgressive protest. The question of position vis-à-vis the police was much clearer for us than for police ethnographers but we still had to think about our relationship to the group we were studying. The risk of 'going native' inherent in ethnography was still present, and we had to consider how we marked out our status as researchers without negatively affecting our ability to enter the world we wished to examine. The dangers of becoming involved in the practices under observation, have been long deliberated by police ethnographers (Punch 1979, Loftus 2009), but are also acute in research studying the policed, as the recent controversy surrounding Alice Goffman's (2014) work have demonstrated (Manning, Jammal and Shimola 2016). Researchers who have studied the policed have also directly reflected on the challenges of being drawn into illegal activity as part of participant observations (Hobbs 1989, Pearson 2012). This extract from field notes demonstrates that some of these risks were also present in our study:

> January 2014 – visited at lunchtime to catch protesters between morning and afternoon slow walks to conduct interviews. However, unexpected delivery to site arrived in layby at the top of BM lane shortly after I arrived and a message was sent down to camp that a slow walk is needed. Everyone at the camp was rallied to join slow walk. By the time people are mobilised, the truck had started down the road with 2 protesters from the layby conducting a slow walk. Everyone at camp and in the lane was called to join the slow walk and it was clear to me that there was an expectation that I join too. As a researcher who has 'picked a side' by choosing to work with the protesters and not the police, it was assumed by the group I have been speaking to today that I would be willing to join the slow walk. I explained that I was keen to observe the walk from the front and would stand some way ahead of the line of protesters. This was the first time that I have been asked to join the slow walk. I did not want to appear opposed to the protest but I was wary of 'joining in'. I entered the lane but stayed someway ahead of line of the protesters. As the trucks moved slowly up the lane, a line of police officers stood in front of the trucks and began to try to move the protesters up the lane. The number of protesters on site today was small (approx. 10) and there appeared from the start of the walk to be a general sense that it would be slow but would keep moving. No TAU officers deployed. A woman from the protest group joined me further up the lane. She explained that she was visiting today and had children to pick up from school this afternoon so could not afford to be arrested. I explained

> that I was in the same position and we made our walk at a safe distance up to the gate site. We stood to the side on reaching the end of the lane and the slow walk came to a close at the gate. The risk of arrest felt very real having observed slow walks from a distance before on site visits and in live-streamed video shared by protesters online. Accounts of seemingly random police targeting of protesters suggest that arrest is a real risk for anyone on a slow walk. It does not feel that my status as researcher is sufficient to alleviate this risk. How we manage the need to engage with a live protest event that is structured around direct action, and the need to maintain a degree of detachment in our research is something reflected on during the walk back to the car and on the drive back to the warmth and safety of my home.

Like other ethnographers studying policing, we were also aware of our appearance and gave thought to what Hobbs refers to as 'the importance of image management' (1989, p.6). The risk of being confused as one of them (see Loftus 2009) was clear to us, and just as Hobbs sought to never intentionally appear as a CID officer, we did not seek to 'blend-in' as protesters, but nor did we come dressed as academics fresh from the lecture theatre:

> February 2014 – morning visit. Convoy on the lane and slow walk coming to an end as we arrive. As we walked down the lane to the gate, some officers greeted us but others stare at us or past us. No police officers ask what we are doing or who we are, and we are free to walk along the side of the convoy. We ask ourselves if we look like protesters, a question I have reflected on during each site visit. How do we look as researchers and how do we appear to protesters and police? Is our presence noted and crucially, does it have an effect on the protesters or the police?

We asked ourselves many of the same questions that occupy police researchers. Following Fassin (2017), we considered the difference that our ethnography of policing would make to the society in which it was conducted. As critical ethnographers we sought also to make our work 'socially useful' (Fassin 2013b, p. 125) and the public report we produced (Gilmore, Jackson and Monk 2016) sought to make a contribution to public as well as academic debates about policing, democracy and the environment. Whilst there

are differences in approach, focus, and application between our study and other work in this area, in general our aim was the same. Like other studies, we sought to understand how protest policing has changed since 2009, but we suggest that the social world of the police is not the only relevant social world that needs to be explored to understand policing in this context. In conducting ethnographic research with protesters, we experienced an unfamiliar social world in which police have a profound presence and impact. In doing so, we brought a different perspective to our debate about the nature of protest policing in an attempt to establish some symmetry. It is our view that this approach has much to offer our collective project of seeking to understand policing.

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[i] This work was conducted in collaboration with Dr Joanna Gilmore, University of York, and Dr Helen Monk, Liverpool John Moores University.

[ii] For an explanation of direct action protest, see Joyce (2016, chapter 4).