

Introduction: Policing a Multicultural Society

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Introduction

The fall of the Iron Curtain, persistent regional conflicts, repression and political unrest, the opening of borders by previously closed societies, and a variety of trends related to globalization figure prominently in the world at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. A consequence of this international tumult has been the migration of large numbers of people from one place to another. This movement is changing the cultural diversity and the ethnic composition of both sending and receiving areas, in some cases transforming longstanding homogeneity. Countries that historically may have been less than welcoming to outsiders have suddenly become multicultural and multiethnic. In states that have undergone significant political change without a major influx of immigrants, no less profound shifts have altered features and expectations of, and demands on, societal institutions, including the police. These internal shifts have literally transformed the “policed” into the police; peoples who historically were the recipients of police actions and services have themselves become the police delivering those actions and services or have been placed in positions to review, revise, or otherwise influence policing policies and practices.

The Challenge

Notwithstanding differences in the previous postures taken by various jurisdictions toward immigrants and marginalized subjects, a common underlying question remains: What impact have these transnational trends had on institutions dedicated

to the preservation of order and stability? Indeed, one of the societal institutions for which these emerging global patterns can be expected to have posed fundamental challenges is the police. The police in all societies are charged with maintaining public order and protecting public safety, and that generally means conserving the status quo in whatever form it may take. The police are inherently conservative in both their actions and their predispositions. They represent the vested economic and political interests and values of the societies in which they perform their policing duties. Where countries are changing and adding cultural and ethnic multiplicity, the police are most likely to be aligned with the old cultural and ethnic guard, or they may be perceived as such by new, or newly empowered, constituents. As a result, questions about the philosophy and practice of policing are ultimately liable to come under close and probing scrutiny.

The police operate at “street level,” where they have direct contact with all who are involved in any way with law and public safety. In fact, the police represent the sole agency with which the vast majority of those who ever have any dealings with the criminal justice system come into contact. As a result, the police have enormous power to influence attitudes and public opinion about fundamental concerns regarding a political entity’s capacity to act in just, legitimate, and accountable ways. Police-community relations are shaped on the street and in the station houses, and it is there that such controversial practices as profiling and “zero tolerance” are enacted. Using their discretionary arrest powers, the police are also the gatekeepers of the criminal justice process. They determine who is subjected to the power of the law and who is not. Because of this unique role and powerful position in society, the police are likely both to influence and to be influenced by the social implications of migration and shifts in the political power of various communities.

Rapid transformations in the relative heterogeneity of the population, and the accompanying discourse on multiculturalism, can lead to questions about the validity of definitions of laws or crimes for some groups and conceptions of “order” or “disorder” for others. Conversely, the arrival of new groups often provokes questions about the appropriateness of practicing what those groups consider “normal” domestic or familial relations, duties, or privileges. Thus, an increase in the number of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic communities and racial groups can give rise to conflicts about the legitimacy of legal and communal standards and definitions, and hence present an enormous challenge to law enforcement and order maintenance activities.

A Response

Two of the many nations encountering these new challenges to policing are Israel and the United States. In an effort to better understand the issues, and, most important, learn the lessons taught by the experiences of others in this critical area, the Israel National Police (Division of Community Policing and Civil Guard) organized a conference on policing a multicultural society. The conference, cosponsored by the National Institute of Justice of the U.S. Department of Justice (hereafter NIJ), was held in Jerusalem, Israel, in March 2001.

Experts from a number of countries were invited to submit papers and participate in the workshop. To ensure wide dissemination of the workshop products, agreement was reached with the academic journal *Police and Society* to devote a special issue to this topic. *Police and Society* (Pinchas Yehezkealy and Orit Shalev, coeditors) is published (normally only in Hebrew with English abstracts) under the auspices of the Division of Community Policing and Civil Guard of the Israel National Police. Because of the broad interest in this important subject, this special issue of *Police and Society* is being published in English (with Hebrew abstracts) and, in addition to its regular subscribers, is being made available by NIJ to a worldwide audience in electronic form via the NIJ Web site. Not all contributors were able to come to Jerusalem, but all those submitting a paper have had their contributions considered for inclusion in this special collection. Decisions have been based upon a rigorous peer review process.

Contributors to this issue of *Police and Society*, who are drawn from a variety of countries, address a wide range of topics and nations. The articles lay out the problems, contradictions, or dilemmas facing the police in their respective societies and the ways the various countries have addressed the issues and responded to the challenges. The authors in this collection take different approaches. The collection includes general perspectives on some countries, descriptive accounts of practices in other countries, theoretical perspectives on problems inherent in multicultural policing in still other countries, and finally, empirical studies delineating some of the issues that present themselves in specific contexts in yet other countries.

The problems associated with policing in culturally and ethnically diverse societies are not unique to countries that have undergone dramatic changes in recent years (see the discussions of Germany and South Africa in this volume as examples of the latter). It is clear that such problems can also be found in relatively stable, albeit diverse, countries where change has been more evolutionary than revolutionary. Three such countries are Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

According to Philip Stenning, Canada has seen its dramatically increased immigration over a 40-year period met by police forces that are reluctant to even see the need for, much less embrace, changes in their organizations and practices to meet the new challenges. These new challenges are especially apparent in cities like Montreal and Toronto, where attitudes of immigrants toward government, police, the law, justice, social order, interpersonal relations, and child rearing clash with the prevailing standards. Canadian police departments, in their effort to deal with the problems of policing a multicultural society, have adopted a number of practices, which Stenning discusses in some detail. Stenning singles out as especially noteworthy the provision of “cultural sensitivity” training for the police. Such training creates a “conceptual dilemma,” or ambiguous situation, for officers, based in the attempt to draw a distinction between “positive” and “negative” discrimination. The “progressive” policy response is to train the police to be more sensitive to cultural differences, to be alert to such differences, and to respond accordingly (including, at times, with tolerance and respect). At the same time, as another tenet of this progressive response, the police are told that cultural difference is an inappropriate basis for discretionary decisionmaking and that equal treatment under the law is what is required. The distinction can prove to be unworkable in practice, and the police response to this ambiguous message can often be confusion, impatience, and an inclination to stick with the status quo.

Such less than thoroughly developed responses to the task of improving police-minority relations are central to Simon Holdaway’s analysis of the role of race in policing, which is framed around two calamitous events in the United Kingdom. The two events - a police crackdown and the subsequent racial riots in Brixton, London, in 1981, and the police investigation of the murder of a black youth in 1993 - led to much soul searching and to efforts at police reform. Holdaway argues, however, that typical police responses to these and similar incidents are misplaced and ineffective. New laws, policies, managerial strategies, and training in multicultural issues are equally unlikely to improve police-minority race relations. In fact, he argues that an overemphasis on multiculturalism can actually reinforce rather than ameliorate racial prejudice and that discrimination (evident in the differential meanings and experience of “citizenship”) can function independently of multicultural policies and prescriptions. So what should be done? He argues that “racialisation” is key to understanding (and possibly improving) police-minority relations. Racialisation is not limited to actions undertaken by the police or other state agents; it is an ongoing, constitutive process, integral to the construction of social reality, evident in the ongoing classification of individuals into (and out of) racial categories that furnish grounds for subsequent inference and action or inaction. Holdaway submits that people do not possess “race” or “racial identities” uniformly. Although group

identification and categorization are inevitable, there must be recognition that the nature of police-minority race relations is shaped by a mutually interactive process.

Australia provides an interesting contrast to those countries, like Canada and Britain, where the multicultural policing issues are related to relatively recent immigration (that is, situations where the problems arise from traditional police forces having to deal with new immigrants). In Australia, according to Mazerolle, Lindsay, and Marchetti, the main multicultural policing challenges emanate from the indigenous Australian communities. The Aboriginals and others who make up these communities are not newcomers; they actually preceded the more recent white Australians who began arriving 200 years ago. The issue, instead, is the disparate economic, political, and social relationship between the white and indigenous Australians. Mazerolle, Lindsay, and Marchetti note that, although indigenous peoples live predominately in rural areas, and consequently there are not ethnic ghettos in Australian cities, the police are highly centralized. There is thus “little basis for diversity and localized approaches to policing local communities.” And it is just such local communities that constitute the vast majority of all Aboriginal communities. The result is that, despite a number of initiatives to reduce social distance, the Australian police continue to exacerbate the historical tensions between themselves and the indigenous populations.

In their article, Adelman, Erez, and Shalhoub-Kevorkian focus on the tensions the police face when policing violence against women in multicultural societies, particularly the theoretical and pragmatic dilemmas involved in respecting differences while enforcing laws in a nondiscriminatory fashion. The authors examine the gendered meaning of “community” in community policing and link the new emphasis in policing on local values, multiculturalism, diversity, and cultural sensitivity with the invisibility of gender differences within these minority communities. Community policing is oriented toward partnerships with and input from the community and toward serving the interests of differentiated “communities.” It is also oriented toward events and interactions that are taking place on the streets rather than behind closed doors. But an exclusive focus on the lifeblood and health of the public face of a community may run the risk of overlooking the welfare and well-being of the members within the community. As a result, domestic violence may be placed beyond the reach of community policing. In light of the push to criminalize domestic violence, community policing may be problematic in multicultural societies in which police, reflecting the dominant community ideology, characterize subordinated or minority communities as inherently primitive or violent. Drawing on the literature on policing violence against minority women, including their research on the policing of violence against Arab women in Israel, they argue that gendered racism and racialized sexism shape

victims' and police responses to domestic violence, resulting in the culturalization and underpolicing of violence against women in minority communities. They recommend that police seek out nontraditional community leaders and organizations that challenge rather than reinforce myths and stereotypes about minority women

Another critical issue with respect to community policing in a multicultural society is the very meaning of community itself. Ibarra's article addresses this topic by looking at the means and circumstances through which residents of two Los Angeles neighborhoods contact the police. Drawing on his ethnographic fieldwork, he describes and discusses the often contradictory perceptions of "order" and "disorder" that can coexist in a multicultural neighborhood, even one as small as a few city blocks. The data demonstrate how identifying something as a problem worthy of police response is contingent on neighborhood social relations as well as ethnic origin, social standing, immigration status, and/or residents' personal and political histories. Conceptions of contacting the police that are prevalent in many Western societies may not, according to Ibarra, be useful or even applicable to some segments of the population or in some situations. Alternative ways of contacting the police, as well as different perceptions of crime and disorder, need to be considered by the police to be effective and to accomplish their mission. Ibarra emphasizes that it behooves the police to think of how their work may foster relationships of trust with (and within) the community, as opposed to engendering hostility, bitterness, and distrust. The issue is not just the state of relations between the police and the community; also at issue is how relations among members of a community frame the meaning of contacting the police and are, in turn, affected by neighbors' complaints to the police.

The decade of the 1990s witnessed enormous political, economic, and social change. Among the countries undergoing particularly eventful political upheaval were Germany and South Africa. Ewald and Feltes describe how the breakdown of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, meant the end of the Iron Curtain and the beginning of cataclysmic change for Germany. Following the relaxation of borders that had divided East from West for nearly five decades, a virtual flood of people began traveling from the East to the West. The formerly homogeneous society of the socialist German Democratic Republic (East Germany) was transformed practically overnight, with increased xenophobia and all its repercussions being among its results. The former West Germany had an influx of asylum seekers, including persons from Eastern Europe claiming German heritage. Both the police as an institution and police officers as individuals had to confront and cope with these critical changes. For example, police in the East, accustomed to the totalitarian tactics of a police state, had to determine who they now represented, the public or the government. According to Ewald and Feltes, across Germany there developed

great uncertainty among police officers, the outcome of which often was frustration, opposition to organizational change, and a general withdrawal from public contact. The German example is an enormously valuable case study of a society's efforts to cope with both the burdens of its past and the new challenges of dramatic change. The German police have been and continue to be at the center of these efforts.

The burdens of the past and the challenges of the present likewise characterize current developments in South Africa. Post-apartheid policing offers another illuminating case example of the profound changes policing has to undergo to cope with the new realities of a reordered political scene. Buntman and Snyman argue that the new South African Police Service (SAPS) has both a legal and political commitment to accommodate cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity. There are, however, two constraints that limit the multiculturalism of the SAPS. First, their heightened awareness and concern has not yet been matched by real changes in the ways the police deal with different citizens and communities. Second, the police have been overwhelmed by the increases in crime, particularly violent crime—increases that they are trying to combat with limited human and financial resources. History tells us that concerns for human rights and civil liberties often take a back seat to calls for cracking down on crime and preserving law and order under these circumstances. Buntman and Snyman paint the complex South African scenario in vivid detail.

Finally, William McDonald presents what is perhaps the most optimistic (and at the same time controversial) of the papers in this collection. Sketching various developments in the United States, he argues that a new paradigm for policing multiethnic societies is emerging. Accepting the premise that the police reflect the societies in which they exist, McDonald concludes that culture in the United States and other "liberal democratic societies" has become more tolerant of diversity and demanding of equality and that police practices and policies have moved with this change. The United States aside, assuming that Australia, Britain, Canada, and Germany would all qualify as liberal democratic societies, the papers about those countries in this volume seem to point to a different conclusion. The same might be said about his conclusion that police priorities are shifting from fighting crime and maintaining law and order to maintaining racial and ethnic peace. Other authors here would probably disagree.

Where there would likely not be disagreement is with McDonald's conclusion that the challenge for the police in multiethnic, liberal, democratic societies is to find the proper balance among the public goods at stake. What the McDonald paper exemplifies is that, indeed, the subject of policing multicultural societies is one

about which there are many opinions. We have tried to capture a few of them in this collection.

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