Lost and hound: The more-than-human networks of rural policing

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ABSTRACT

The rhetoric of community is widely deployed in rural policing but can be problematic for three main reasons. The idea of community can exclude as well as include; be used as a way of shifting responsibility for policing away from the state and sometimes produces insular, bounded views of places. In response to these concerns, this paper uses a relational approach to re-conceptualise rural policing as a networked activity that enrols various actors to produce different forms of policing in different places. To illustrate the potential of this approach it considers how various agencies are drawn into searches for missing people in the countryside. It pays particular attention to non-human agencies, specifically search-dogs handled by volunteers, in searches for missing people. As well as broadening empirical and conceptual knowledge of rural policing, the paper also contributes to wider debates in rural studies about the place of animals, and especially working dogs, in the countryside.

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1. Introduction

This paper uses the opportunity afforded by the special issue to consider how relational networks can be used to further understanding of rural policing. It has two main aims. First it seeks to critique the way that ideas of community have been applied to rural policing. Community is frequently conflated with rurality and can used to support policies that assume social concerns can be resolved through local action (Edwards, 1998; Gardner, 2008; Harper, 1989; Liepins, 2000).

In response, the paper's second aim is to explore how relational thinking can be used by scholars to provide a better knowledge of policing in the countryside. Relational approaches seek to understand how networks of different actors affect change in particular places. These networks cross space, and so are not confined to individual communities, and enrol various human and non-human agencies to achieve their goals (Murdoch, 2006). Network approaches can be used to consider how different technologies, people, institutions, animals, knowledge, performances and practices are enrolled into certain spaces in different ways to create assemblages of 'policing' (Murdoch, 2006; Whatmore, 2002; Yarwood, 2010b).

To illustrate the value of this approach, the paper considers the empirical example of dogs that are deployed to search for missing people in rural terrain. Specifically, it focuses on rural areas of Devon, Cornwall and Dartmoor in the UK that are classed as 'less sparse' by the Office of National Statistics (2014). This measure refers to places where between 50% and 80% of the population lives in a rural settlement or market town. While the example has primarily been chosen to illustrate the significance of a network approach to rural studies, it also draws attention to two neglected aspects of rural policing. First, research has tended to focus on the ways in crime and the fear of crime are policed in rural areas (Mawby and Yarwood, 2011), yet the police also have a remit to provide public safety. Often a focus on crime and crime prevention has meant that these wider aspects of policing have often been ignored although they remain an important staple of rural policing. Second, through a focus on search dogs, attention is given to the ways that non-human agencies are enrolled into policing networks. This not only broadens understanding of policing but also contributes to wider debates in rural studies about the place of animals in the countryside (Buller, 2014; Jones, 2003; Sellick and Yarwood, 2013; Urbanik, 2012).

2. Beyond community policing

'Community-based' has become something of a buzz-word in the policing of rural areas in Western countries. In response to increasingly centralised policing strategies, budgetary constraints and public pressure for more visible forms of policing, many police forces have taken measures to work in partnership with local

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communities to reduce crime, improve security and reduce the fear of crime in rural areas (Gilling, 2011; Yarwood, 2007b, 2008; Mawby and Yarwood, 2011; Young, 1993). The intention is that voluntary, state and private agencies should work in partnership with the police in particular localities to identify and resolve crime and safety issues affecting them. Examples have included the establishment of Neighbourhood Watch schemes (Yarwood and Edwards, 1995); the development of village-based crime and safety partnerships (Small, 2001; Yarwood, 2007a, 2010a); the deployment of residents' patrols (Thurman and McGarrell, 2005); greater use of unsworn police officers from local communities (for example aboriginal officers, neighbourhood wardens and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)) and the re-skilling of police officers to work more closely with rural communities (Cunneen, 2001; Fyfe, 1995; Smith, 2010). There may also be efforts to police areas in ways that are sympathetic to local cultures or viewpoints by, for example, working in partnership with community leaders or minority groups. Community policing is not, however, a panacea for rural policing and may be critiqued for three reasons.

2.1. Community and exclusion

The idea of community is exclusionary as it necessarily omits some groups or places when is beign defined (Staeheli, 2008). Those more likely to participate in community partnerships are usually drawn from elite groups of people that are more willing to work with the police to defend class interests (Herbert, 2006). Rural policing may revolve around a vision of rurality and community that reflects a hegemonic, idealised view of crime-free rural life (Yarwood, 2005; Yarwood and Gardner, 2000). More often than not, these visions tend to exclude on a cultural rather than a criminal basis. Certain groups, such as young people (Yarwood and Gardner, 2000), travellers or ethnic minorities (Vanderbeck, 2003), are more likely to be the target of community-based initiatives rather participants within in them (Gilling, 2011; Yarwood, 2010a). Rather than one rural community, there are many; raising questions about whether policing is for or of particular communities.

Particular views of community may lead to some offences being missed. Violent crimes 'do not align with traditional perceptions of rural communities as harmonious and idyllic places to live' (Wheeler, 2013: 28) and are often hidden from sight. Domestic violence and crimes against women, for example, remain largely hidden in rural places (Liepins, 2000; Panelli et al., 2002; Websdale and Johnson, 1997) and will remain neglected by initiatives that only target public space.

Inclusion can also be problematic. Evidence has emerged that police officers who live and work in particular communities find it difficult to reconcile their 'insider' status with a need to police the people of that locality. Mouhanna (2011) recounts how French gendarmes' impartiality could be compromised by local friendships and gifts from the local populace. Some community-based officers may be reluctant to prosecute neighbours and friends for some offences such as drink-driving, delegating instead these duties to colleagues from outside their locality (Yarwood, 2011b). Malcom Young's (1993) account of policing in rural areas of the West Mercia Constabulary in the UK revealed high cultural expectations of the police and pressure for offices to respond to trivial, non-criminal concerns in their communities.

2.2. Governance through community

Community policing usually refers to the efforts of various state, voluntary and private agencies to police particular places in partnership with each other. The term community, as various commentators have suggested (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Lockie et al.,

2006; Woods, 2006), is something of a misnomer aimed, in part, at enrolling local people into taking responsibility for policing themselves (Thurman and McGarrell, 2005). Sometimes, as in the case of the UK's 1998 Crime and Disorder Act (Gilling, 2011), community-based policing has been driven by legislation that requires local agencies to work together. In other cases, co-operation has been encouraged through the use of grants or funds. Western Australia's Community Safety and Crime Prevention programme, for example, used a series of financial and collaborative incentives to encourage shire councils to adopt community-based approaches to crime prevention (Anderson and Tressider, 2008).

Even when initiatives have been driven from the 'bottom up', these tend to become incorporated into frameworks of national policy. Thus, residents' patrols in New Zealand were started informally to patrol rural communities but have become formalised through the establishment of an umbrella body, Community Patrols of New Zealand (CPNZ), and a memorandum of agreement with New Zealand Police that, amongst other things, requires volunteers to undergo formal training and vetting. Similarly, Street Pastors are Christian volunteers that patrol the night time economy of the UK to ensure the safety of people on a night out (Middleton and Yarwood, 2013). Whilst originating in urban areas, many patrols now work in partnership with police forces in rural towns to agree patrol routes, respond to requests for help, share radio networks and ensure that all their members undertake formal training.

While both of these examples rely on volunteers, some rural policing partnerships have started to pay private security guards to undertake patrols. The 'Safer North Devon Community Safety Partnership', for example, has paid door staff (bouncers) to patrol as 'Street Marshals' in Bideford, a rural a market town, on Saturday nights to prevent anti-social behaviour and alcohol related crime.

Community policing reproduces a view that communities are the cause and solution of social problems (Gardner, 2008). Active citizenship, in the form of voluntary action in specific places, has been encouraged through policy-measures as a way of engaging local people with crime and safety in their locality (Yarwood, 2014). Some communities are more willing and able to help themselves and it is an irony that those in the need of most help are unlikely to benefit from self-help initiatives. The 'trapdoor of community', as Herbert (2005) puts it, means that many people unable or unwilling to work in formal partnership fall past the opportunities they offer. Far from empowering local people, many community-bases schemes represent a form of government from a distance (Higgins and Lockie, 2002) in which local people are judged as having 'succeeded or failed as citizens as a place-based community, with repercussions for the further treatment of that locality by the state (Desforges et al., 2005: 441).

2.3. Bounded territories

The idea of community may foster insular thinking that regards a community as a closed, bounded space. At best this leads to a neglect of places outside the territory of a community. This is most clearly envisaged when one village adopts a territorial crime-prevention scheme and crime is displaced to others that have not (Johnstone, 2011). At its worst, territorial policing can be used to exclude some groups of people from particular spaces. In urban areas there are many examples of community and territory being used to cleanse space, often to support neo-liberal programmes of investment (Herbert, 2005; Mitchell, 1998; Paasche et al., 2014; Samara, 2010).

As noted in Section 2.1, there are dangers that partnerships in rural areas might empower rural elites to exclude people on the grounds of cultural rather than criminal threat (Yarwood, 2010a). These have been viewed as a way of enforcing a particular moral