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Shadow policing: the boundaries of community-based ‘policing’ in Northern Ireland

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The intention of this article is to provide a structural and operational analysis of policing *beyond* the police in Northern Ireland. While the polity enjoys low levels of ‘officially’ recorded crime as part of its post-conflict status, little empirical analysis exists as to the epistemological roots of security production *outside* that of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The empirical evidence presented seeks to establish that beyond more prominent analyses related to paramilitary ‘policing’, the country is in fact replete with a substantial reservoir of legitimate civil society policing – the collective mass of which contributes to policing, community safety and quality of life issues. While such non-state policing at the level of locale was recognised by the Independent Commission for Policing, structured understandings have rarely permeated governmental or academic discourse beyond anecdotal contentions. Thus, the present argument provides an empirical assessment of the complex, non-state policing landscape beyond the formal state apparatus; examines definitions and structures of such community-based policing activities; and explores issues related to co-opting this non-state security ‘otherness’ into more formal relations with the state.

Keywords: policing; security; community; non-state policing; Northern Ireland

Introduction

Almost without exception, dominant narratives of policing, safety and security associated with Northern Ireland’s recent transformations have centred on the progress towards ‘normal’ policing by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI; Ellison 2007, Topping 2008a). With changes to the state policing apparatus having acted as ‘meta bargaining’ in terms of the transition from conflict to peace, it may be contended that structural realignments to policing – started under the Independent Commission for Policing in Northern Ireland (ICP 1999) – have by-in-large been completed. Indeed, the ICP was set up as part of the 1998 Belfast Agreement political negotiations in the country, with a mandate to resolve the issue of policing which for many lay at the very heart of the conflict (Campbell *et al.* 2003, O’Rawe 2003, Topping 2008b).

Undoubtedly, contemporary evidence raises concerns as to the success (or otherwise) of PSNI’s ability to deliver community policing (or policing with the community under the rubric of the ICP) as central to the ICP’s more ‘normalised’ vision of policing and security affairs (CJINI 2012). This too must be qualified in the light of the persistent and severe dissident terrorist threat in the country; unresolved historical and ‘legacy’ issues;

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and the continual potential for civil disorder (Byrne and Monaghan 2008, Ellison and O’Rawe 2010, Frampton 2010, Lundy 2011, McDonald 2012, Topping and Byrne 2012a). But for the majority of the population, the imperative of fully inclusive, shared police governance between former Loyalist and Republican protagonists has been realised as part of policing ‘having been given back to the people’ – notably through some of the most robust policing oversight and accountability structures anywhere in the world (Mulcahy 2006, Office of the Oversight Commissioner 2007, Bayley 2008). However, the intention here is not to recount nor assess the parameters of policing in Northern Ireland through the lens of police-organisational change. Nor will the current argument consider policing from the perspective of well-rehearsed debates surrounding summary, paramilitary ‘justice’ as a form of social control during the conflict (Knox 2002, Hayes and McAllister 2005).

Rather, this paper seeks to examine policing from the perspective of actors involved in what the authors have termed ‘shadow policing’ – as a distinct, latent form of non-state, networked policing delivered at a grass-roots community levels across the country, and which contributes to the post-conflict peace along with the relatively safe nature of the polity (Brogden 2000). On the one hand, the importance of considering ‘shadow policing’ lies with the fact that beyond anecdote, the actions and intentions of these security stakeholders have never been empirically ‘mapped’, detailed nor barely sketched amidst the swathes of policing attention focused on the country. And on the other hand, through interpreting policing and security from this particular perspective, the paper may also be viewed as an alternative narrative to the majority of Northern Irish policing literature, where there exists an unchallenged presumption of PSNI ‘ownership’ of Northern Ireland’s ‘criminological netherworld’, perpetuated by the country’s position as Europe’s low crime comparator in spite of the recent protracted, internal armed conflict (Van Dijk *et al.* 1990, Ellison and Mulcahy 2001, Lyness *et al.* 2004, PSNI 2012).

In this regard, it is further contended that a significant gap in academic or policy debate has been a sufficient interrogation of the dynamics underpinning the production of security generally, and policing specifically, with the presumption of causal security relations having remained firmly with PSNI. Indeed, due to the nature of the conflict and ‘contest’ over policing delivery, there remains an unexplored tension at a local level in terms of the extent to which communities (both geographic and ethno-national) exist as passive actors to state policing services – or are active agents in their own security production (Topping and Byrne 2012a). As part of the current study, it is thus intended to examine these contested dynamics of ‘community security’, albeit within the parameters of the sample areas.

The remainder of the paper therefore seeks to frame policing (in its broadest sense) *outside* that of the state (Shearing and Wood 2003, Martin 2012). From the outset, it must be cautioned the present study does not seek, nor has the capacity, to detail ‘completely’ the activities of *all* stakeholders involved in policing outside that of the state. Additionally, it is important to note the paper deliberately excludes both policing associated violent, extra-juridical ‘justice’ by paramilitary actors; along with modes of activity grounded in more formal state origins, such as neighbourhood watch (Loader and Walker 2001, Topping 2013). In this respect, it should be highlighted that ‘paramilitary policing’ in Northern Ireland is a well-rehearsed field and has been considered extensively elsewhere (Topping and Byrne 2012b). Thus, while undoubtedly part of the wider non-state, policing ‘picture’, it falls outside the remit of the current study – itself

seeking to explore the involvement of those involved in legitimate (in the sense of legal and consensual) policing activities at the local level.

It is at this point where the authors must further concede that the empirical ‘ratio’ of PSNI/state, ‘shadow policing’ and paramilitary contributions to the wider ‘policing equation’ remains a moot point. Thus, in terms of reconnecting these ‘alternative’, legitimate sources of policing to the aetiology of security production, non-state policing may be imagined as encompassing:

any institutional, organisational, communal or individual agents or nodes ... that are interconnected in order to authorise and/or provide security to the benefit of internal or external stakeholders. (Dupont 2004:78)

The paper will further seek to provide an understanding of that which constitutes non-state security governance, or ‘shadow policing’ in Northern Ireland, while defining the structure and delivery of policing and security from the perspective the actors and organisations involved. And finally, the paper will also propose avenues for cooperation between such actors and the PSNI as part of acknowledging the reality of ‘shadow policing’ which exists – as a hybrid of what Topping (2008b) has termed ‘community governance policing’. Indeed, the imperative of this approach has been captured by Baker (2002, p. 31), who notes that policing is not shaped entirely by national agendas, but locally by the public. And where the public (through non-state actors and agencies) bypass the formal state policing apparatus, the state role in policing provision must therefore be re-examined.

Methodology

The empirical data for this paper draws upon extensive qualitative evidence spanning the period from 2007 to 2012 concerned with the delivery of non-state policing in Northern Ireland. With kind permission, the majority of the data are drawn from interviews and case studies carried out by the authors as part of a research study for the Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium (BCRC) in 2011 to examine a decade of community safety policy and practice in Northern Ireland (Topping and Byrne 2012a). The BCRC is part of the PEACE III Programme under the Special EU Programmes Body and provides Belfast-wide, cross-community partnership working between representative Loyalist and Republican organisations to assist conflict transformation across Belfast’s interfaces and divided communities. As part of the longitudinal approach, this BCRC research is further supplemented through drawing upon complimentary policing research by one of the authors (Topping 2009).

In this regard, the paper is based on a total of 36 semi-structured interviews with representatives and organisations across Loyalist and Republican communities (mainly) in the Greater Belfast area. The interviews have additionally been informed and contextualised by four case studies of community-based organisations (as part of the original BCRC research) who deliver either conflict management programmes or policing interventions at a local level. Of the interviews, 16 were drawn from both from Loyalist and Republican areas, with 4 interviews derived from organisations representing neutral or ‘cross-community’ affiliations. Looking to the case studies, they comprise contextual data which detail the the activities of: a Loyalist/Unionist community support programme for former paramilitary members; a Republican/Nationalist community safety forum

working outside formal state policing bodies; a cross-community partnership dealing with interface violence and sectarian tensions; and a summer intervention scheme to provide diversions for young people from the formal criminal justice system. The case studies have thus been used to inform the wider ‘picture’ of shadow policing and its operation rather than a specific focus of inquiry in and of themselves.

In terms of the data, the present study draws uniquely upon the activity of those actors *directly* involved in non-state policing in the country – as the first empirical interrogation of such provision beyond anecdotal contentions (Kempa and Shearing 2002, Office of the Oversight Commissioner 2007). However, for the purpose of the current analysis, the authors concentrate solely upon the nature of non-state policing from the perspective of actors and organisations themselves, rather than considering views from a police or statutory standpoint. Furthermore, the intention of the paper is not to provide a comparative analysis of non-state policing *between* Loyalist and Republican communities. Rather, the present research aims to capture the *nature* of those policing contributions as part of a baseline assessment of such activity.

While the extent of research ‘generalisability’ across the whole of Northern Ireland may be limited, related studies suggest that policing issues within the Loyalist and Republican sample areas have resonance with the wider communities they represent, although broadly restricted ‘to urban rather than the more rural and isolated areas of the country, often sheltered from the more damaging effects of the conflict’ (Mason 1996, Topping 2008b, p. 780). Furthermore, the authors accept that as a qualitative study, such research may be seen as a euphemism for anecdotal accounts of reality – often limited to the narrow contexts in which the questions are asked. But beyond traditionally polemic Loyalist/Unionist and Nationalist/Republican comparisons, the current research is about providing a more nuanced interpretation of the diverging interests and rationalities which underpin non-state policing activity in comparison with that delivered by PSNI and locate this within the context of their existence at the community level (Loader and Walker 2001).

As the authors further argue, part of the current empirical gap lies with the sheer lack of governmental, policy or academic research space afforded to capturing non-state policing provision in the country. In reference to the former, this has been ‘reflective of a mindset which *fears* genuine community involvement and ownership in the process of justice’ (McEvoy *et al.* 2002, p. 197) – especially where many of those involved in local security arrangements are themselves former combatants or protagonists in the conflict (Shirlow *et al.* 2005, Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, Dwyer 2012). Yet on a more pragmatic level, such limited knowledge is due to the fact there has simply been no systematic ‘mapping’ of existing non-state ‘sources’ of policing in Northern Ireland, nor an assessment of their rationales, practices or the issues this may pose for state policing arrangements (Wood 2004). The current methodological approach therefore aims to provide a ‘grand tour’ of this issue, with the explicit intention to open up understandings, rather than definitively capture the fact that PSNI are not the *only* auspice capable of providing a viable ‘security good’ in the country (Grabosky 1992, Loader and Walker 2006, Shearing 2006, Undheim 2003).

Finally, the authors accept there may be a degree of ‘insularity’ to the current work in terms of documenting Northern Ireland alone – as lacking in wider international comparison. Though as Bayley (2008, p. 240) contends, lessons to be derived from the policing landscape here are still valuable in so far as:

Northern Ireland is relevant to post-conflict reconstruction in what it has faced; it may be irrelevant in terms of what can be achieved. To put the point another way, if police reform requires what Northern Ireland has, then the prospects for it are bleak in all one or two of the world's other trouble spots.

The context and rationale of non-state policing in Northern Ireland

As part of a baseline appreciation of non-state policing in Northern Ireland, a key starting point relates to the context of such non-state policing networks and their operations. With neither policing nor its delivery as 'neutral' concepts in the country, the socio-political landscape is both a key referent and driver for such understandings (O'Rawe 2003). While the paper does not seek to recount the historical antecedents of (necessary) police reform in the country, the state police – and by extension security – have been symbolic of the normative ordering of Northern Ireland's (still) divided society (Ellison and Martin 2000, Mulcahy 2006, Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, Ellison 2007). To this extent, policing remains inextricably linked to wider debates about the processes of ensuring policing is delivered 'in ways that promote 'public goods' in accordance with 'public interests' (Shearing and Wood 2003, p. 205).

Examining the reforms to policing under the ICP, on the one hand they created a police-organisational change process, described as one of the most complex blueprints for police reform anywhere in the world (OOC 2006). And in relation to the

'public good' of policing in the country, such reforms were part of an end to the incremental and politically nuanced 'tinkering' to policing, and the beginning of a substantive, inclusive and permanently acceptable change process.... (Topping 2008a, pp. 377–378)

Yet on the other hand, the effect of the necessary ICP reforms, in spite of Shearing's more radical vision, was to entrench the Western democratic tradition of clinging 'tenaciously to the belief that the contemporary array of policing institutions is the only one capable...' (Burriss 2004 cited in Shearing 2006, p. 13). In this respect, the organisational and structural changes associated with the ICP's first 'stream' of physical reforms trumped over the more radical, second 'stream' related to the 'policing more broadly conceived' – described as part of a 'missed chance' to embrace alternative community-based policing capacities (O'Mahony *et al.* 2000, Topping 2008a, 2008b). Especially in view of wider research on paramilitary 'primacy' within many communities during the conflict, governmental and policy rationales to support this reform trajectory must be qualified. Indeed, this state-centric approach arguably fostered a climate in which peripheral actors and agencies were seen as 'threats' – as opposed to stakeholders – in the security landscape and were thus marginalised from formal policy considerations (Criminal Justice Review Group 2000).

Further police-organisational limitations to these broader policing considerations in the post-ICP era may also be observed through the reduction of the ICP's broader *policing* language to that of technocratic, operational definitions of *police* activity (Brunger 2011, *Belfast Telegraph* 2012). With significant socio-political capital generated from PSNI's position as one of the most accountable, overseen police services anywhere in the world, police-centric, bureaucratic inertia has become the definition of policing delivery itself (Ellison 2007, Bayley 2008). Thus, chances to conceive the delivery of policing in language *other* than that set by the police institutions have remained limited – especially where 'new' policing discourses may challenge PSNI's 'expertise' on crime

control (Johnston and Shearing 2003, Topping and Byrne 2012a). However, beyond such *general* issues of police-organisational centrism, within the context of how policing is delivered there exists a *specific* meaning in terms of policing delivery as a ‘power relation’ in the country.

As may be observed, the combination of political symbolism to the police reform process, the retention of one of the highest police-to-population ratios in the Western world and the lowest crime figures in 14 years have all cemented PSNI’s operational prowess in policing and security matters (Topping and Byrne 2012b). The issue for PSNI has therefore been their general, organisational reluctance to officially ‘accept’ that modes of policing other than their own have contributed to, or are a necessary part of, the policing *status quo* – at least in the public eye (Topping 2008b). And while community policing has been PSNI’s dominant narrative as part of policing with communities across the country, engagement with security ‘others’ as part of this power dynamic remains taboo (Dupont 2004).

To some extent, it is possible to understand the rationale for PSNI resisting what may be viewed as challenging or competing loci of power – especially when set against the destabilising potential of challenges to PSNI authority and all they represent. Yet, on the other hand, it has been well documented that non-state, community-based policing provision continues to be a significant ‘player’ as part of the wider spectrum of security in the country – although not necessarily with the explicit intention of ‘opposing’ PSNI (Jarman 2002, 2006, OOC 2007, Topping 2008b, Topping and Byrne 2012a).

The present argument is therefore about moving beyond the transitional politics of police change, contest and ownership characteristic of the post-ICP era; and to consider ‘a radically different conception of social order in which consideration is given to the conditions under which groups are prepared to cooperate...’ (Crawford 1995, p. 122). And while it is important not to presume that the default position for such organisations is to bluntly oppose cooperation with PSNI, such an approach is especially pressing when providers of non-state policing in Northern Ireland still tend ‘to be judged illegitimate in terms of the very Westphalian ideal that they are moving beyond’ (Kempa and Shearing 2002, p. 30).

As a final consideration to the important contextualisation of ‘shadow policing’ in the country, to some extent broad sociological explanations have been set forth to consider the local community resilience to crime in comparison with other post-conflict societies (Altebeker 2005). On a simple plain, it was the Office of the Oversight Commissioner (OOC), the body set up to oversee the implementation of the ICP recommendations, who made a significant note on the capabilities of the community sector in Northern Ireland, noting:

the Policing Board, the Police Service and the Northern Ireland Office need to be alert to the effects the well intentioned ... community groups and their overlapping mandates can have on community engagement.... (2007, p. 16)

With approximately 4800 community-based groups across the country, as a collective ‘mass’ it generates an annual income of £430 million and employs 27,000 workers (not including an additional 45,000 volunteers) – further described by Bayley as part of Northern Ireland’s ‘hyper organised’ civil society (CJINI 2006a, Bayley 2008, NICVA 2012).

Through a Durkheimian school of ‘solidarity in conflict’, detailed accounts of close-knit communities, vibrant civil society and ‘grapevine’ community networks have all been used to explicate (mainly) urban, working-class community resistance to the vagaries of crime – notwithstanding the actual and potential deterrent effects of brutal paramilitary ‘back alley justice’ meted out at local levels (Morrissey and Pease 1982, Shaw and Shearing 1998, Brogden 2000, Brewer 2001, Monaghan 2004, NICVA 2012, Topping and Byrne 2012b). Furthermore, significant alienation of (mainly) Republican/Nationalist communities from engagement with the formal state police throughout the conflict and post-conflict phases of recent history add weight to the fact dynamics *beyond* state police intervention mediate the country’s criminological narrative (Ryder 1997, Ellison 2000, Ellison and Mulcahy 2001, Byrne and Monaghan 2008).

Though more significantly for the present argument, it was the former ICP commissioner, Clifford Shearing, who has detailed that in Northern Ireland:

networks of policing nodes – as agencies, groups and collectives ... outside the public sector that directly participate in the process of policing ... [as] a fact of life. (Shearing 2000, p. 388)

Indeed, a key aim of this paper is to take forward the thinking of the OOC as to the contributions of well-intentioned, non-violent community and voluntary organisations and individuals (Kempa and Shearing 2002, Topping 2008a, 2008b, CJINI 2006).

Defining the nature of non-state policing contributions

In an attempt to define the reality of that which comprises ‘shadow policing’ in Northern Ireland, an initial point of reference lies with the perspective taken on defining policing delivery itself. Martin (2012) argues that overly simplistic analyses of police-organisational diversification within Western policing traditions have dominated thought, whereby the ‘solid state’ technologies of the public police are gradually giving way to more malleable forms of security as part of society’s growing security needs (Garland 2001, Hughes 2007, Zedner 2009).

However, in view of the unique, post-conflict environment from which such policing ‘otherness’ has emerged in Northern Ireland, it is therefore important to extricate analysis from the ‘trap’ of resource/demand comparisons. As indicated from the fieldwork, non-state policing capacities as delivered in the country are may be defined as a:

a very diverse group of people ... some very politically motivated groups, some very socially motivated groups – it’s a complete mixed bag. And their level of engagement with the police will vary quite widely. (*community respondent*)

By the same token, as part of defining ‘shadow policing’ it is important not to develop overly ‘cosy’ or ‘wholesome’ conceptions about the capacities and abilities of non-state actors to deliver policing and security within any constitutive or fundamental sense of the term – not least because it would be naive to assume otherwise due to the country’s (paramilitary) history of ‘dark social capital’ (Putzel 1997, Lea 2002, Loader and Walker 2006, Zedner 2009).

Thus, in terms of trying to both define and categorise this amorphous and context-specific nature of ‘shadow policing’, it must be accepted that such activities, their

capacities and demand are neither fixed nor static over time. However, as part of defining the nature and scope of non-state policing from the fieldwork, the authors have created a broad typology of ‘policing’ activities by such actors as set out in [Table 1](#). Due to the fluid nature of policing demand at the level of locale within the sample areas, it should also be noted that actors often worked across the multiple categories outlined; or delivered programmes and interventions on a cyclical basis or needs-based approach. Additionally, many of the bodies and groups contributing to the collective of ‘shadow policing’ work may have been conceived for one particular purpose or issue, but have morphed into dealing with (potentially multiple) others. With dynamics such as the ebb and flow of community problems, organisational capacity or even funding, groups such as Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) for example, while originally created to provide alternatives to paramilitary punishments, are presently involved in a range of mediation, community relations, education and service delivery roles (McEvoy and Mika 2001, Topping and Byrne 2012a). And while outside the scope of the current paper to chart the development of all such organisations involved in ‘shadow policing’, [Table 1](#) may be viewed as a broad ‘menu’ which defines the range of activities in which voluntary and community actors are involved.

In view of [Table 1](#), it may further be observed that to simply ‘recode’ the delivery of policing as acceptable or unacceptable – either set against neoliberal police ‘standards’ or political viability – belies the extent and complexity of non-state policing as conceived and delivered in Northern Ireland (Rose 1996, Johnston and Shearing 2003). Indeed, the post-conflict focus upon PSNI (as noted above) has created a ‘policing fallacy’ whereby ‘the public believe that the government possess the ability to control the crime rate and that a failure to do so represents a lack of service delivery’ (Leggett 2003 cited in Marks and Goldsmith 2006, p. 157). In this regard, it was an apt comment by a community-based respondent that in terms of ‘positioning’ their activity on a fluid spectrum state police legitimacy versus efficacy:

We’re no alternative to the PSNI. What we *are* is a response to a lack of policing in our own areas. So we aren’t out trying to be the ‘[named area] cops’. It isn’t like that at all. There was stuff [crime] going on, it wasn’t being policed [by the state], and it *needed* to be policed. So we developed a community response to that.

Therefore, in tentatively beginning to define ‘shadow policing’, at a general level the evidence would point to it as a collective of ‘territories’ of policing provision. In turn, this allows us to challenge purely state-centric perspectives on the delivery of policing and accepting, in a Foucauldian sense, that the power for policing comes from everywhere – the harnessing of which has the potential to deepen the democratic, common ‘good’ of policing (Shearing 2006). This point was made by one respondent, who stated that as part of the definitional complexity to this community ‘soft power’, yet simplicity of focus:

there’s so many different permutations and calculations, it really is a minefield at times who you’re dealing with and where they sit. But in all honesty, they’re all going towards the same objective at the end of the day – they all want a better place and a safer place for all the community to live in.

Beyond more general, macro-level definitions, evidence at an operational level is equally important in helping to supply a definition of ‘shadow policing’. Here, non-state policing at a local level may be imagined as a ‘point’ on a wider spectrum of civil society

Table 1. Typology of shadow policing activities.

1. Community Advocacy – The majority of respondents indicated that they frequently promoted the needs and fears within their communities. Furthermore, they usually are the first point of contact for local residents and service providers in the context of responding to community safety issues.

Specific Advocacy-based Policing Activities:

Operational policing; parades and protests; interface violence; quality of life issues; vulnerable, excluded and marginalised groupings.

2. Education and Intervention – Respondents indicated that continually the community sector is responsible for either delivering or facilitating programmes and initiatives aimed at supporting and educating local communities set within the context of broad policing issues.

Specific Education and Intervention Activities:

Community training; community education; identifying ‘at risk’ groups; policing, offending, and anti-social behaviours

3. Emergency Response – Representatives from the community remain the focal point for emergency responses relating to policing issues through either responding directly to an incident, or facilitating the relevant service provider

Specific Emergency Response Activities:

Interface violence; sectarian clashes; parading; general criminality/offending/anti-social behaviour

4. Partnerships – It was apparent that very often statutory agencies and service providers looked to identify community representatives to either facilitate or act as a bridge between the community and themselves on policing issues.

Specific Partnership Activities:

Working with PSNI; developing partnerships with ‘hard-to-reach’ groups; holding the wider criminal justice family and service providers to account at a local level; dealing with single issues or concern; multi-agency working; intra and inter-community working.

5. Prevention – Occupying a central role within the fabric of community life, it was clear that many organisations at a community level had a strong preventative role in terms of contributing to a variety of local factors which in turn, enhanced the safety and security of local areas.

Specific Preventative Activities:

Environmental and economic regeneration; fear of crime issues; awareness raising

6. Restorative Justice & Mediation – Within both Loyalist and Republican, it was evident that the local restorative justice agencies and their practices had a significant role in contributing to the policing landscape – working with individuals and the wider community to promote safer, inclusive communities and reduce offending behaviours; and mediate with stakeholders on policing issues

Specific Restorative Justice Activities:

Restorative practice, including mediations and liaison roles; public order events; brokering agreements on contentious issues; cross-community working

organising in the country – or its civic ‘hyper-organisation’ (Bayley 2008). Indeed, such civil society energy across a range of domains including health, education, politics, advocacy and human rights ‘has been inextricably linked with, and interconnected with, the political situation’ (Acheson *et al.* 2004, p. 41) – related to wider societal coping mechanisms for the pressures of internecine, armed conflict and sectarian division over nearly four decades.

More specifically, and developing out of what may be termed a policing and security ‘vacuum’, the historical separation of mainly working-class Republican and Nationalist communities from state police intervention has generated a sense of ‘security liminality’ in which the normal processes of state-based Peelian policing simply do not work (Mulcahy 2006, Byrne and Monaghan 2008). Thus, it is this liminal ‘space’ which supplies the operating platform upon which a variety of actors beyond the state existed can exist. And somewhere in between, it is Morrow (2006, p. 73) who states that:

where the state could not provide protection, which was the starting point for many Catholics and Nationalists and could easily emerge for less well protected working class Protestant communities ... there was an enormous reservoir of understanding for extra state [policing].

From Table 1, it is also clear that in terms of defining ‘shadow policing’ activities, the extent of such non-state policing, the nature of local policing liminality and willingness of actors to fill policing requirements is of interest (although mainly limited to urban, working-class areas). Because where such activity occurred, so too it fell outside standard legal, procedural and regulatory rules to which state policing organisations are usually subject – creating alternative rules of operation, informed by the local circumstance and ‘distance’ from the state police (Johnston and Shearing 2003). This in turn assisted in ‘hiding’ these policing contributions from official PSNI and political discourse by virtue of their lack of amenability to ‘accepted’ policing standards. Here, the *absence* of disorder and community breakdown may be a more useful metric of delivery as opposed to the *presence* of procedural police metrics, which for so long has underpinned state-based thinking on policing.

In terms of the definitional typology of ‘shadow policing’ in Table 1, it is evident that such activities are not concerned solely with ‘safety’ in a police-centric sense, but also acquire a *community* meaning in terms of providing a sense of belonging, cooperation and social support as an attribute of the (post) conflict circumstances in which these actor and organisations are embedded (Coleman 1994). Thus, ‘shadow policing’ may additionally be defined through its representation of a symbolic, alternate policing order above and beyond the empirical reality of such contributions (Delanty 2003, p. 46). This was highlighted through the assertion of one community organisation that claimed that as part of their ‘version’ of democratic policing:

the vast majority of community groups – 95%, are able to collaborate together ... enable them to reign in their own ambitions about something and say ‘so and so does that type of thing better than we do, so they should be the ones [with primacy]. So we [as a network of community groups] have that understanding’.

Defining ‘shadow policing’ through these socially informed rules of operation has also been supported through research by the Criminal Justice Inspection for Northern Ireland (CJINI) who, in attempting to examine the contributions of the community/voluntary sector to the criminal justice system, have accepted that:

in broad terms the voluntary and community sector was seen as the most appropriate for social inclusion and support work, including crime prevention, while the state sector was seen as fulfilling legal compliance and enforcement responsibilities. (CJINI 2006, p. 13)

But as a note of caution from the fieldwork, much of this activity is based upon sectarian lines, clearly not conducive to an overarching public policing ‘good’ for the country (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006).

In taking a step back from attempts to define ‘shadow policing’, precisely the problem for wider societal and indeed, state acceptance, of non-state policing contributions has been the politics of police reform, as noted above. With the primary focus of policing in Northern Ireland having been shaped by the imperatives of institutional-political reform over the past 15 years, this has effectively distracted attention from the unique, defining contexts which generated such networks of non-state policing in the first place (Rose 1996). This has resulted in the *de facto* marginalisation of those groups and organisations on both sides who participate in, or pose a challenge to, the centrality of policing by PSNI. In terms of capturing the current ‘state’ of these state/non-state arrangements, one interviewee stated:

there are all these organisations, and you can call them what you like, but there is a reluctance ... there is a reluctance to let go of some control. And I don’t mean you hand over policing [to community groups] wholesale, but to work more with, and give more to community groups and organisations which are already in existence. (*community respondent*)

However, this statement must be contextualised insofar as below the official policy ‘radar’, evidence does point to the fact limited levels of cooperation do exist between local police commanders and community stakeholders where necessary – even if not publicly ‘advertised’ beyond the remit of issue or relationship (Jarman 2006). With reference to organisations such as CRJI, who, according to CJINI act as key community ‘gateways’ for both PSNI and the wider criminal justice family, the complexity of these low-visibility contacts further defies binary conceptions of community support/opposition to PSNI (CJINI 2014).

Finally, by virtue of the unique operating circumstances in which ‘shadow policing’ exists, such contributions do not easily fall under ‘normal’ definitions of ‘police work’. A significant consequence of this in terms of defining such activities (in political or police-centric language) has been to label those actors and organisations as ‘affiliated to some kind of anti-community whose morality, lifestyle or comportment is considered a threat...’ (Rose 1996, p. 340). Thus, it may also be seen that policing (in a security sense) is but one strand of the country’s vibrant communities – with ‘shadow policing’ as an umbrella term to contextualise the ‘social’ and ‘community’ activities against which a community sense of security is situated alongside that of more traditional understandings of police work.

Structure and strategy: the ‘shape’ of shadow policing

In moving away from definitional issues associated with the nature ‘shadow policing’, a key issue rests with the broad ‘structure’ of this collective mass of policing (and community safety) providers within the sample areas. Therefore, the focus of this section shall be to consider the ‘shape’ of ‘shadow policing’ with reference to the aetiology of such policing production (Loader and Walker 2001).

An initial point of reference in regard to the ‘shape’ of ‘shadow policing’ is with the loose, networked structure of these policing actors (Martin 2012). Across both Loyalist and Republican communities, the fieldwork pointed to the fact such networks engaged in local policing activities in a fashion which was neither explicitly ordered, nor randomly conceived. This was most succinctly described by one Loyalist grouping, detailing that as part of the ‘shape’ community infrastructure:

what you have in this areas is very good [community] structure which has lots of things underneath it ... they would be a good central hub there ... [name] will complement the bits that everyone else is doing, filling the gaps, or developing new areas of working which no one else has the time or resources to do.

Beyond organisational rules and hierarchies, it was apparent that such networks in the sample areas used ‘relationships to influence behaviour and change minds ... [which] are more flexible, less hierarchical and therefore more responsive to ... shifts in the environment’ (Gilchrist 2004, p. 34). With the basis for ‘membership’ of these community networks generally derived from ‘interest’ rather than strictly geography (except across sectarian divides), it is precisely this fluid, amorphous dynamic which allowed these community-based policing contributions to have access into, and comprise of, virtually all latent community capacities and spheres of life – and to manage the complexity of those potential relations. This locally grounded ‘hyper-connectedness’ was noted by a community representative in so far as:

in [area] all those dots in that map behind you [points to wall chart with 250 community organisations], I will probably know somebody in every one of those organisations, and there might be ten others [groups] in [area] who will...

As the basis for a unique form of informal, networked and intelligence-led policing, such arrangements allowed each of the actor or ‘nodes’ to develop:

a detailed local knowledge of places and spaces ... rely to a great extent on their personal knowledge of and relationships with local residents, young people and of local groups, and they have the ability to act effectively because they each have a degree of local authority. (Jarman 2006, p. 35)

Further considering the structure of ‘shadow policing’ as networks of *informal* social control, such policing was grounded in local context, knowledge and need rather than structural, organisational outputs associated with PSNI for example. Thus, ‘shadow policing’ may be viewed as structured to reflect a broader policing philosophy whereby:

it makes no sense at all to treat an offender as if he had no family, never went to school or work, never visited the shops ... if you ignore the fact the boy who broke the window lives in the next street, that his dad drinks in the local pub ... who else ... can participate in mending ... the problems crime has created. (Alternatives 2000 cited in McEvoy *et al.* 2002, p. 201)

This point was clearly made by a Republican-based organisation involved in what they described as more ‘holistic’ approaches to community, policing and quality of life in so far as:

we have crèche facilities, after school clubs, young peoples' groups on a range of issues ... young men's and women's groups ... so we've a finger on the pulse of *every* aspect of community life. Many people would say this centre is the heartbeat of the community.

However, in terms of generic notions of the 'public good' of policing, it is important to note from the research that the collective mass of community-based policing actors were not organised as part of a grand 'project' to render alternative policing solutions to entire populations or communities. Rather, the importance of the informal networked approach lay with its tailored ability to 'swarm' around community issues or concerns and provide a number of different approaches and solutions beyond a 'police' response per se (Shearing and Wood 2003). Thus, to consider the delivery of 'shadow policing' (as above) without reference to the active, networked 'structures' in place to support such activities fails to consider the innovative nature of such networks; assumes that the delivery of such policing activity is a purely self-serving process; and that state policing provision is but optional as opposed to lacking requisite local knowledge and 'community sophistication' in such communities where it exists (Perry *et al.* 1976).

Additionally, a number of respondents made it clear that for PSNI to acknowledge these networked policing affiliations was also to 'accept' some aspect of state-authoritative transfer to what may be conceived as barely accountable individuals and actors (Loader 2000). Furthermore, there was also an acceptance that current community networks were only 'papering over' deep-rooted social, economic and sectarian issues which for so long had remained hidden under the veil of the conflict. In this respect, it was suggested by a number of respondents that the 'balance' of informality with 'openness' to state interventions needed to be addressed – especially where it was felt more – not less – state intervention and support was required.

But in terms of the foundational security effected through the presence of 'shadow policing' structures, it is important to note that this itself was predicated upon organised communities, trust, social capital, shared values and relatively low levels of crime. In terms of attempting to quantify the levels of local social capital, it was summarily stated by one organisation that:

everybody knows everybody. *Nothing* can happen without someone else knowing. And we have workers like [name] who could tell you the name of *every* young person in [area] – so it's impossible for anyone to do anything without someone knowing.

Interestingly, such embedded, networked community qualities would appear to mitigate additional factors such as deprivation and sectarianism, as potentially fatal to community organising and capacities in terms of dealing with their own policing affairs (Nolan *et al.* 2004, Matsueda 2006, Jones 2007).

But in terms of the structure of 'shadow policing', one outstanding issue which merits attention is *motivation* for underlying community networks to remain, in spite of wider policing progress. Related more closely to Republican/Nationalist communities because of traditional dissociations with state policing (Mulcahy 2006), it was clear from respondents that strong community infrastructure more generally developed out of the political goal of 'resisting' the state, together with police inability to deliver 'normal' policing set within the counter-terrorism context (Hamilton *et al.* 1995). However, in the post-ICP era of fully inclusive political support for the PSNI, a question seldom asked

relates to the extent to which limited contact with PSNI remains an incentive for such policing networks to continue.

While predating the current all-party support for policing, Ellison and Mulcahy (2001) have noted that mainly Republican/Nationalist communities remained 'satisfied' with the police by virtue of their absence at a local level. Though set within the contemporary context, more recent studies have evidence continuing dissociation between *both* Republican/Nationalist and Loyalist/Unionist communities – albeit grounded in perceptions of a poor policing service by PSNI rather than politics (Topping 2008a, 2008b, Byrne and Monaghan 2008, Topping and Byrne 2012a). Indeed, it is precisely within such communities where 'shadow policing' structures remains most vibrant. And while direct correlations between the quality of service by PSNI, post-conflict politics and community reliance upon alternative policing cannot readily be made, the evidence relating to a lack of policing by PSNI in such areas undoubtedly creates a dilemma for communities as to whether: they should endure state-police deficits; simply wait improvements; or rely on the community infrastructures to which they have become accustomed in order to deal with local policing issues – in spite of the potential to damage the 'public good' of state policing (Dupont and Wood 2006, p. 242). This contention was captured by one Republican respondent in a 'hard-to-reach' area, stating that:

to me, people are phoning us to deal with stuff rather than phoning the police ... because we'll find a way of dealing with it. Sometimes people don't *see* the situation a child is in – they just see the crime and the consequences of it ... it's trying to find ways of dealing with it without punishment beatings, or dragging them through the courts ... its local knowledge again.

Incorporating shadow policing?

Having examined the context, delivery and structure of 'shadow policing' activities, the outstanding question of harnessing or co-opting this latent 'soft power' extant across the country's (mainly) working-class Loyalist and Republican communities remains (Vaughan 2007). At a general level, the fieldwork suggests that the issue of incorporating, in a practical sense, the operational capacities of 'shadow policing' actors into an overarching state agendas or frameworks was under-developed (Johnston and Shearing 2003, Martin 2012). In Northern Ireland, this issue has been further complicated through political, paramilitary and state police actors who have monopolised the language and ownership surrounding policing and security – which in turn has raised issues of ceding power to networks of 'dark' social capital. The remainder this section will therefore seek to provide a more nuanced disaggregation of potential avenues for co-opting non-state policing provision into operational policing considerations as a challenge to the limiting institutional police narratives which have dominated the post-ICP era (Loader 2000).

The centre of any such debate related to co-opting 'shadow security' capacities must begin with an acknowledgement of the ICPs original vision for developing a regulatory *policing*, rather than just *police* system in the country (Topping 2008b). Here, Dupont (2006, pp. 107–108) clearly spells out that:

the selective implementation of the ... [ICP] recommendations which abandoned the broader security mandate in favour of more traditional forms of police supervision, makes clear the

normative challenges posed by nodal regulation ... old patterns represent a force of attraction which is hard to resist.

In addition to a 'path dependent' reluctance by PSNI to diversify policing beyond police (Topping 2008b, Marnoch *et al.* 2014), such sentiment was captured by one community representative who, in considering how more formal state-based relations might look, stated:

if you're going to talk about allowing it [community-based policing] to exist and to use its strengths and to capitalise on its voice and to use it as a conduit – we have to accept the organic nature of it and accept the fact it is independent....

The present research would also point to more subtle issues associated with co-opting 'shadow policing' provision and according such activities more than an 'unspoken' policing role. On a simple plain, the assimilation or at least incorporation of organisations and actors into state-centric modes of operation retains the potential to transform community networks and relations into different (and possibly diminished) set of relations by virtue of new, 'alien' forms of regulation and police operating logics. As pointed out by one respondent, it was somewhat ironic that introducing PSNI into networks of 'shadow policing' could actually destabilise community infrastructure through the removal of local 'ownership' on local policing matters (Tonkiss and Passey 1999). Thus, precisely *how* to render non-state contributions more accessible to the police and vice versa without damaging the vitality of local policing efforts is a fundamental issue to be negotiated on local terms rather than those set exclusively by the police or state. Although interestingly, the will for community groups to engage with formal state policing was apparent from interviews in so far as:

policing *can't* be left to the police. And I mean, if a local community want to take steps, and real positive steps in order to address various issues in that area, I think it should be encouraged, but it should be done in co-operation with the police.... (*community respondent*)

More broadly, respondents also indicated that co-opting their local efforts into programmes of joint action with PSNI should be viewed in terms of the potential added value which may be derived above and beyond traditional police-centric attempts at community engagement whereby PSNI would co-opt a whole spectrum of latent community capital (Dupont 2004, Brogden and Nijhar 2005). Furthermore, the ancillary benefits of tapping into these networks would not only recognise and reinforce the work already being done, but may further enable PSNI to gain access to services, knowledge and capital not otherwise available through the police-institutional modes of working (Gilchrist 2004). This was clearly articulated by one respondent who claimed that community bodies were themselves were a 'port' through which additional community capital could be accessed beyond police-centric attempts at community engagement:

cops need to take it [community-based policing] seriously. Because see *anything* that you want to know about [area], somebody from [named group] will tell you, and that's who done what to who, when they did it, what they did it with and how they got away – and *that's* what policing is about.

From the research, it was also clear that as part of co-opting non-state policing, consideration should also be given to the power which resides in these organisations to attract ‘voluntary compliance’ within and between populations in terms of both ideological and operational ‘buy in’ to policing (Shearing 2006). And while this has, to some extent, been informally developed between PSNI and community actors over the past decade, it was clear the question of formalising this approach for ‘normal’ crime and quality of life issues was yet to be fully answered (Jarman 2002, 2006, Topping and Byrne 2012a). This was succinctly noted by one group who indicated that policing needed to move beyond the PSNI’s version of reality insofar as:

the community is only a meaningful concept if people are allowed to organise, associate and articulate collective views. Which means ... working through organisations. So if you [PSNI] don’t trust or fund or support those organisations, and recognise what they are, you can’t deal *with* the community....

As a final proposition for co-opting ‘shadow policing’ into more formal (state) policing arrangements, the evidence would suggest that community-based policing provision also has the ability to ‘level’ the asymmetrical landscape of security and policing provision more generally (Stenson 2005). As part of Braithwaite’s (2000, p. 231) contention that security for the ‘poor’ (or marginal) is the best hope of security for the ‘rich’, applying this to Northern Ireland’s segregated populations, it was suggested by one community worker that ‘shadow policing’ was not just a strand of policing in terms of security per se, but was a:

a long term project. In the short term, it’s all the stuff [crime issues] we’re dealing with now.... This is for a safer, better, stronger community, people representing and supporting each other ... this is the future – strong residents’ groups, people giving leadership, providing a voice for those that are vulnerable.

In more general terms, it may be observed that much of the ‘tension’ residing in the potential co-option of ‘shadow policing’ actors lies with the issue of power and police authority. However, due to the changing nature of the policing landscape in the country (and not least political progress), it may be more useful to consider how these nodal community arrangements would fit with formal state policing mechanisms. With issues of accountability and governance key to such debates, existing evidence would suggest that current police-community forums, such as the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, are at best a ‘clumsy’ and bureaucratic fit over the complex networks of community actors and rationales (Topping and Byrne 2012a). Thus, it may be more apt to look at pre-existing community infrastructures to see how best they may be adapted for the necessities of administrative policing oversight. With organisations such as the West Belfast Community Safety Forum and Community Restorative Justice Ireland acting as central ‘hubs’ of shadow policing themselves, to some extent current accreditation and evaluation of these programmes by Government may provide a model through which to harness the organic nature of their existence in an acceptable format (CJINI 2008, 2009). It must be considered that the extent to which smaller, less organised (and often voluntary/ad hoc) groups and bodies could mesh with such a regime may further push their activities to the community periphery. But it may then be argued that a degree of ‘responsible leadership’ needs to be taken by such central, nodal bodies as the main point

of oversight through which state-bureaucratic oversight necessities could be introduced and administered with minimum disruption.

Ultimately, it must be recognised that the full and formal ‘co-option’ of entities involved in ‘shadow policing’ may remain, but an ideal, rather than practical, scenario from state and community positions alike. With a wide array, or degrees, of synergy already in existence, both efficacy and legitimacy in terms of policing delivery from state and community perspectives will, on the basis of the evidence, continue to shape the nature and feasibility of ‘shadow policing’ relations which cannot necessarily remain fixed or static over time.

Conclusion

In summary, the evidence presented in this paper points to what is a complex picture and definition of ‘shadow policing’ in terms of context, delivery and ‘shape’ of policing outside the state. In many respects, such complexity defies placing the activities of Northern Ireland’s policing ‘others’ into predefined categories or models; nor makes ‘shadow policing’ amenable to clear or quantifiable metrics of operation. Thus, the current paper has attempted to provide a more nuanced understanding of policing across Northern Ireland’s Loyalist and Republican communities from the perspective of the locale, the translation of which into more formal policing language should not presuppose viability or legitimacy.

In part, and outside the limiting parameters of police-institutional reform in the country, the trajectory of state ‘owned’ policing and that delivered through ‘shadow policing’ are in 2014 (in spite of their incompatibilities), ironically interlinked as part of the more ‘normalised’ community safety era dawning in Northern Irish policy. The initial post-ICP years were demonstrably about establishing PSNI primacy in all matters of policing and security. Yet more recently (and similarly to wider community safety shifts in England and Wales), there has been a degree of ‘softening’ governmental attitudes to co-opting our non-state policing actors – not least because of the finite and ever dwindling resources of PSNI. With the Criminal Justice Review (CJR) of 2000 having *de facto* excluded schemes involved in community-based policing as part of the wider criminal justice reforms in the country (CJR 2000, para.9.57), over a decade on the Department of Justice’s (DoJ) most recent community safety strategy has provided space to ‘explore’ the role of community-based contributions to the community safety initiatives (DoJ 2012).

Yet in spite of the extensive (and in many cases vital) role of ‘shadow policing’ as part of the local landscape, to merely ‘explore’ such contributions is symptomatic of a general sentiment by non-state actors ‘that their role in addressing community safety issues had gone un-noticed or unrecognised by statutory organisations, at least at an official level of discourse’ (Topping and Byrne 2012a, p. 63). However, with the pivotal role played by many community bodies in both reducing communal violence and promotion community cohesion, the long-term necessity for the state to draw on such capacities may become more apparent as part of the country’s more peaceful trajectory.

Across both Loyalist and Republican communities, it is also clear that non-state policing and security in the country occupies a significant ‘space’, or ‘foundational presence’ from which other community freedoms and organising flow. This point is particularly salient given the requisite need for basic levels of security to exist in the first place within transitional societies from which other developments can flow

(Ellison 2007). In view of the evidence, therefore, a relevant course of inquiry on both theoretical and practical levels – and especially for areas with conflicted policing arrangements – might be to move *beyond* security as we currently understand it in police-organisational sense and look at the freedoms non-state security governance helps generate in terms of education, health and welfare and consider the extent to which ‘shadow policing’ contributes to these ‘democratic goods’ rather than generating ‘security goods’ in isolation (Loader and Walker 2006). Indeed, this has significant implications as part of facilitating latent community ‘soft power’ as a means through which to persuade and influence populations at the bottom of the social, economic, educational and health hierarchies, as well as improve their quality of life (Walklate 2003).

But as the paper has argued, it is ultimately those non-state organisations on the ground within working-class Loyalist and Republican communities who act as the guardians of unseen community capital, resilience and safety – the absence of which would render those communities and areas less stable than if security and policing was delivered solely by PSNI, regardless of moral, political or policy arguments to the contrary. On the one hand, the issue therefore lies not necessarily with the providers of ‘shadow policing’ themselves, but with the state-institutional capacity to accept that Northern Ireland’s buoyant, post-conflict society would be less safe and secure without them (Nolan 2012). Although it could be additionally argued that the position of those involved in shadow policing lies with their collective ability to articulate and evidence their role in a more meaningful fashion to the statutory sector.

But on the other hand, the salutary lesson is that police reform as witnessed in the country has never been flexible enough to incorporate, in a meaningful fashion, ‘alternative’ policing providers in spite of their verifiable contributions. But with policing and justice matters now devolved to Northern Ireland, it may provide the opportunity to redress this position and provide a greater voice to ‘shadow policing’ stakeholders as part of self-determined and tailored security solutions. Thus, in attempting to capture ‘shadow policing’ as a continuing ‘trait’ of Northern Ireland’s post-conflict society, the current *status quo* can be observed, however, through the lens of one community representative, who simply noted:

I think it’s just madness – here you’ve got vibrant communities ... yet we [as a society] don’t see the potential in using those people, using those people to design engagement with the police.

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