
Reviewed by Kris Christmann

The way that the police deal with protest and dissent is becoming more militarized, and the controversial tactic of “strategic incapacitation” is more widespread. To challenge the legitimacy of our leaders in North America (or indeed Western Europe) is to be confronted with fortified summit sites, phalanxes of paramilitary “Robocop” units, an array of “non-lethal” weapons, escalated coercive strategies, pre-emptive arrests and indiscriminate intelligence gathering. While this account is depressingly accurate, how should we explain these changes?

In answering this question, Wood argues against explanations which simply demonize the police, reduce their behaviour to an epiphenomenon of capitalism, or rely on micro-sociological level accounts. What is required is to locate the militarization of protest policing within the logics and practices of neoliberal restructuring. This means adding more actors and a more richly dimensional account. What we are offered here is an original argument which outlines an overlooked research agenda in protest policing. I cannot do full justice to its complexity in a brief review, but the author charts how periodic political and economic crisis has given rise to waves of protest, which in turn has led to increasingly polarized interactions between the police and protestors, and a hardening of the “police identity”. In attempting to maintain their power and legitimacy when “on the job” trouble occurs, policing agencies have turned to a range of private sector actors and defence industries who offer a range of “best practice” solutions, all of which prioritize militarized strategies and equipment. This dynamic is driven by the increasingly globalized field of policing, where police professional organizations promote, share and generate said “expertise” through international conferences and training deployments. Moreover, the dominant logic of intelligence-led policing and anti-terrorism initiatives has redefined the calculus of threat and security, where the unpredictability of organized and determined protestors can be conceived as “somehow similar to terrorists”. The end result of this integration and diffusion of innovation has resulted in a drive towards strategic incapacitation, one which handily serves vested corporate interests.
Wood charts these new contours of policing efforts to control social movements, and in doing so provides some richly textured analysis from secondary and public source data. These theoretical accounts are complimented by detailed examples of how pepper spray and tasers have been adopted by police agencies and case studies which attempt to explain national and local variations in the militarization of protest policing across four North American cities.

While I find much of what is said to be convincing, let me comment on what I think are a few of the weaknesses of the study. There is only the sparsest discussion of methodology and one reference to “field notes”; hence, it appears that her insights are largely gained from secondary sources. This means that we are offered only an external view of police decision making as no attempt is made to interview senior ranks or industry insiders. Gaining such a perspective could have strengthened the central argument. Later in the text, Wood concedes that “while the direct influence of private security and defence corporations on policing decisions ... is impossible to determine conclusively, it is not farfetched to suggest that the collaboration between public police and private industry may be influencing policing strategies” (119). This is to rather temper the thrust of the earlier assertions and perhaps why the central backdrop of fingering neoliberalism feels undeveloped in the study.

One would have also expected a more explicit engagement with the repression literature, as seen in the work of Jennifer Earl (2003, 2009, 2011), Earl and Soule (2006) or Goldstein (1978). This seems a missing element as is the role given to what are central actors, the state and key political elites. I have in mind a more careful consideration of what international summits and related events actually are. In part, are they not rituals or dramatizations by which our rulers justify and legitimize themselves through a very particular form of prestige? As Barker (2001) has argued, every administration attempts to establish and cultivate the belief in its legitimacy. With so much invested in this ritual and when pursued with such intensity, the exorbitant costs of the “security” apparatus, the bewildering array of restrictions on protest activity and the militarized response towards any dissenting voices become less surprising (although no less objectionable).

A greater recognition of the dilemma presented by a shift towards “transgressive” protest would have also benefited the work. When protestor tactics blur into criminality, how should this be addressed by those tasked with enforcing the law? From a police perspective, there is a difference between policing public order and policing public disorder, with the later usually ensuring an authoritarian response. Finally, the discussion of the role of police culture and the idea of “police personality” is found rather late (in the penultimate chapter) and feels rather truncated. I would have preferred a deeper exploration of this, although admittedly this would mean a longer book.
Notwithstanding these comments, *Crisis and Control* is a valuable addition to the growing critical literature on current protest policing practices, and it deserves to be widely read. The study is centred on developments in policing principally within Canada and the US, not Europe, but having said that it will be of interest to anyone wanting to understand the origins, organizational styles and police repression of social movements. I get the sense that *Crisis and Control* has been written for a variety of readers, not simply an academic audience. There is much here to stimulate thought and prompt reflection, not least because Wood also offers us at least some tentative insights about how police militarization can be resisted and opposed. Given that the move to paramilitarism and strategic incapacitation imperils some of our most cherished civil liberties, this is perhaps the most urgent issue.

Kris Christmann, Applied Criminology Centre, University of Huddersfield, UK.

References


D. Rothe and D. Kauzlarich (eds), *Towards a Victimology of State Crime* (London: Routledge, 2014), 263pp, £95.00

Reviewed by Sandra Walklate

It is now almost commonplace to observe that national and international appreciation of the shape and form of victimhood has undergone significant transformation. No longer is the concept of victim confined to the innocent victim of violent crime that informed criminal injuries compensation initiatives in the 1960s. Contemporarily, the concept of victim and the contours of victimhood have been transformed. From hate crime to genocide, victimology has had an important presence in setting the agenda that has contributed to this transformation. This has not