

Reviews

**McCulloch, Jude (2001) *Blue Army, Paramilitary Policing in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
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The attacks on the US on September 11, 2001 spotlight the dilemmas of balancing the needs in the liberal democracies for security against the preservation of the civil liberties that are supposed to distinguish these societies from the depressingly long list of brutal police states. This makes the publication of this scholarly but highly readable book most timely and it should be mandatory reading for criminologists, legal scholars, democratic politicians, police and other criminal justice practitioners around the world. McCulloch, an academic with a background in community law, provides a thorough review of the international literature on paramilitary and counter-terrorist policing and provides a sustained historical and contemporary analysis of tough forms of police organisation and practice in the state of Victoria in Australia. She aims 'to explore the gap between the saying and the doing of counter-terrorism...operationalised through paramilitary policing' (p14). This is achieved by examination of current and historical policing and, to an extent, military practices. Her sources range from official policy papers, coroners' and official inquiry reports, to a range of 'alternative' sources. The latter provide a voice, through the research process, for less powerful groups that experience harsh policing beyond the purview of more affluent citizens.

In left-liberal circles, the Victoria police have long been seen as trigger-happy in their use of force in dealing with criminal incidents involving weapons, political demonstrations, labour disputes, alleged terrorists, Aboriginal, and mentally disturbed suspects and offenders. The Victoria Police shot and killed just over twice as many people between 1984 and 1995 as all the other forces in Australia and concern was expressed about this in an Amnesty International Report in 1995. Much of the book consists of a detailed, forensic presentation of case studies of what is claimed to be excessive use of force by police, in conflict with the avowed principle of minimal force by police organisations in the liberal democracies. McCulloch focuses particularly on the role of Victoria's paramilitary, counter-terrorist Special Operations Group (SOG). This group, set up in 1977, remained officially secret until 1979, in part because of its role in diplomat protection. The bombing of the Hilton Hotel in 1978 aimed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting, provided the impetus for the growth of this shadowy group, seemingly with limited accountability to the democratic process at any level. According to McCulloch, the culture, and organisation of SOG is militarist and macho and its personnel are socially withdrawn from the rest of society. It is seen as reproducing a violent, aggressive, misogynist, and racist masculine brotherhood. Given the growing integration between 'normal' police and SOG, this is viewed as contaminating, blurring the boundaries between the subjective and behavioural capacities and qualities soldiers need to kill the enemy and the more restrained capacities and qualities required for minimal, liberal, policing by consent. The roll call of deaths at police hands is seen as testament to these developments.

It is difficult, as a non-Australian, to evaluate the impressive looking forensic evidence and to assess to what extent it involves - as I suspect police managers would predictably respond - a selective focus on worst practice. Instead, I will focus on McCulloch's theoretical narrative. She rejects police claims that they are responding to an increasingly violent and disorderly society, preferring to emphasise the role of police departmental philosophy and policies (p105), and the search by politicians for scapegoats low on the social hierarchy (p217). This is not seen merely as a function of local fashion or the play of party politics. Rather, McCulloch provides a historical and contemporary 'political economy of policing' (p52), a broad neo-Marxist theoretical narrative in which capitalist economic forces are structurally determinant in the last instance, and includes a fascinating class analysis of the Ned Kelly phenomenon. The UK model for the Victoria police was less the Metropolitan Police Service and more the repressive, colonial, Royal Irish Constabulary. It is claimed that, historically, the Victoria Police

were...a repressive force, used to overcome Aboriginal resistance to dispossession, and later to put down agitation by independent miners, small farmers, workers, and others opposing government policy...(they)...have been integral to the establishment and maintenance of hierarchical social and economic divisions ...major shifts in policing style and organisation ...can be tied to shifts in the nature of the economy...Police have at times used excessive force, escalated conflict and disorder...this history...and the overlaps in the culture and role of the police and military are integral to the formation of police culture and practice today (p52).

Moreover, in the globalised economy, the nation state is waning at the expense of the international corporation and other capitalist organisations. In this context, increased international exchanges between the police and military have created a homogenising effect, escalating the use of force and the militarisation of police organisations even in countries like Australia, with lower levels of internal conflict and violence than, for example the US and UK (p215).

However, a disadvantage of this type of analysis is that it tends to detach the study of social control from the behaviour and environments of the populations being governed, partly in order to avoid blaming the victims of tough policing. As a governmentality theorist, I emphasise that these environments and populations are not passive and contain sites and agents of governance, often in competition with agents of public government. Policing must be understood in terms of the everyday interactions between police and those they police. McCulloch's analysis is, hence, somewhat at odds with the claim (pp 216-7) that globalisation and the (neo-liberal) retreat from egalitarian, welfare state policies is associated with 'racial, ethnic and religious tensions ...heightened as the pressures of declining wages and conditions, unemployment, decreased social welfare, job insecurity, rapid change and environmental degradation...' (p216).

McCulloch's advocacy for the poor would be enhanced were she to admit that there is abundant international evidence from the UK and elsewhere that these conditions are usually associated with family and community breakdown, poor mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, troubled masculinity and behavioural problems among boys and young men, the growth of inter-ethnic and other forms of social violence, and illegal economies. These problems cannot be easily documented by crime statistics alone, but have certainly afflicted the demographically complex Australian cities and are part of the heavy price we have paid for the neo-liberal transformation of the Anglophone countries. These changes alter the environment and agenda for policing, criminal justice, and other control agencies, even if they do not excuse trigger-happy cops.

McCulloch's account has a deterministic flavour and provides a strange echo of the mantra of the Thatcherite right that you cannot buck the markets and that there is no alternative to globalised neo-liberal policies. On the contrary, to echo Max Weber, Marxists have no monopoly over political economy (Hindess 1998; Stenson & Edwards 2001; Stenson 2002). The 'economy' is a field of political and cultural relations involving values, choices, and human agency at every point. Hence, the dangerous conditions of the cities are largely a product of cultural fashions among policy makers and the hard won (but alterable), political and cultural success of the neo-liberal right. This also holds for police organisation and culture and while McCulloch's analysis of police culture is insightful, we need much more primary *empirical* research into the patterns of police and military culture in order to understand sovereign, state technologies of rule. The crisis at the time of writing, stemming from the attacks on New York and Washington illustrate that, while critics of the left provide a valuable sentinel role for the defence of liberty, the survival of the broadly liberal democratic societies still requires the (sometimes heroic and selfless) work of disciplined 'bands of brothers'. This will be particularly so for Australia, given its geo-political location. There remain huge questions about how to harmonise the cultures of sovereignty and security with the freedoms and tolerant values that most of us cherish.

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