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Community Policing in Comparison

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If community policing in Western democracies is often a unilateral action of the police promoting community self-rule, in most of the rest of the world, informal policing in communities is ubiquitous, popular, and sometimes excessive. Bracketing the Western ideology of community policing as state-initiated and -controlled (top-down) allows to discover a rich field of informal policing widely practiced by communities in Asia, Latin America, or Africa (bottom-up). Using secondary data as material, the article suggests accounting for these patterns of community policing with a state-centered model. Key variables identified by the authors are the service delivery capacity of the state, the dominant ideology, indirect or dual rule, political alliances as well as the framing of opportunities by civil society entrepreneurs or police managers, and available cultural repertoires of policing.

Keywords: *community policing; policing in Africa; vigilantism; informal policing; democratization*

Reflecting on the American experience, Buerger (1994, p. 270) deplored the view that community policing (CP) is mainly a “unilateral action from the police” in spite of a rhetoric ascribing powers to the communities to regulate themselves. This observation is not a valid one in Africa. Security in many parts, and perhaps most of Africa, seems, on the contrary, a unilateral action from the communities. What is difficult to achieve in the United States and Western democracies in general exists in abundance, perhaps in excess, in African towns and villages. There, community self-rule is ubiquitous, informal policing a net contributor to local safety enjoying popularity, whereas it is the state that appears distant to local residents and sometimes inhospitable. CP in Western democracies is a policy in search of a community; in Africa, we may argue without too much exaggeration that it is a community in search of a state.

Using the term CP to discuss state formal policing and informal policing together is unconventional. For most authors, CP refers to a particular style of formal,

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de jure, state policing. *CP* is defined as philosophy or a strategy of the police, not the communities. In turn, “informal policing,” the “policing of everyday life,” or “community-generated policing” (Schärf, 2000) are favorite terms to describe a de facto policing taking place (mostly) outside of the regulatory framework of the state. *CP* in this sense is more than a *terminus technicus*: There is an ideological twist in it. The terms refer to a legal form of policing well anchored in the nation state with its Weberian bureaucratic model as sole and unique source of the legitimate power. Community-generated informal policing, in this context, has a dubious legitimacy, seems slightly anachronistic, and sometimes subversive and, at the very best, problematic. This diagnosis, of course, is in sharp contrast with the views of those communities who practice informal policing. To them, it is the state that is often problematic, sometimes irrelevant, whereas informal policing brings the otherwise absent public good of security in their daily experience.

The conflict between these two views is grosso modo reproduced by the two main schools of criminology in Africa. With few exceptions, South African criminologists, as noticed by Buur and Jensen (2004), have been prompt to point to the inherent dangers of informal policing, its dubious compatibility with human rights, and the inherent lack of accountability.

Academics, by contrast, seem largely to have shunned the phenomenon of vigilantism in South Africa, as a hostile and anachronistic interloper in the new nation-state and have instead concentrated on exploring the values and normative reach of the new Constitution and human rights. (Buur & Jensen, 2004, p. 139)

Informal policing is associated with a plethora of abuses of all sorts: criminalization, gangsterism, commodification, warlordism, terrorism radicalization, ignorance, and abuse of basic human rights (Minnaar, 2001; Schärf, 2000; Shearing, 1997). Although acknowledging the risks, the Nigerian school of criminology has organized a barrage position with a number of empirical studies demystifying informal policing. Informal policing is shown to be omnipresent in poor communities, to separate between civil and criminal cases (Okerafoeze, 2006), to work (Meagher, 2006), to be popular (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004), and to be anchored in a system of local traditional governance (Heald, 2002).

A similar impatience with studies of policing “importing” preconceived views of the nation-state can be observed in policing studies in China. Wong (2000, 2007) recently judged sterile and irrelevant studies of imperial policing using a Weberian/Western state model. Like his colleagues of the Nigerian school of criminology and others (Buur & Jensen, 2004), he calls for more descriptive/empirical/anthropological than normative analyses, more bottom-up/inductive than top-down/deductive research designs, putting brackets over preconceived and imported ideals of the nation state, human rights, and legitimate policing. These calls revive the “*epoche*” (bracketing) methodology Edmund Husserl advocated in his critical phenomenology: Put into

brackets for one moment claims of existence (ideology) and provide good detailed descriptions of the phenomenon as it presents itself, without prejudices, to the researcher.

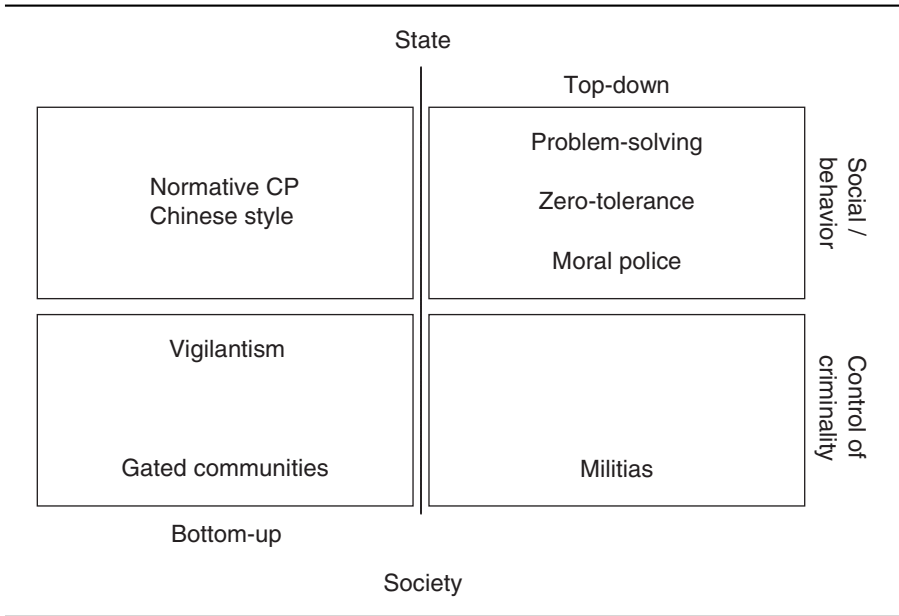
Such calls are methodologically legitimate, as the nation state is far from an empirical reality in a good number of regions of the globe. Although the rhetoric of “criminalizing” informal policing can serve the normative long-term goals and enterprise of state builders, they might not correspond to the reality of informal policing in an incomplete and weak state. Calls for a phenomenological analysis of CP might be more useful in the short term to identify the reality of policing, how security is produced in various contexts, and the concrete daily interactions between civil society and the state. And such research might prove quite useful for international cooperation projects in the security sector and UN civil police operations in postconflict situations. As “restructuring” and police reform are becoming a core task in the mandate of peacekeeping/building missions, programs run the clear and distinct risk of being subjected to the same irrelevance argument made by Wong (2007) at a more academic level. Although western police officers turned overnight into experts in cooperation will always find willing local police managers ready to embrace the ideal of the nation state that they implicitly import piece by piece, and the dollars that go with it, these projects might be taken place in such different states that their failure is programmed in advance.

Using an aerial nonideological perspective, the methodology of the *epoche* and a cross-national one, we will propose a nomenclature or a typology of CP styles independently of their origin in the state or the communities. After having done that and provided a brief overview of how patterns of CP seem to vary regionally worldwide, we will turn to the more challenging task of attempting to elaborate a model for understanding the constitution of these styles and their regional patterns. One key argument will be that the notion of the state should be “brought in” the sociological analysis of CP. The type of state, we believe, is likely to produce specific forms of policing might have intuitive immediate value or sense for top-down state-led and -controlled policing approaches, but building on social movement literature, we will argue that community-led initiatives are also highly dependent on the type of state or, more precisely, by what we will call the “political opportunity structure” (POS). The article will use secondary data offered by the literature as material to both propose a classification of CP styles and substantiate hypotheses that we will develop for a heuristic model.

A Typology of CP

Unloaded from a normative character, the (slightly adapted) distinction Schärf (2000) suggests between top-down and bottom-up CP is a good starting point to operate a first distinction between two main patterns of CP (see Figure 1). Some CP initiatives, then, originate from and are controlled by the state (top-down), whereas

Figure 1
A Typology of CP



others originate from and are controlled by civil society (bottom-up). It is fair to reality to add the caveat that this distinction will not “hold” perfectly empirically. As Buur and Jensen (2004) correctly state, empirically it will always be difficult to tell exactly what is state and what is society as the two are in constant negotiation over the exact location of the frontier between them. When this happens, more “Kleingeld”¹ (“pennies”) or description will be needed by researchers to discuss their cases.

CP “bottom-up” can take the form of *vigilantism* if it involves as one main strategy the use of violence. It can take also other forms closer to the notion of *social control*, as in China for instance, when by definition it does not include the use of violence. Vigilantism, in particular, finds often its origin in a social movement (bottom-up strategy) crystallizing in an urban environment (Bakassi Boys, Cape Amalgamated Taxi Association in Cap town, and the People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) movement in South Africa, townships in South Africa) or in tribal communities in rural environment (Sungusungu in Tanzania, the Rondas in Peru, and Peoples’ Courts in South Africa) claiming to take the law in their own hands. The degree of institutionalization of vigilantism, as we will argue, varies from mostly rejection (South Africa) to partial institutionalization (Tanzania). At the far end of the institutionalization, once vigilant groups are fully incorporated in the state, they may change in nature. They may indeed become “militias” run now by the government

as auxiliary police or military.² This is, however, not an ineluctable fate as legislative frameworks can be imagined in which vigilant groups continue to respond to “local traditional leaders” in a legal framework of local governance (Heald, 2002).

Another version of the bottom-up origin of CP can be found in the spread of “*gated communities*” and “neighborhood watch schemes,” particularly in the United States. There are many cases, however, where the neighborhood watch schemes are initiated by the police who encourage residents to adhere to such programs. China CP style, as argued by Wong (2000, 2007), corresponds also to a bottom-up process deeply anchored in the traditional values of Confucianism. Unlike vigilantism (use of violence) and gated communities (creating safe private zones through physical inaccessibility), it emphasizes policing through the inculcation of social norms by clans, families, and other groups. The model institutionalized during imperial China and consolidated by the “*massline*” ideology of popular China involves a degree of control by the state of the informal as well as its transformation.³

Top-down CP initiatives are defined here as being initiated and controlled by the state. Such a strategy can take the form of instituting *militias*. Militias are auxiliary police invested with policing powers (such as the power to arrest) and are recruited, trained, and paid by the state that they serve. Uganda and Sudan, to take only two examples from many, maintain such militias. In Sudan, these militias called the *Shurta Shabia* (popular police), are paid “informally” through the system of the *Zhat* (or *Zakhat*) an informal Islamic solidarity tax system that has been colonized and captured by the state after the 1989 coup (Baillard & Haenni, 1998). Militias can have various goals: They can be tasked with pure public order and territorial control tasks (the Local Defense Units⁴) or, in some cases, function as “*moral police*” (as it is partly the case for the *Shurta Shabia* in Sudan). *Western/European community police* also fit in the top-down strategy. Unlike the “militias” form, CP in this form is performed by one division or department of the regular police or the whole police. Whereas militias are auxiliary police, often poorly trained, inadequately equipped, and have a military style, Western CP involves in general more training, an investment in and the use of social sciences (problem solving) in policing, a focus on vulnerable groups, and more governance (partnerships, transparency, and consultations) with communities resulting in a “negotiated policing agenda.” CP Western style involves a shift of the issues that are seen to be relevant to policing: Small public order problems (labeled as *incivilities*) and quality of life issues are often the main concerns of CP departments. Similarly, there is an organizational or methodological shift of emphasis: Problems rather than individual incidents are the unit of work of police (Goldstein, 1979).

Regional Variations

In Africa, although there have been numerous attempts to import laterally the top-down Western approach to policing—which takes place in a context of limited state

resources—it must be underscored that factors, such as incomplete state building, high levels of criminality, rampant official corruption, and inadequate resources accompanied with a correlative limited trust of the population in the police make it complex to fully adopt an Euro-American-centered police style (see for instance, Frühling, 2007, for Latin America). CP, in African states, takes often a radically different shape from the known models in Western democracies. In a number of cases, CP is understood as vigilantism or involving community-based quasipolice groups in managing public order at the community level (Nigeria, Tanzania, and Kenya). Vigilant CP is also widespread in Latin America (see for instance, García & Cristina, 2004, and Gitlitz & Rojas, 1983). The degree of institutionalization of vigilantism varies across states. Tanzania is a relative strong case of institutionalization of vigilantism. Nigeria is a case of partial institutionalization. Institutionalization will also vary across time depending on the government. A first government may encourage it while the next will not (Peru, Philippines). South Africa is a case of stronger “state resilience” to vigilantism but, as discussed by Burr and Jensen (2004), the South African state’s response to vigilantism is selective, oscillating between repression and toleration depending on the group level of violence, whereas at local level, vigilant groups are often likely to find more receptive African National Congress (ANC) authorities.

Africa is also a fertile ground for militias. Uganda, Sudan, and, at one point of time, Tanzania have all created auxiliary forces, often poorly trained, disciplined, and paid, to assist the police in maintaining public order. Uganda maintains Local Defense Units throughout the country that can be mobilized for specific purposes and events by the police (see Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2006). These auxiliary police are cheap, ubiquitous, and in a number of cases are the sole representations of the state in the most remote areas of a country. One of these auxiliary police, the *Shurta Shabia* in Sudan, paralleled the constitution by the Khartoum regime of military auxiliaries in the early 1990s—the so-called Popular Defense Forces—with a double agenda to control territory and Islamize society.

China might be a fully original case of CP by itself. Wong (2000) states that 80% of villages perform self-governance tasks, including public security. However, it does not seem that villages maintain vigilant groups. Rather, enforcement is achieved mainly through informal social control channels such as education, persuasion, the inculcation of moral values, and discipline. CP, in China, takes the form of social prevention rather than enforcement. The state in China maintains the monopoly over repressive policing tasks. As argued by Wong (2007), “strong communities” (mostly rural families, clan) organized around the model of the “Kongfu” combined with a religious respectively state ideology (Confucianism and Chinese “popular mass line” ideologies) are key features of CP Chinese style.

CP Western style might also be taking distinct avenues in the United States and Europe. Popular schemes such as neighborhood watch communities in the United States enjoy less popularity in Europe. CP in Europe takes rather the form of new methodologies (problem solving), policing in network (partnerships), and local

governance mechanisms involving consultations with civil society for the definition of the police agenda, a stronger emphasis on social sciences, training, communication, and transparency. This top-down approach involves in general the decentralization or deconcentration of police services (Belgium, France, Spain), but always apparently with a strong concern that security remains a monopoly of the government. In Europe, there seems to be more concern than in the United States with the privatization of security. In their study of the recent community police reform in Britain, Kempa and Johnston (2005) argue that the creation of police auxiliaries (community support officers) and the “extended family” doctrine is an attempt by the police to remain in control and maintain sovereignty over neighborhood and everyday policing in a field characterized by increasing demands for security and competing offers by the private sector.

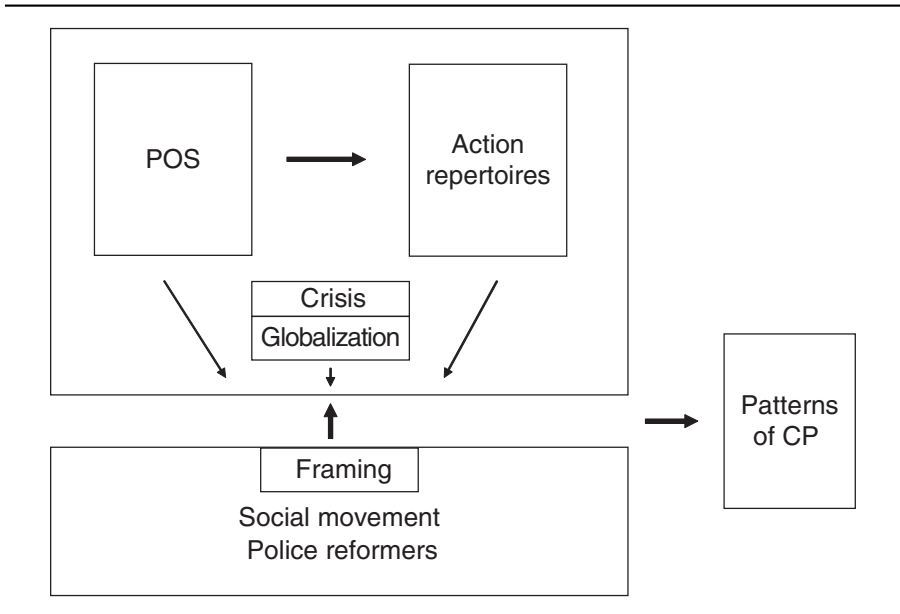
A Theoretical Model

The intention of this section is to suggest a model explaining patterns of regional variation of CP. Patterns of CP, we will argue, relate to features of the state or, using a more encompassing concept well established in social movement studies, the POS.⁵ Theoretical models of social movements invite themselves in the analysis of CP bottom-up as modern informal policing is generally associated with claims of social movements. In the past decade, the sociology of policing has also started using state-centered models to explain variation of style in policing (Della Porta, 1996; Della Porta & Reiter, 1998; Wisler & Kriesi, 1998). POS features, we will suggest in this article, are relevant to both bottom-up and top-down CP approaches. POS features particularly relevant to policing in our view are the service delivery capacity of the state (weak states/strong states), the state dominant ideology, and its tradition of dealing with challengers, as well as the elite division or “configuration of power” with respect to CP.

The model will also acknowledge that institutional change is generally and historically precipitated by a context of a crisis. Institutional change represents a paradigm change (Kuhn, 1962) triggered by “anomalies” in the previous paradigm. There must be a loss of faith in the existing institutions and a sense that the time is ripe for establishing a new set of rules to deal with insecurity. Such a situation will be called here a *crisis*. For early risers, crises are the likely trigger of the introduction of changes in CP, whereas for late risers, other mechanisms such as diffusion and globalization are at work.

Crises and institutional opportunities, we will argue, to have an impact need to be framed as such by actors. In bottom-up processes leading to CP (when the initiative is with social groups) or in top-down processes (initiative by the state), framing respectively by social movements and states of the issues at stake and the solution to the problem will further determine how CP will take shape eventually. Although framing is highly context dependent, it can be facilitated by traditional *repertoires*

Figure 2
A Model of Analysis



(Gamson, 1975) of policing. These repertoires function as “tool kit” (Swidler, 1986) that can be mobilized by civil society entrepreneurs or police reformers in favor of some forms of policing. The availability of these repertoires and their nature, in turn, will vary depending on the degree of institutionalization of the nation state. In ex-British colonies for instance, where to some degree, a dual policing and legal system was well established, it is likely that traditional nonstate policing repertoires are still in good memory, partially in use, and likely to constitute important stocks of resources for those political entrepreneurs who are advocating informal policing.

The model of analysis is sketched in Figure 2. The discussion that follows is an elaboration of a number of hypotheses using secondary data from the literature on CP, informal policing and the state.

The service delivery capacity of the state. One of the key variables associated with vigilant forms of CP is the lack of service delivery capacity of the state. Weak states, incomplete states from a state-building perspective, create a “policing gap.” In an analysis of vigilant mobilization against cattle rustlers in rural Peru, Gitlitz and Rojas (1983) argue that vigilantism emerged in those provinces that had been only recently pacified and had witnessed only little state building. In Guatemala, lynching

mobs burgeoned after the peace agreement of 1996 in rural areas where courts are distant, staffed with judges speaking Spanish only while the population speaks Mayan dialects, a highly complex legal system, and an inefficient criminal justice system (García & Cristina, 2004).

In Africa, there is arguably a high correlation between chronically underresourced police institutions and vigilantism. Tanzania, for instance, has a ratio of 1 police officer to 2,000 inhabitants.⁶ In Uganda, the ratio is 1 officer to 1,800 inhabitants.⁷ These numbers pale in comparison to the average of 1 to 350 in Europe for instance. The United Nations' recommendation is 1 police officer for 450 inhabitants. In low-policed areas, communities might be tempted to take the law into their own hands in contexts of crisis (see below). Buur and Jensen (2004) believe that there is a direct causal relationship between the weakness of the state and vigilantism.

The state might be indeed tempted to tolerate or even encourage vigilantism to compensate its notorious lack of policing capacity.⁸ Alternatively, states might take the initiative by establishing auxiliary forces or, in our terminology, militias. Militias might indeed be a favorite choice for states as they are cheap,⁹ require less training, and remain under the control of the state. A further advantage of militias is their knowledge of the territory they control as their members are often recruited from the local communities. Militias, per definition here, have full policing authorities. The downside of militias is, however, that they might be vulnerable to corruption and human rights abuses and, as a matter of fact, worsen the problem of crime.

Vigilantism is unlikely in high service delivery capacity states. Although some form of "delegation" (see neighborhood watch schemes and private security) exists, strong states are less likely to delegate policing powers valued, in a Weberian tradition, as a "nonnegotiable state monopoly." To "reach" communities, police reforms in nation states are likely to involve decentralization rather than delegation of policing competencies to civil society. Decentralization or, as in constitutionally centralized states, deconcentration of services means that policing (strategic planning, budget, and even police laws) is delegated to subnational level of government.

The (state) ideology is a factor that plays an important role in the emergence and *degree of institutionalization* of vigilantism or other forms of informal policing. The state ideology is a "discursive opportunity" (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004, for instance) or "dominant ideology" (Althusser) that fits or not with informal policing. In Tanzania, for instance, the Sungusungu vigilant groups have been encouraged and institutionalized as they fitted with the Nyerere's ideology of village socialism and community self-reliance (Abrahams, 1987; Heald, 2002). Their institutionalization, Heald (2002) indicates, has been only partial. She argues that although some regulations have been passed, the cooptation of the group has been mainly informal and subject to short-term changes in policies.

In Sudan, the new state ideology after the 1989 coup was instrumental in the *creation* or strengthening of paramilitary and auxiliary policing institutions (popular defense and popular police), institutions that played an important role in the jihad against the

South, the Islamization of society, and the marginalization of competing local Islamic congregations in Darfur or the eastern provinces.¹⁰ Zellman (2006):

Institutionalized as the Popular Defense Force (PDF), this semi-formal paramilitary structure was legislated into existence in 1989 with the Popular Defense Act along with Turabi's other populist initiatives which promoted universal free education (instituted primarily in the North only), a new focus on rural populations including outreach to previously disenfranchised Muslims from remote areas such as the Fur in Darfur and the Beja in the East, and other "popular" security agencies such as the Popular Police Corps and Popular Neighborhood Committees. . . . "[They] were intended to counter the popular support enjoyed by the Ansar and the Khatmiyya, which the NIF [National Islamic Front] sought to eliminate and replace. Of these, the PDF was the most significant, since its final aim was to replace the army and thereby eternalize Islamist rule as propagated by the NIF," the Ansar and Khatmiyya being rival Islamic parties with the former led by the previous elected Prime Minister, Sadiq al Mahdi. (p. 19)

In China, Confucianism and *mass line* modern community party ideology combined to solidify communal/clans/families to deal with public security issues.¹¹ In Western democracies, ideology is also at play in CP. Clifford Shearing (1997) provides for an interesting discussion of the neoliberal ideology and its impact in CP initiatives (gated communities, privatization of policing, and neighborhood watch schemes). In France, the French socialists, although supporting and having initiated the programs of decentralization and "police de proximité" during the Mitterrand presidency, were viscerally opposed giving the local mayors the responsibility to head the Local Council of Security in place of the prefects as figure of the central government.

In Africa, "republican" understanding of the state and a strong state-building agenda can explain the rejection of vigilantism after the democratic transition (Mozambique, Nigeria, and South Africa) even when facing strong social movements in their favor. In Mozambique, even a CP controlled by the state (top-down) was not welcomed in the first decade following the peace agreement in 1992 as the ruling party (Frelimo) feared that a decentralization of security would threaten the peace.¹² In Nigeria, political considerations are also at play in the repression of vigilantism. In South Africa, informal policing did not find its way in the post-1994 South African Police Service law, as Dixon and Johns (2001) argue, a Western liberal democratic policing model was imported by the ANC state-builders instead.

State (dominant) informal strategies with challengers. Vigilant groups operate at the periphery of the state whose frontiers they contest. To survive, vigilant groups, so Buur and Jensen (2004), are constantly negotiating with the state. "Vigilante formations," they argue, "are similar to what Lund refers to as 'twilight institutions,' and where it becomes difficult univocally to distinguish between what is state and what is not" (Buur & Jensen 2004, p. 145; see also Lund, 2006). Heald's (2002) discussion of the Tanzanian case supports this statement as would Chen's (2002) discussion of

the China case. Heald (2002) argues that although Tanzanian vigilantism has operated in a minimal legal framework, vigilant groups could still be prosecuted for extrajudicial killings and other activities. To avoid prosecution, a great deal of negotiation and lobby by local tribal leaders with the state were necessary.

Given the often-dominant informal nature of the relationship, we hypothesize that the state tradition to deal with challengers (of its authority) and peripheries has an independent effect on this CP form (its rise, growth, form, and success). This mechanism has been discussed in police studies. Della Porta (1996) argues that a fascist tradition and the dominant view of the police as the strong hand of the state have translated into hard protest policing styles in Italy during the 1970s and the 1980s. In the more "rule of law" tradition of Germany, protest policing has been much more legalist, moderate, and selective in style. Similarly, many have argued that a "colonial style of policing" has survived decolonization in Africa (for instance, Deflem, 1994) and "explains" the often-harsh repression of political dissent in these states. At the same time, one might argue that the British indirect rule and dual policing are the keys to understand the relative toleration by the state of informal policing as well. Indirect rule attributed a legal and political space to native authorities and community self-rule, a system also often continued by governments after the decolonization, and, in this sense, instituted a tradition likely to lead to the institutionalization or at least some toleration of vigilantism and other forms of informal policing when they arise. We will argue, later, that indirect rule can also be seen as an enabling factor for informal policing as it produced familiar stocks of knowledge and practices readily mobilizable by political entrepreneurs.

The informal strategy of the state toward vigilantism affects the action (and ideological) repertoire of the movement. Using the example of the PAGAD vigilant movement in South Africa, several studies have documented that vigilantism in South Africa has radicalized its discourse and turned progressively antigovernment as a result of increased repression (Dixon & Johns, 2001; Minnaar, 2001).¹³

Elite division or the configuration of the system of political alliances. To grow, informal policing needs political sponsors. The emergence of the Bakassi Boys and the subsequent growth of the vigilant movement in Nigeria have been shown to be closely associated with the power struggle that took place between state (local) governments and the federal government over the control of public security. In a few Nigerian states, laws were passed accordingly to legalize the Bakassi Boys. The federal government's initial toleration for these local political maneuvers could itself be explained by the fact that many involved governors were from the ruling party; this toleration came to a (provisory) end with the obvious increased politicization of the Boys, "mediatized" human rights abuses, and a campaign by human rights NGOs to end the violations. This story line is useful as it shows that even when the state ideology (and the formal constitution) is in principle adversarial to vigilantism, powerful allied can secure the necessary political space for these initiatives to grow. A limited and precarious level (constitutionally doubtful) of institutionalization can be the result.

In the Tanzania case, Heald (2002) argues that the state was and remains divided over the issue of how to deal with the Sungusungu vigilant movement (see also Abrahams, 1987). The majority political party traditionally supported the movement, whereas the judiciary (with the support of human rights activists and lawyers) and the police opposed the movement that challenged their exclusive field of competencies (Heald, 2002, p. 3). Contrarily to what is the case in Nigeria, the movement has also more recently benefited from the support of UN organizations such as UN Habitat who have lobbied and initiated projects strengthening urban Sungusungu initiatives in Tanzania (Lubuva, 2004; UN-Habitat, 2000).

Crisis in Tanzania. Sungusungu vigilantism seems to have emerged in a period of rising pastoralist conflicts and cattle theft. Heald (2002) quotes a chief commander of a village group in Shinyanga District in January 2002 whose account of the creation of the Sungusungu runs as follows:

There was so much cattle theft in Kahama, especially in the Buruma area which has many trees. The thieves came in broad daylight and captured herdsmen out with their cattle. Often they would tie them to a tree and just leave them there. Sometimes, it took several days to find such a herdsman, and they could be dead by then, while others could not speak for days. There were also night raids and the owners were just ordered to hand over their cattle. Going to the police was pointless. It took too long. By the time the police came, the thieves were far away. In 1982, this kind of raiding was at its height and so they looked for a solution and formed *basalama* in Kahama. (p. 4)

Similarly, in Western Sudan (Darfur), villages have started to arm themselves with the rise of intertribal conflicts (Tanner, 2005). *Omdas*, that is the lowest level of the tribal leaders in Darfur, seem to have taken the decision to organize vigilant groups to defend villages against raiding groups (interview, August 2006).¹⁴ In Nigeria, a crime rise seems at the origin of the Bakassi Boys phenomena (Meagher, 2006, p. 96). According to Meagher (2006), the South Eastern region of Nigeria, where the Bakassi Boys emerged, was particularly affected by crime for historical reasons.

Although crises triggered by specific events (catalytic events), an increase of incidence of crime, or other security issues, are certainly important to explain social change; it is doubtful, however, that we can find a correlation between the level of the crisis and the rise of vigilantism or the creation of a militia for instance. "Crises" or a "sense of crisis" are not enough. As the Mozambican case would show and, in general, social movement theories would confirm, in other context there might be similar level of criminality, cattle theft, or else without giving rise to a vigilant movement. In the Tanzanian case, Abraham (1987) underlines the fact that the original areas where the Sungusungu movement established itself witnessed a high level of cattle raids but no more than other regions. Rather, crises need to be *framed as such* by (political) entrepreneurs and responses proposed to crises "make sense," have a

“resonance” to acquire the necessary credibility they need to be sustainable. Additionally, as we just saw, a POS must be favorable.

Social movements, police reformers and framing. To be able to transform crises and opportunities into mobilization, social movements’ organizations and tribal leaders have to engage in a good deal of framing activity. Building on Erving Goffman, and before him the phenomenological school, David Snow and Robert Benford (1988) have called “diagnostic frames” the narratives employed by social movements to identify and describe a problem and “prognostic frames” the narratives that suggests solutions to the problem. Not all framing activities can be successful. To succeed, frames must “resonate.” Frame resonance, so Snow and Benford, can be achieved by actors through the mobilization of myths, historical references, and other symbols that talk to people (narrative fidelity) as well as through empirical test (empirical credibility).

Studies reveal that vigilantism is associated with a diagnostic frame identifying a “crisis” to be solved (Heald, 2002; Nina, 2000).¹⁵ The crisis is generally a (sudden) rise in criminality. Parts of the problems are a high degree of distrust in statutory police and the criminal justice system in general. Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) write that the “lack of confidence in the police appears to be the most important reason found in the literature on why citizens embrace informal policing structures” (p. 11).¹⁶ This lack of trust is further often associated with “inefficiency,” “leniency,” and “corruption” frames. Discussing the Nigeria phenomenon of vigilantism, the Alemika and Chukwuma quote a survey run in 2001 showing that 95% of Nigerians consider the National Police as corrupt. In Guatemala, Fernandez García quotes a survey run by the *Latinobarometer* showing that 74.7% have “minimal or no trust in the judiciary power” García and Cristina (2004, p. 47). Chabedi (2005) accounts for the appearance of vigilant groups in Apartheid Soweto in the following terms:

Caught between criminals and minimal state policing, and tired of being “bullied by our children,” older residents banded together to wage a bitter war against part of society that they felt was morally and traditionally decaying. At a meeting in Naledi, Soweto in early 1974, two like-minded civil guards from different corners of Soweto merged and formed a movement called “*Makgotla*”—a Sotho word meaning meeting of elders. The rationale for such a movement was simple: the ineffectiveness of the South African police, the inappropriateness of the Western judicial system, the breakdown of parental authority and the spiraling of crime could not go on unchecked. At the heart of *Makgotla*’s ideology was a belief that urban life had brought moral decay and degeneration of Africans. The movement emphasized traditional family structures, developed a vision of an ordered society based on age hierarchies. A vigorous response to a moral crisis, especially over the excesses of youth was imperative. (p. 7)

Vigilantism, as these studies tell us, enjoys often a high degree of popularity in those communities practicing it. A study quoted by Minnaar (2001) in neighborhood

in the Cap found that “there was a significant support among rural and black respondent for alternative or traditional forms of punishment” (Minnaar, 2001, p. 21). Lynch popular justice is highly popular in Guatemala. One of the reasons of this popularity is its empirical credibility. A study quoted by Minnaar (2001) on public opinion in a settlement (Diepsloot) in the suburb of Johannesburg associated with vigilant activities underlined that residents believed that vigilantism was effective in curbing crime and perceived the vigilant response as the result of an ineffective police and criminal justice. A large household survey in Tanzania conducted in 1996 showed that local vigilant groups were seen as more effective than the police (CIET International, 1996). As a result of the *rondas* in Peru, cattle theft almost disappeared.

In Africa, another key factor that explains the popularity of vigilantism is that social movement entrepreneurs can often tap into repertoire of actions, popular myths, and other cultural framework that were in use in a not so distant past. In other words, it has narrative fidelity. In states with a recent past in indirect rule or a dual administrative system, political entrepreneurs are likely to have fairly easy task in framing vigilantism. Apartheid might be a functional equivalent to indirect rule. In these contexts, entrepreneurs can tap into a recent past with action repertoires familiar to communities. Some studies have indeed stressed the remarkable “continuity” between traditional form of justice and the “new vigilantism” (Chabedi, 2005; Okerafoeze, 2006). Buur and Jensen (2004) argue in the South African case that communal traditions were continued—and radicalized—by the antiapartheid movement. The post-1994 vigilantism echoed directly the repertoire of action used by the ANC in its “power to the people” campaigns. Okerafoeze (2006) and Kellsall (2005) show that tribes respectively in Nigeria and Tanzania exploit their rich traditional repertoire of (criminal justice) action to deal with crime at village level. Heald (2002) documents for the Tanzanian case how informal policing takes organizational forms associated with the type of tribe and their cultural traditions. In this context, it is not surprise that the Bakassi Boys in Nigeria have actively cultivated tribal symbolism to “legitimize” their activities. Although rejecting a strong thesis of continuity, Meagher (2006) admits that traditions have been mobilized by the Bakassi Boys and have affected their organizational form, “References to charms and occult practices, while somewhat overstated, indicate a tendency to bolster the contemporary organizational structure of the Bakassi Boys with an older informal institutional repertoire of communal security organizations and secret societies” (p. 98).

In Latin America, sociologists and anthropologists discussing the “continuity” theory have offered a variation of the argument. The Maya customary law in Guatemala emphasized historically restorative justice mechanisms rather than corporal punishment (see García & Cristina, 2004). In a context where the traditional elite has been executed by the regime or died because of the harsh conditions existing during the 36 years of civil war, the customary repertoires have mostly vanished with them. The repertoires with which the new generations were familiar were rather the public executions perpetrated mainly by civil defense militias and the army during the

war. “Mob lynching” is analyzed by these studies as the prolongations of these war repertoires in a context of vacuum created by distrusted and distant formal judiciary system and vanished customary.

In the nation state, communal repertoires of informal policing have been progressively replaced by formal bureaucratic policing the Western nation state and are no longer available in the “tool kit” of culture.¹⁷ The situation in China, for instance, is quite different. Wong (2000) argues that “modern” policing in China is a fairly new policy whose origins he traces back to a 1979 Community Party decision. Wong (2007) argues that policing was, and still is, largely informal in China; action repertoires are quite different from those found in Africa or Latin America and anchored in the value system of informal control of the paradigmatic “Kongfu” household. China’s modern CP style still relies heavily on informal policing at local level with a dense network of resident committees invested with informal policing tasks echoing a set of traditional values—self-reliance, discipline, normative conformity, and so on—and mobilized by community party political entrepreneurs to create a sustainable ordering system (Chen, 2002). These committees are examples of “twilight” institutions discussed earlier, where one would be hard pressed to tell exactly what is state and what is not.

In Western police departments, the police rather than a social movement is at the origin of the reform movement that brought the wave CP. This does not mean that police did not react in some way to pressures from outside the organization. In fact, the factors identified as having contributed to the success of police reformers were both internal and external to the police institution. CP was framed masterfully by Goldstein (1979) as an organizational strategy for regaining a lost efficiency (internal). Eck and Rosenbaum (1994) do argue that some of the key features of CP—equity—could be interpreted as a result of the civil right movement in the United States (external). Furthermore, the police witnessed a degradation of their image in the 1970s, which led managers to search for new solutions to regain the confidence of the public. A key feature of CP Western style crystallized from this: more equity, fairness, and an emphasis on minorities and vulnerable groups.

Conclusion

We have attempted to break the rigid ideological framework that confines “legitimate” CP to the Western democracies models. Taking a more aerial point of view and practicing the husserlian *epoché* over prejudices widened the horizon and allowed to adopt a fresh look at bottom-up cases of CP. There was a rich world of experiences to be discovered. Although informal policing has by and large been replaced by formal policing in the nation state, this form of policing is ubiquitous in Africa, Latin America, and, as seen, in China. We suggested a model explaining the reasons behind these variations of CP patterns with factors such as the type of state,

policing repertoires and the framing activity of police managers, and social movements. The model needs more testing by adding more “dissimilar” cases in the analysis.¹⁸ Most of the article has focused on material from Africa, cases of incomplete state building, and Western democracies with only brief incursions into Latin America and Asia. The real test will come with the inclusion in the analysis of more dissimilar states from these regions. Another useful research strategy would be the study of historical accounts of transitions from one type of CP to another. The vanishing of vigilantism, peoples’ courts, and other lynch courts in the so-called frontiers American states in the middle of the 19th century is a case in point. David Johnson (1981) rightly wrote that Californian

repudiated more than terror . . . , they turned away from propositions about human nature and the locus of authority in a democratic society that had been central to an older America. And by embracing the rule of law over the rule of men they participated in the creation of the modern state and its mechanisms of social control. (p. 562)

Studying in details historical successful transitions is likely to prove useful to reflect on current attempts to export CP Western style in other developing states.

The *epoche* brackets might have been quite useful for another purpose. Although globalization is taking place, clearly Western CP models have seen the light in very specific contexts and the rationale behind the exportation of the model can be questioned. Does it fit? Today, in the West, CP is associated with democracy and countries in transition are most certain to witness hundreds of Western police experts debarking from intercontinental planes to offer their good offices to local police managers. Dixon and Johns (2001) discussed this point for South Africa and concluded that in the South African case, Western practices were not blindly imported but, rather, “adapted” by local police managers. After more than a decade of Western-style CP in South Africa, the results seem rather meager. The South African police, disenchanted with CP, have in fact returned to a more directly repressive approach (Burger, 2006). Perhaps what did not “fit” was not CP in itself but, rather, CP Western style. There is a risk that the Nigeria government and the police fall into the same trap. Nigerian criminologists have been mobilizing knowledge to give credentials to informal policing by providing enlightening phenomenological accounts of the daily practices at village level. Their efforts are important and should be supported.

We can probably not conclude this piece without, even for one paragraph, taking the Husserlian brackets off. As a matter of fact, by now it should be clear that this strategy was not self-defeating, a Damocles glaive that some in the beginning of this piece might have predicted. There are a number of models—China, Tanzania—where the linkages between informal and the formal are institutionalized and they can serve as model/material for further discussion. There are many cases of formal linkages between traditional and state criminal justice systems. In Africa, as a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report underlined rightly (UNDP, 2004),

people are more likely to use traditional and customary systems rather than formal courts to solve disputes. In China, Chen (2002) reports that popular mediation bodies at local level are the favorite forum for solving local cases. The “nexus” is not a Pandora box. This is, in our opinion, one of the areas that need to be studied further to avoid the programmed failures of imported pieces of states that do not fit, while overlooking the readiness and the resources of communities for self-regulation.

Notes

1. Philosopher Edmund Husserl is indeed reputed to use to tell his students “mehr Kleingeld” or “more pennies” to emphasize the necessity to provide detailed accounts of how the world presents itself (the phenomenon) to the researcher as a recipe against quick existential judgments loaded with prejudices.

2. A process that could be observed for instance in the Philippines during the first years of the democratic transition when vigilant groups were brought under control of the Ministry of Defense and under these news auspices continued playing a role in counterinsurgency against communist rebels (Van der Kroef, 1988).

3. See Chen (2002) on this point. Although CP Chinese style relies heavily on the informal, that is how communities solve problems, the local resident committees are “government controlled and organized organizations.” Chen (2002) writes, “theory and practice of Chinese social control indicate that it is not a completely informal system; rather, it is formally invested in less formal structures—in mass groups more than in traditional social institutions” (p. 11).

4. In the 2003 police budget, the share of the Local Defense Units was 18.5% (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2006).

5. For early theoretical studies on the political opportunity structure, see Kitschelt (1986), Kriesi (1995), McAdam (1982), and Tilly (1978, 1984).

6. One may object that this ratio is artificially low and does not reflect the importance of the security sector, knowing that security services in many of these states or the army have *de jure* or *de facto* policing competencies. Policing, in these states, is indeed often not a monopoly of the police. Although security organs have often police competencies in African states, they use these powers to control political dissent and not crime.

7. In 1990, the ratio in China was 1 officer for 1,500 inhabitants (Chen, 2002).

8. Barton (2004) discusses several examples of institutionalization of informal legal systems and policing in Latin America using this argument.

9. For instance, the Local Defense Units (auxiliary police in Uganda) consume 18% of the budget but constitute 80% of the police staff. They are paid less, trained less, and their paid services are only “on call.” In the Sudanese case, which is a good example of Baillard and Haenni’s (1998) thesis of a colonized and captured civil society, the Shurta Shabia is financed privately by the Islamic informal tax, the Zhat, and do not appear on the state budget.

10. Zellman (2006) notes that although the military viewed the paramilitary groups as an instrument to win the war against the South, the Islamic Front viewed them as a means to Islamize society (see also Salmon, 2007).

11. Another case in point is Cuba. At local level, so-called popular councils maintain “guardas”—militias in our terminology—who patrol the city at night (Kruger, 2007).

12. The Mozambican authorities selected the Spanish Guardia Civil to support the police reform. This led the British to leave the police contact group and abandon projects of supporting the reform. The rational (interview by Dominique Wisler, 2002) was that the police was the only national organization capable of controlling the territory (the army had been drastically reduced by the peace agreement) and community policing (CP) forum and decentralization, as advocated by CP experts, would come only after the state would have reasserted its authority through a paramilitary policing organization nationwide.

13. On the relationship between repression and social movement, see for instance Tilly (1978) and Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, and Giugni (1996).

14. Interview conducted by Dominique Wisler.

15. Nina (2000): "Vigilantism arises from the perception that the state is doing nothing to assist the community in guaranteeing its safety." See also Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1974): "the potential for vigilantism varies positively with the intensity and scope of belief that the regime is ineffective in dealing with challenges to the prevailing sociopolitical order" (p. 545).

16. According to a household survey run in 1996 (4,561 households) in Tanzania, 35% responded to have to pay for a service by the police (CIET International, 1996). In Uganda, two third of respondent in a similar survey responded to pay bribes for service to police (CIET International, 1999). In both countries, police arrives at the top of services workers to whom solicited bribes are paid.

17. Abrahams (1987) discusses briefly and skeptically whether mafias and the "primitive rebels" of Hobsbawm are similar to the Sungusungu phenomenon (see also Heald, 1986a, 1986b). The popular justice and vigilant tradition of the so-called "frontier" states or the states west of the Mississippi in the United States are much closer examples of informal policing as witnessed in Africa (see, for instance, Johnson, 1981). The "populist" rhetoric of distrust in the effectiveness of the formal justice system, weak law enforcement, and allegation of corruption in these states is not dissimilar to the discourse observed in vigilant social movements in South Africa, Nigeria, or Tanzania. In California, this popular justice started to decline in the mid-1850 accompanied with a rising public criticism of the practice that, in the first half of the century, enjoyed high levels of popularity (Johnson, 1981). As working hypothesis, we may argue that this American tradition is at work in explaining the relative success of some bottom-up aspects of CP—neighborhood watch schemes, gated communities—in the United States, whereas in European nation states, these schemes seem to be less successful.

18. See the "most dissimilar cases approach" of Ragin (1989).

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