Benevolent policing? Vulnerability and the Moral Pains of Border Controls

Abstract:

In the UK, as in other jurisdictions, the language of vulnerability and 'safeguarding', protection and care is becoming increasingly prevalent, often dovetailing with punitive rationales and practices. Drawing from empirical material collected during a study on police-immigration partnership in everyday policing, the paper analyses how contemporaneous punitive and humanitarian turns in criminal justice are experienced by law enforcement officers doing border work on the ground and considers what implications these have. To what extent does the impetus to protect and care bolster or complicate the exercise of state coercive powers? And what challenges and tensions does it evince? It argues for a more nuanced understanding of the moral pain of border work and its disruptive potentials.

Keywords: policing, vulnerability, border controls, humanitarianism, moral pain

Introduction

At the turn of the century, the 'punitive turn' in criminal justice -apparent in the readiness of legislatures to use criminal statutes to regulate social life (overcriminalization), the popularity in 'zero tolerance' policing, the increase of sentencing tariffs and the enlargement of prison populations- dominated discussions in criminology (Garland 2001, Husak 2008, Melossi et al. 2017, Lacey 2008, Harcourt 2001). The ease with which criminal justice operators exert state-sanctioned pain has been linked to concomitant cultural changes in the way societies perceive offenders and respond to crime. Such policies have taken stock of racialised and xenophobic sensibilities and propelled 'hostile solidarities' (Carvalho and Chamberlen 2018) by singling out sources of threat and danger: from foreign criminals and terrorists to sex predators (Pratt et al. 2011, Zedner 2009). Despite decrease in crime rates and renewed calls for moderation (Loader 2010), this 'punitive turn' remains unabated and emerges as one of the distinctive features of our times.

While such diagnosis is accurate, the focus on punitiveness has often obscured other facets of contemporary criminal justice policies which have received comparatively less attention. This paper aims to unearth and explore one of them: the rise of vulnerability. In the UK, as in other jurisdictions, the language of vulnerability and 'safeguarding' is becoming increasingly prevalent in criminal justice policies. While concerns about suffering and vulnerability have often been expressed in relation to crime victims (Walklate 2011), sometimes reinforcing a punitive response towards perpetrators, attention in criminal justice policy started to focus on the suffering and needy offender (Hannah-Moffat 2005). Underlying this new emphasis in focus is a conception of offending not through the lens of guilt and blame, but as a human response to disadvantage and injustice (see eg NCA 2019, 3). In this reformulation, the distinction between victims and perpetrators blurs, unsettling and complicating binary criminal justice categories. A prime manifestation of such emphasis is the rise of exploitation as an object of criminalization and a priority for law enforcement agencies (Collins 2017, Hadjimatheou and Lynch 2016).

This paper is less interested in highlighting competing and contradictory trends and rationales for state coercion. After all, as sociologists of punishment (O'Malley 1999, Garland 1996) argued, criminal justice policies are driven by highly volatile, contradictory and incoherent aims. Rather, it analyses how these contemporaneous punitive and humanitarian turns in criminal justice are experienced by law enforcement officers on the ground. In particular, it enquires what are the implications of injecting compassion and empathy into policing? And what challenges and tensions does it evince?

Situating the emergence of vulnerability in UK law enforcement within a global framework, the paper teases out its significance and implications for frontline in the context of migration policing. The recent policy concern with labour and sexual exploitation revealed a widespread economy of illegality which thrives in the context of a deregulated labour market and restrictive immigration policies. This paper will first chart the rise of vulnerability in public policy, exploring its main drivers and implications. The second section turns to academic discussions on the notion of 'vulnerability', its advocates and critics, and connects such literature to Fassin's work on 'humanitarian governance' (Fassin 2012). As he argued, humanitarianism has become a pervasive rationality to frame and respond to a diverse range of situations and govern the global poor. The main section of the paper explores how different and sometimes conflicting rationalities for enforcement and coercion play out on the ground, by attending to frontline staff's perspectives and policing practices. This new focus

has demanded a major mindset change to the way law enforcement officers work and think. As they are tasked with arresting and prosecuting or removing offenders, and at the same time safeguarding and rescuing vulnerable individuals, their stance towards the population they police often oscillates between suspicion and compassion. This section will explore the attendant moral tensions and dilemmas facing officers involved in exercising state coercion. Actors can and do mediate policy processes by reflectively adopting, negotiating, questioning or rejecting policy mandates. In the conclusion, I reflect on the value of capturing these accounts for exposing the moral pains of border work and assessing opportunities for resistance to punitivism from within.

The rise of vulnerability in policing

In recent decades, a thriving industry profiteering from the social and legal precarity of migrants has flourished in many urban areas to serve a growing demand for a range of services: from hand-car washes, agricultural and food industries, and nail bars, to cannabis 'factories' and sex work (Davies 2019, Clark and Colling 2018, Cruz 2013). In response, since the 2010s in the UK a variety of laws and policies focused on criminal exploitation and the protection of vulnerable individuals in the criminal justice system (Gadd and Broad 2018), particularly in the context of labour and sexual violence. In 2015, the UK Parliament passed a flagship Act to tackle some of its most serious manifestations. Branded as the Modern Slavery Act 2015,[1] this law symbolically upgraded these crimes (slavery, servitude and forced labour, and human trafficking), made them a key strategic priority for law enforcement agencies around the country and inspired new templates in policing and criminal investigations. The MS Act, in section 45, created a new defence for individuals who commit an offence under compulsion or coercion due to exploitation akin to the common law defence of duress. Law enforcement agents and prosecutors should remain alert to indicators of trafficking and slavery, to consider whether to pursue enforcement action or a prosecution against a person who might be a slavery or trafficking victim, and to avoid their criminalization.[2] Frontline staff are increasingly bound by a more general duty of care and safeguarding obligations as recognition is growing among practitioners and policy makers of the significance and implications of vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system (Cooper and Norton 2017).

Concerns about vulnerability are of course not new. People drawn to the criminal justice system have historically been the most socially and economically disadvantaged sectors in society, attracting a wide range of philanthropists and religious institutions to provide care and support, and to divert the poor away from crime through a mixture of curative and repressive tools (Platt 1969). Originally delivered by religious organizations, the institution of probation was founded on the principle of rehabilitation and embraced a vision of offenders as socially situated human beings and amenable to reform through advice and assistance. Its creation in England in the late 18th century pioneered a new conception and methods for the treatment of offenders and it was an important milestone in the process of 'civilizing punishment' (Whitehead and Statham 2006). As penal welfarism was progressively

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[1] The MS Act 2015 was debated simultaneously with the Immigration Act 2014, which introduced a range of measures to criminalise illegal working and prevent illegal migrants from accessing public and private services. Interestingly, the former was repeatedly framed as the 'humanitarian bill' to protect genuine vulnerable victims, and contraposed to the latter which was aimed at tackling immigration abuse.
[2] Under Article 26 of the Council of Europe Anti-Trafficking Convention, and Article 8 of EU Anti-Trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU.

embedded within the criminal justice system, practitioners have been required to accommodate safeguarding and rehabilitation with public safety considerations.

Yet, in the last decade, the language of vulnerability and safeguarding has surfaced with particular strength and in a distinctive way. The identification of vulnerabilities has been institutionalized as an aspect of the work of criminal justice employees, including the police, becoming a central performance measure of their work and instigating a new field of research (Asquith et al. 2017, Dehaghani 2019). The rise of vulnerability in policing reflects changes in demands, such as the shift from volume crime to more complex forms of offending (Menichelli 2019, 9), and has been boosted by the government's response to high profile cases of child sexual exploitation (HM Government 2018, 13). While the working definition of 'vulnerability' is elusive and varies across agencies (Enang et al. 2019, Keay and Kirby 2017), it is indicative of an individual condition which enhances the risk of harm and which is produced by personal (such as mental health) and situational factors (i.e. poverty), it activates a duty of care and requires specialised support. In 2016, the then Home Secretary announced £1.9 million funding for the College of Policing to train the new police leaders on vulnerability and to develop a new qualification so that 'the skills required to protect the vulnerable are every bit as valued and critical as those required of an authorised firearms officer or any other specially trained officer' (Rudd 2016). The College has prepared a range of training packages to acquaint police officers on how to identify, protect and support vulnerable individuals by 'looking beyond the obvious' and empower them to use 'professional curiosity' (College of Policing 2017b). In so doing, it supports 'a cultural change' in policing which prioritizes safeguarding and public protective services (College of Policing 2017a). How police forces deal with vulnerability is now a key performance indicator of their effectiveness (HMIC 2015).

The vulnerability agenda has extended beyond police services as public protection and crime prevention is shared by a multitude of public and private agencies. Despite its public mission statement, Immigration Enforcement (IE) has annexed safeguarding vulnerable people to reducing illegal migration and deporting foreign national offenders, its institutional raison d'être. The existence of the immigration agency in its different institutional incarnations (first the IND and UKBA, and now downsized as IE) have been marred in a number of public scandals in its dealing with foreign national prisoners and the tactics to reduce undocumented resident populations (Jones et al. 2017). Branded the 'hostile environment' policies, a range of restrictions were sanctioned to detect and send out undocumented migrants creating duties upon employers, bank employees, teachers, doctors, and others to report on them (Aliverti 2015a). The zeal of the policy goal to reduce net migration to the UK was said to be behind the wrongful repatriation of a substantial number of UK citizens of Caribbean heritage, later known as the Windrush scandal (Gentleman 2019). The illegal curtailment of residence rights to individuals, some of them frail, elderly and suffering from serious illnesses compounded questions about the moral compass of the department and triggered a soul-searching exercise within IE. The then Home Secretary Amber Rudd lost her job over the scandal and her successor, Sajid Javid, promised to make the department fairer and more compassionate.[3] One of the inspections by its watchdog, the ICIBI, recommended its managers to provide for a more humane and compassionate service: 'How well the Home Office's Borders, Immigration and Citizenship System (BICS) recognises and responds to the needs of vulnerable individuals is a test not just of its competence but also of its capacity for

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[3] In an exercise in rebranding, IE scrapped all references to 'hostile environment' and replaced them by the 'compliant environment'.

compassion, both of which have been questioned in recent months' (Bolt 2019). The mainstreaming of vulnerability, not just within asylum policy making and case working (Smith and Waite 2019), but at the core of its enforcement arm, speaks of its powerful rhetorical force and suggests profound changes *at the heart* of the state.

From vulnerability to humanitarian governance

The proliferation of concerns about vulnerability in public policy, as well as its operationalization in practice, have been criticized by academics as a shallow attempt to achieve social justice and equality, at best, and at worst as a tool to legitimize problematic practices and appease critique. Its purchase in contemporary criminal justice policy, some argued, lies on its amorphous content and malleable contours, and its benign facade enabling the legitimation of myriad, and often contradictory, policy goals. The dialectic of vulnerability necessitates the hyper-representation of victims and villains, thus heightening punitive responses to a range of issues. By pitting states, nations and individuals against rapacious and exploitative others, criminalization decisions from anti-social behavior orders and counter-terrorism measures (Ramsay 2012), to anti-trafficking and prostitution policies (Munro and Scoular 2013, FitzGerald 2012) become framed in terms of protection from vulnerability to harm (Harcourt 1999). So too, criminologists noted, the 'soft power of kindness' (Canning 2019, 6) renders violence and coercion palatable (Barker 2017), and enables the operation of state power even beyond its territorial limits under the guise of humanitarian intervention (Bosworth 2017, Aas and Gundhus 2015).

Vulnerability is loaded with associations of fragility, weakness, non-agency and femininity. Feminist scholars warned about the reliance on vulnerability in sexual violence policies to justify protectionist interventions that are at odds with the respect for sexual autonomy (Munro 2017). Instead of achieving formal and substantive equality for disadvantaged groups, it perpetuates gender, sexual and racial inequalities by making its promises of protection conditional upon individuals fitting specific social roles or stereotypes (Gilson 2016). At the same time, the focus on individual vulnerability may overlook the complex intersections of structural and situational factors leading to susceptibility to abuse (Paasche et al. 2018) and works to negate state responsibilities to provide universal, rather than targeted, care (Hannah-Moffat 2005, 42). As Vanessa Munro argued, decisions about who counts as vulnerable and what situations constitute an abuse of that vulnerability are embedded within power relations, thus '[u]npicking these "politics of vulnerability" also requires interrogation of the socio-political contexts in which the concept is invoked, the motives underlying its invocation, the power interests at stake and its concrete effects' (Munro 2017, 430). These authors argued that its policy translation has eroded the critical edge of the concept, one that has been embraced by feminist philosophers to question liberal subjectivity as disembodied and asocial (Fineman 2008).

In interrogating assumptions in liberal philosophy about consent and autonomy, Judith Butler offers an understanding of vulnerability and precariousness as an intricate aspect of human existence, of being in the world with others, and of embodiment (Butler 2004). As she explains, our 'very survival depends not on the policing of a boundary—the strategy of a certain sovereign in relation to its territory—but on recognizing how we are bound up with others' (Butler 2016, 52). Vulnerability emerges from sociability and indicates conditions of physical dependency on one another. We are therefore required to take moral stock of such bonds and interdependence, we are ethically implicated and responsible for others' lives. Although shared, vulnerability and precarity are unevenly distributed which accounts for the

disproportionate exposure to risks of certain groups. Such geographical distribution of corporeal precarity is maintained through violence (Butler et al. 2016, 4). Butler's reflections on vulnerability, precarity and power directly engage with issues of political violence, particularly recent imperial wars waged by the USA across the world. In her view, war disavows our shared precariousness and global interconnectedness, and our responsibility to protect by dividing the world into those whose lives are worth defending and grieving, and those whose lives are disposable, invisible and forgettable. Wars and other nationalist endeavors help shape 'frames of recognizability' by reinforcing identification with our fellow citizens and circumscribing our moral responsibility to those within communities of belonging based on national ties (Butler 2016, 36). Yet, these frames of recognizability are not entirely firm. As the accounts of frontline staff evince, closeness to human fragility and suffering can perforate these frames, revealing a more complicated moral landscape and casting doubts on their border control role.

This conception of vulnerability as a common human condition and moral imperative for action has historically foregrounded humanitarian work. Humanitarianism as a movement whose modern origins have been traced back to anti-slavery struggles by religious and grass roots organizations in the early 19th century, galvanized 'a uneven and imperfect "moral globalization" that gradually [gave] more people the tools to engage with distant issues and with the fate of distant strangers' (Stamatov 2013, 189). Through its founding principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality, humanitarianism expressed a cosmopolitan ethics of care (Barnett and Weiss 2015, 3). Under contemporary conditions, global interconnectivity and dependency, laid bared by environmental, political and financial catastrophes, as well as growing global wealth polarization and inequality has ignited anew humanitarian efforts to alleviate human suffering. As humanitarianism has been colonized by state and supra-states, it has abandoned its radical foundations and surpassed its humble remit of saving lives (Maxwell and Gelsdorf 2019, 7).

Humanitarian discourse and logic have become a form of governance --'humanitarian governance' (Barnett 2013). Didier Fassin defines it as 'the deployment of moral sentiments in contemporary politics… to manage, regulate, and support the existence of human beings' (Fassin 2012, 1). As a politics of compassion, he explains, humanitarian governance operates at various levels (domestic, transnational), deployed by various actors (state, non-state and supra-state organizations) and oriented to address the social question. Fassin argues that the emergence of this form of power is born out as 'a response made by our societies to what is intolerable about the state of the contemporary world' (Fassin 2012, 252) and relieves us from the 'burden of this unequal world order'. Humanitarian governance, he argues, encapsulates the contradictions familiar to humanitarianism, since it is inspired by solidarity for others as fellows, although structured around power inequalities between the giver and recipient of aid. This tension in relationships of domination and assistance underscores the constant oscillation between compassion and repression that underpins the operation of humanitarian governance (Fassin 2005).

The prominence of concerns with vulnerability in domestic public policies may be conceived as an expression of humanitarian governance in so far as it signals a shift in the state's governance of the disadvantaged, from the force of 'iron fist' (Auyero and de Lara 2012) to the 'warmth of the heart'. It inscribes compassion for human suffering and an ethic of care into domestic policies, yet recalibrated to accommodate neoliberal logics and demands. This 'neoliberal humanitarian morality' (Sözer 2019) is organized around selective and partial assistance, and is aimed at transforming vulnerable into resilience subjects (Turner 2019, 3).

The notion of 'humanitarian governance' helps us appreciate important transformations in rationalities underpinning the operation of state power and the moral tensions and dilemmas facing frontline staff in the governance of the poor under contemporary conditions. The foregoing discussion reminds us of the pitfalls of mobilizing the state's pastoral power, yet it also speaks of the disruptive, even subversive, potential that the language of vulnerability may engender. In the next section, I investigate how law enforcement officers tasked with migration control functions navigate the tensions and conflicting demands for compassion and order, and what their accounts tell us about how state power operates, and how it is enabled or thwarted through humanitarianism. In exploring officers' experiences and beliefs, the focus is less upon criticizing humanitarian governance's logics and rationales, than in understanding its effects and implications.

Policing vulnerabilities, humanizing law enforcement?

Methodology

In recent years, concerns over cross-border crime and the improper identification of crime suspects, and a growing appetite to pursue deportations against foreign offenders, instead of criminal prosecutions, have instigated various forms of institutional cooperation between the police and IE (Aliverti 2020). While partnership work has been predominantly fostered by crime prevention objectives, the involvement of IE in everyday policing is increasingly called forth to identify and safeguard vulnerable individuals -from crime victims and lone migrant children to rough sleepers and people seeking asylum. In this section, I draw from empirical data obtained during a project which investigates police and immigration cooperation in everyday policing, in two major UK police forces and the respective Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) teams. The project charted different forms of cooperation to understand the drivers, nature and implications of interagency work.

It is based on data collected during a period of ethnographic research within these institutions, between 2017 and 2019. The data derives from approximately 1,000 hours of non-participant observations of enforcement operations, custody processes, training sessions, case management work and police-immigration officials' interactions at a distance from control rooms (equivalent to 3 days per week during a 18-months period). The project was divided into two stages: the first stage was devoted to observing custody processes (including police and immigration interviews, custody bookings) in custody suites with embedded immigration officers and shadowing these officers throughout their daily shifts for 16 weeks. In the second stage, observations focused on operational joint work between immigration and police officers. I accompanied immigration and police staff during pre-arranged intelligence-led visits. On average, I attended operational visits once in a fortnight during a period of 12 months. Most of the visits observed involved multi-partnership work, including the police, HMRC, Housing Standards, Fire and Rescue services, among others, and were led by ICE staff. In addition, I observed the daily working routines, meetings and training sessions of police and immigration officers. This involved the systematic criminal and immigration status checks and referral assessment of cases, and training inputs to various police and non-police staff on immigration powers. Observations were collated through extensive, reflexive fieldnotes after each shift. They capture some of these interactions and informal conversations I had with staff as faithfully as possible (when possible, I reproduce them verbatim), and my reflections on them.

Additionally, I conducted 100 in-depth semi-structured interviews with police and immigration employees at different ranks and with various responsibilities. Interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes on average and explored officers' backgrounds and perceptions of their role, as well as experience of multiagency work. Interview recordings and fieldwork notes were subsequently transcribed and coded together, through NVivo, to identify common themes and connections. When reproducing interviews and fieldnotes, participants are identified by their institutional affiliation, rank and pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. Likewise, the sites where I conducted observations are not identified to protect the anonymity of participants.

This section examines how police and immigration staff navigate the competing policy demands for protection and repression in the policing of migration. These policies are mediated, altered, contested and negotiated by state agents in their implementation. They are 'interpretative actors in their own right', whose accounts and actions can reveal 'the intermissions and tensions between rationalities and actions, discourse and practice' (Côté-Boucher et al. 2014, 199). State agents do not just implement policies, they make them. By zooming in their experiences and values, we can study the state from the bottom up and grasp its 'heart' (Zacka 2017, 18, Fassin 2015, 2). As the institutional moral milieu of policing shifts, the implementation of policies and rules are highly determined by values and judgements of individual officers (Lipsky 2010, 15). As I show below, the 'humanitarian turn' in policing has been responded to differently by officers according to their perceptions and beliefs about their jobs and the people they are meant to police. In describing the new moral climate of policing, they also reveal the moral pains of border work.

Vulnerability dialectics: fuzzy contours, confusing demands

Vulnerability's fuzzy boundaries, ambiguity and pliability are critical in understanding the relative lack of resistance to its mainstreaming in policing. Its multiple signifiers enable the swift adaptation to different and contrasting policy goals, sometimes disrupting the premises on which border controls operate, others reaffirming them. Its fuzzy boundaries might also be the reason why it is preferred to the notion of humanitarianism, which is seldom evoked. Vulnerability is a matter of perspective, sergeant John reckons: '*whereas for one officer a young person with a crack addiction might be vulnerable, for another he will just be a crack dealer and criminal*' (fieldwork notes). Discerning victims from villains, and deciding how to respond depends on officers' moral dispositions and orientations. Felicity, an immigration officer (IO), recounts her own dialectics of vulnerability: '*They are getting lots and lots of money that is getting sucked out of the government just because they are abusing the system, they have got no right of entitlement, they have got nothing... It is not just people who are committing criminal offences you have got people who are from foreign countries*' (immigration interview). In discussing the harms of illegal immigration, she portrays the nation as vulnerable to abuse and in doing so, she bestows her job with a moral mandate to protect it. Her account echoes a shift in institutional discourse framing illegal migration, not just as a regulatory breach, but as wrongful and harmful (Aliverti 2013, 2015b).

For Becky, vulnerability takes a more concrete shape. As a detective in a sexual offences team she learnt that domestic violence victims often refuse to testify against their abusers and are left unprotected. Mimicking a reassuring conversation with a hypothetical woman, she explains how the border can offer her protection when the criminal justice fails: '*we are going to solve this problem for you, we are going to stop you getting beaten up every night of the week because we are going to take some positive action and immigration are going to*

remove him' (police interview). Sarah, who has worked in a local ICE team for almost two decades and is now an inspector, regards the protection of IE's 'clientele' as being at the centre of her job: '*We are a law enforcement agency so you know, we are here to enforce the immigration laws, um, so yeah, part of protection, sort of protecting people as well. Not just protecting those people that are being exploited or are being trafficked or… You know we have vulnerable people walk in here downstairs* [in the reporting centre]' (immigration interview). Working with IE, PC Frank asserts, is not just about enforcement. In his role as offender manager whose task is to divert people away from crime, he comes across many destitute and homeless foreigners who are keen on 'going back' and IE 'can facilitate that' (fieldwork notes).

Such job description resonates with a presentation made by the head of an immigration crime unit tasked with investigating human smuggling networks. Aided by a slide showing a photo of a woman holding her toddler daughter in the back of a converted van crammed with men, he made a punchy introduction to an audience of police and immigration officers: '*this is why I do this job: to save lives*' (fieldwork notes). On these accounts, immigration controls are meant to stop people from being abused by keeping them or their abusers out of the UK and as a tool to interrupt the vicious cycle of 'illegality' by encouraging them to 'move homes'. In doing so, they not only reassert the multiple logics that the border serves (Walters 2011, Barker 2017); they also inscribe it at the centre of everyday policing.

The 'humanitarian turn' adds a new set of demands to a workforce that has been trained to detain and remove, and that generally regards it with perplexity and confusion. Lesley started her career as an IO, climbed the ranks and now works in a unit responsible for 'mainstreaming' vulnerability in IE. When she joined the Home Office, it was all about kicking in doors and arresting people, '*and you don't necessarily see that human person in front of you*'. She is well aware that she faces an uphill task ahead in changing the 'target culture' and that IE's 'new hat' will complicate even further its organizational identity:

> *I think we have always had this issue in Immigration Enforcement of who we are, we have always had a huge identity problem, are we soft and fluffy? Do we safeguard? Or are we there to actually tackle immigration abuse?… I think it is really difficult to combine erm a job where we're protecting people and a job where actually we are protecting the community* (immigration interview).

Her police colleagues agree, airing their concerns about engaging with immigration staff for identifying and supporting victims of exploitation. '*I think they* [IE] *have got problems in fact they are getting beaten with a stick by the government to have their figures of how many people to remove and I think that clashes a little bit with our victim care side, that worries me a little bit*', Tim, a detective with a specialization on modern slavery, confessed (police interview). Close cooperation between the police and immigration has heightened concerns that personal data on crime victims was being passed on to IE placing those with precarious migration status at risk of removal.[4] Softening its profile and rebranding IE through, for example, posters featuring a mosaic of human faces that read 'you can't always see where

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[4] Following a super-complaint requesting regional police forces their policies in sharing information on victims with IE, NPCC guidelines were published setting out minimum standards about data sharing: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-data-sharing-for-immigration-purposes-a-super-complaint and https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/767718/Appendix_1.pdf respectively.

someone is vulnerable' and advising partners to contact IE, has in part sought to contain the reputational risk of recent scandals and reassure partners. While the institutional change of heart might have been driven by instrumental reasons and even though its operationalization might seem cosmetic, its reverberations on the ground are profound.

Moral discomfort: when compassion gets in the way

Officers have responded in different ways to the new demands. For some, the 'humanitarian turn' has complicated moral dilemmas about their work. Many immigration officers joined the force to arrest and deport murderers and rapists, and feel less comfortable about pursuing people without the right papers or protecting vulnerable people –a job that some of them feel they are not trained to do. '*I am interested in criminality, so where immigration meets criminality*' IO Jane explains confidently:

> *I don't necessarily agree with all of our immigration policies and the way that we go about them, erm so looking at criminality I think that is quite clear cut so for me. It was a moral decision… We're not geared up at dealing with victims, we don't look at people as victims, we look at people as offenders and that… we're an enforcement organization so that makes sense* (immigration interview).

'Straightforward immigration work' is morally more complicated and troubling: it is about piercing the 'moral fog' of immigration lawbreaking (Fischer 2012, 476) and deciding who deserves to stay and who needs to go. Like Jane, many of her colleagues find tackling 'real criminals' to be the most rewarding part of their job, because it is clear cut, does not pose moral dilemmas and is less politically contentious. Mike, a chief immigration officer (CIO), told me he sometimes feels 'embarrassed' about his job and does not disclose where he works beyond his inner circle: '*I feel sorry for a lot of the people that we deal with. A lot of them are vulnerable and want a better life. So I find it quite difficult at times. In some ways, it goes against what I believe in but on the other hand… some of the work we're doing in tackling the criminality, that's the part I find satisfying*' (immigration interview). IO James dislikes dealing with families. As a father of a young child, he told me '*I find that quite upsetting and it's not part of the job I particularly like… it's quite difficult to not be sympathetic to their circumstances…*' Revealing his own moral hierarchies, he draws a line between 'criminals' and 'immigration offenders' and perceives enforcement against the latter reluctantly, as a matter of rule of law: '*unfortunately if they've got no permission to be in the UK, we have to sort of enforce that*' (immigration interview).

Similarly, police managers prefer immigration officers to focus on helping them to deport criminals: '*At a local level my job I think is to work with immigration units to make sure that they are able to meet their targets… so if that means removing rapists and murderers from the country I am very, very happy with that and that feels like a very good use of our time… [as long as] they don't then go and hang round outside homeless shelters or remove prostitutes from the streets and deport them*' (Phil, police partnership lead, police interview).

After a visit to a family home where a babysitter from Latin America was reportedly working without a visa, PC Justin confessed to me he didn't like these cases, he prefers to deal with '*the built-up guy who is involved in all sorts of things*': '*They break my heart. As a father, I'd take her home. Bless her!*' The 18-years-old girl looked puzzled when IO Janine informed her she was under arrest and would be taken to police custody. Complaining about a decision she perceived as 'heartless', she comments '*for god sake, it's like detaining your daughter…*

bless her, she is so cute'. Janine was relieved when the girl revealed she was taking medication for depression and asthma, which she immediately reported to her boss to reverse the arrest decision: '*She might have given me the key to keep her here*' she sighed allayed. This episode reveals not only the discomforts of border work (Franko and Gundhus 2019), but also the moral economy of empathy and compassion. At the end of the visit, Janine and Justin concluded that both the couple and the nanny were 'legitimate' and did not have the '*attitude of guilty people*', they had just fallen foul of the *au pair* placement company who did not conduct the checks correctly. Comparing them to the 'bread and butter' illegal working case -the local Chinese takeaway who hires people to work and live in the same premise- Janine struggles to pin down factual differences (fieldwork notes). Yet, the class and racial undertones were apparent and important for understanding the 'politics of pity' (Boltanski 1999) in policing. It illustrates how feelings of empathy are enabled and constrained by 'ideological constructions' about nation, race, belonging (Heyman 2000, 644).

In contrast, for Mariel, an immigration inspector, the policy shift within her department is welcomed. She recalls working in the 'family team' which was tasked with conducting enforcement visits in family homes, with pain and unease. As she starts explaining the team's role, her voice breaks down:

> *(Mariel): When you're dealing with families with young children, it can be really upsetting and all of what those young children want to do is go to school or see their friends and then you're there saying "well actually, no", and at the time we're with these big burly police officers "and you're going in a van" so…*

> *(Author): What did you think at the time when you were tasked with doing these jobs?*

> *(Mariel): It is not a nice job, it is really not a nice job, I erm… when I became pregnant… erm… when I had my children, I found it even more difficult erm I used to say to myself that I know that if I am doing the job I do to my best ability and I do it… I go in with the intention of being as nice as I possibly can, it is a horrible job but it doesn't mean you have to be a horrible person to do that job, erm and I always had that mindset about me that if it is a job that needed to be done, but it could be done in a better way, a nice way* (immigration interview).

She found solace in the new orientation of her department, which pledged to reduce the detention of children and to put the 'person first' in all stages of immigration enforcement actions and decision-making. She is responsible for training her team on 'vulnerability' and instructs them and police officers to keep an open mind when dealing with people: '*we just need to be that voice of conscious in the background just saying "well actually have you considered that this person who is in a cannabis farm might have been in a cannabis farm because of other circumstances, erm or have you considered this child might be pick pocketing because of something else that is happening?"*' (immigration interview). The 'vulnerability turn' helped her find a moral quality to her job ironing out moral dilemmas and, she hopes, will change the image of a department seen by many as 'heartless'. And, as it turns out, it also enabled to vent the discomforts of doing border work. As Lesley recounts her experience of placing a terminally ill man in detention, she relayed with some ambivalence that:

> *I don't feel comfortable with a lot of things that I am doing because I think as a… I think your compassion sometimes gets in the way of it, but you have got a job to do and you*

think of those people, every now and again and you think what happened to them. Erm… and it is that erm… I like my job, I don't mind doing it, I have no issue with doing it but I think you do need to stay aware of how you do it… treat people with dignity and respect, treat them as you would expect somebody to treat your sister or your grandma or your dad' (immigration interview).

Moral ambivalence and stress, which are often unspoken or veiled during the everyday work of these officers, are one of the reasons for the turnover in ICE staff, as IO Ted reckons: '*Some people can't stay more than a year. This job is not for everyone: the shifts, the detention of families, of children asylum seekers*' (fieldwork notes). While discussing the emotional toll of policing (Lumsden and Black 2017, 610), these officers lay bare moral tensions and ambivalences which can open up opportunities for contestation but also can reaffirm the moral categories or hierarchies and assumptions with which border work operates.

Ambivalence and impotence at the border

In a cold, damp winter morning, I accompanied officers to a makeshift hand-car wash at the verge of an industrial estate where workers were reported as being kept in unsafe conditions and living and sleeping in a nearby stationary lorry. PC Rich and IO Ben found a man washing the wheels of incoming cars. Upon some checks, they found that he had been refused asylum and was not allowed to work, but could not be returned to Afghanistan. Another employee mentioned he was found sleeping in a park and had been fed by the owner of the shop. '*We don't [want] people to come to England and sleep on the street*', Rich explained to him. The officers asked him who gave him work, and he explained that he didn't get paid and that nobody came to offer him work. He just came to do some work and his co-workers feed him: '*They give me pizza*'. In a more assertive tone, he lucidly explained the paradox of the situation: '*I need help, nobody wants to help. You come here and say I shouldn't live on the streets but you don't help me*'. After asking 'safeguarding questions' and confirming he is not a modern slave, the officers walked away (fieldwork notes). The mission of the visit was to 'rescue modern slaves', yet they were unable to help a man caught up in the Kafkaesque asylum limbo held hostage of a policy many officers find cruel and counterproductive.

Frontline staff are exposed every day to the social debris of economic restructuring, climate emergencies and distant wars. Extreme abjection is encountered daily in the suburbs of English metropoles, once home to factories, industries and market towns, whose run-down buildings and repurposed townhouses remind passers-by of a distant glorious past. As IO Ann puts it, '*we see and deal with modern day slavery every day, most of the immigration offenders that we encounter, the majority of them are being exploited to some degree*' (immigration interview). While the constant repetition of misery and hopelessness hardens even the most sympathetic officers as a form of emotional coping (Baillot et al. 2013, Papazoglou and Chopko 2017), some are still reminded of their privilege amid global poverty. IO Hassan confided a conversation he had many years ago with a man he arrested for illegal entry. He told him that, after his father died and his family was left destitute, he came to the UK from the same region of the world Hassan's family once fled in Pakistan. '*It could have been me*' Hassan reflects on their common origins and different life chances. Being privy to the drivers of migration, he tries to explain to his white colleagues why people come to the UK to work in exploitative conditions: '*Nobody jumps on a boat just for fun… If*

you could go to another country and get to send some of your money back to your family, wouldn't you do it as well?' (fieldwork notes).

His colleague Tabita, whose parents came from India, is also well aware of the 'lottery of birth'. As she fingerprints a man who arrived from Pakistan to claim asylum in the UK, she conveys: '*This is a great country. I love this country. People tell me "you're lucky to have been born here" but sometimes people abuse the system here*'. As we retreat from the busy police custody environment to have a cup of tea, she tells me that the year before she was recruited by the Home Office to help dismantle the Calais camp in Northern France. There was a call for an IO to get involved in this and she volunteered to do it, as her language skills were needed. Driving all over France, she helped to identify people for resettlement in the UK. The journey, it transpired, was fraught with contradictions as she tells me: '[as an IO] *I am working towards removing people and I was bringing them in*'. She talked about how the majority of people brought were not from Syria and suggested '*they took advantage*'. Yet, immediately after, as she broke into tears, she told me about a 10 years-old child and a 20 years-old Ethiopian man who was skinny and would not eat. She saw the suffering of people and could not understand how could a child be there, enduring the conditions of the camp. And then she told me about her anger at people, like the ones she encounters in police custody, who are given an opportunity to come to this country and yet commit crimes. As much as she found the deployment to Calais morally rewarding, she is also wary of being let down by the people she helped to come here '*if they are found to be terrorists*' (fieldwork notes).

Feelings of empathy and compassion, which are stirred up by physical closeness to others' suffering and common paths and identities, are mixed with suspicion and concerns about order (Heyman 2002, Aas and Gundhus 2015, 9). This ambivalent stance underpins individual and institutional responses to vulnerable migrants who are perceived at the same time as 'needy' and 'just seeking a better life', on the one hand, and on the other, as potential abusers. Laying out the risks of becoming 'soft and fluffy', Robert explains the fine balance his department has to straddle: '*The tensions… the wider tension for Immigration Enforcement is the need for us to be able to protect the UK from illegal migration*' while identifying people in need of protection. His experience as a manager of a unit which specializes in serious immigration crimes reminds him that policing the boundaries of vulnerabilities is challenging as people keep gaming the system: '*there are certain nationalities that would seem to erm declare that they have been trafficked and exploited when they haven't, just to get the immigration advantage so you have got to try and find that balance there*' (immigration interview).

Yet, maintaining such balance is profoundly complicated, ethically and practically, in a world of deep inequalities. Sergeant Bill leads a team tasked with patrolling a deprived suburb home to an ethnically diverse population built through multiple layers of migration waves since imperial times. Despite his many years of service, he is still astonished at attending houses cramped, hazardous and filthy, where they cannot work out who is who. People are becoming cannier at dealing with the police, he tells me. As we headed to inspect a series of businesses alleged to hire workers without papers, he mentioned in passing that a few days ago his team dismantled a 'cannabis farm' and arrested Vietnamese men 'tending the plants'. Incredulous, he added: '*We found a manual with all the instruction in English of what they need to tell the police if they are encountered: "I am a slave, I have been brought by a trafficker etc etc"*' (fieldwork notes). As many officers relayed, often they leave sites not knowing what is happening behind those walls and impotent to do their job.

As a detective specializing in modern slavery, Penny is familiar with those dilemmas. She recalls an operation where her team dismantled a criminal network trafficking in sex workers from Romania and keeping them under conditions of 'modern slavery'. To safeguard the sex workers and their families they temporarily housed them in a refurbished hall within a church: '*There was a Romanian lady, she must have been in her 50s and will never forget because sometimes it makes you question what you do, and she is saying to me: "I have no windows in Romania, this man gives me a house and I have windows… he is like family, he pays me money, now I have nowhere to live… I have no money I need money, I need to work"'*. Another woman told her that she came to the UK for sex working for a few weeks at a time so she can earn enough money to heat her house in Romania by buying logs for the whole winter. '*And we think we're doing the noble thing and the right thing and helping them, but actually are we? Because now we have had to send them in a minibus to the homeless [shelter] to report [them] as homeless*' (police interview). Doing the 'noble thing' is fraught with dilemmas, as in exercising the state's pastoral power by 'rescuing victims' she inadvertently deprives them of their dignity and exacerbate their troubles.

Despite these dilemmas, Penny finds working in this area still rewarding because not only are they helping '*horrendously vulnerable people*', but also effecting a cultural change in policing where the focus is still placed on catching criminals. Instead, her job requires a different mindset, she explains, '*you have to be prepared to think differently about people*' and have '*an open mind… you know it is not about catching baddies at all and it is… it is about changing things for individuals, and that might just be getting them safe it might not, if they don't want you to, [mean to] arrest people sometimes*'. Despite confessing she is sometimes not seen as a 'real police officer', Penny's testimony relays significant shifts in the moral landscape of policing.

Conclusion

Humanitarianism is not only enabling the operation of penal power beyond the territorial limits of the Northern states (Bosworth 2017), but also increasingly legitimizing its operation within its shores through appealing to the notion of vulnerability. Cynical readings of the policy shifts outlined above as performative and instrumental to validate problematic institutions and practices are warranted, particularly given the punitiveness that has long characterized the politics of crime and immigration worldwide. Notwithstanding its opportunistic policy drivers and its many pitfalls, the significance of the 'humanitarian turn' should not be underestimated. I argued that it signals important moral dilemmas and tensions in producing social order at the heart of the state. For once, it evinces the limitations of punitiveness as an organizing principle in criminal justice and a growing demand to humanize state power.

In exploring these tensions, I have privileged the views of those tasked with enforcing order, hired by institutions that regard public security as its primary objective to shed light on the intricate ways in which the new impetus to protect and safeguard dovetails, often uncomfortably, with that security rationale and training. Such difficulties are evinced by the uneven reception of the new ethos among officers and within institutional structures - including performance indicators. As doing 'protection and safeguarding' is perceived to require specialised skills and dispositions which are outside the ordinary police training, these roles are often occupied by women or outsourced to voluntary organizations (Tomczak and Thompson 2019) who also bear the emotional labour involved in dealing with vulnerable

individuals. Judged by its potential to unsettle police's cultural norms and the gender distribution of labour within policing (Holdaway and Parker 1998), the new policy might have limited impact.

Yet, the testimonies of officers reveal less tangible but equally significant, albeit unanticipated consequences of the 'humanitarian turn'. While the data collected does not allow to draw conclusions on the material implications of the policy on the treatment of individuals subject to border controls, officers' accounts and practices reveal how such policy, given its elasticity and ambiguity, broadens their discretion and amplifies the importance of individual officers' moral dispositions on outcomes. While for some it amounts to treat people with dignity and respect, others feel impowered to be more drastic by prioritising safeguarding and instructing the delay or cancelation of enforcement action. Less tangible, however, are the implications of the 'humanitarian turn' on officers' interpretations of the moral dilemmas they face and their understanding of their roles and responsibilities towards distant others. Their accounts and experiences speak of the limitations of the vulnerability framework and the impotence they face in mitigating human suffering. Yet, they also suggest, such framework enables a new moral economy in the policing of the global poor, which complexity is not adequately captured by a sole focus on punitiveness.

Above all, they lay bare a less assertive image of the state, and a more ambivalent stance towards precarity and inequality. On the face of it, a more complex appreciation of the lived social world is revealed, thus complicating the exercise of state power. As their accounts illustrate, their everyday exposure to the scandal of gross global inequalities strikes a nerve on their own fragility and encourages empathy -captured in the recurrent references to family members when talking about distant others. For many, such realisations are unbearable, for others they are soothing. For all of them, humanitarianism is an opportunity to come to terms with their job, and vent their critiques and the moral pain of border work. In engaging with and interpreting policy demands, they shed light on the negotiated nature of state power while revealing the altered moral landscape of policing under conditions of globalization.

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