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Introduction to Focus Section: The Geographies of Crime and Policing in the Global Countryside

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This focus section aims to identify, conceptualize, and understand the emerging geographies of rural crime, in particular those of globalized rural crime, and evaluate their impact on different rural places. Contributions to this focus section reflect an interdisciplinary array of fields from geography, economy, and criminology to rural studies, fully engaged with pertinent theories and state-of-the-art literature. The focus section also critically examines how security and policing of rural areas is delivered by existing and emerging agencies, drawing from evidence from different country contexts in Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. **Key Words:** globalization, interdisciplinary, policing, rural crime.

The study of crime and policing has largely been driven by a “metropolitan criminology” (Carrington, Hogg, and Sozzo 2016) that has focused attention on urban places of the Global North. Recently, this approach has been challenged by work that has identified the significance of crime in rural places and critically examined efforts to police and secure the countryside (Mawby and Yarwood 2010; Ceccato 2015; Donnermeyer 2016; Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2013; Carrington et al. 2018). There has also been a realization that rural places are no longer, if they ever were, based on isolated communities but, rather, are part of global, hybrid networks that connect them to a global countryside (Woods 2007). To date, most work on rural globalization has examined legitimate networks but, as Hall (2013) argued, illegal activities and organized crime make significant contributions to the processes, flows, and impacts of globalization. In a rural context, issues such as people trafficking, drug dealing, environmental crime, theft for international markets, and unregulated food production are examples of criminality that reflect, rely on, and strengthen global networks of crime. Recently, “southern criminology” (Carrington, Hogg, and Sozzo 2016) has sought to draw attention to the ways in which the world is connected through crime and, at the same time, to destabilize and challenge the largely Western-centric ways in which it has been studied and understood.

Despite these developments, the study and practice of rural policing has often been focused on the rural community, with an emphasis placed on identifying particular crimes in particular localities and encouraging community action to police them. Although a wide diversity of agencies and agents,

both networked and fragmented, have attempted to deliver policing and security in pluralistic or autonomous ways (Loader 2000; Peterson and Åkerström 2014), rural policing is often underresourced, exclusionary, and too parochial to deal with globalized, multiscale threats (Yarwood 2015). These can contribute to exclusionary practices that reinforce the idea that communities are the cause and solution of these issues and fail to recognize the significance of global organized crime.

There is therefore a need to understand better the geographies of crime and policing in the global countryside. This focus section aims to identify, conceptualize, and understand the emerging geographies of rural crime, in particular those of globalized rural crime, and evaluate their impact on different rural places. It also critically examines how security and policing of rural areas is delivered by existing and emerging agencies, drawing on evidence from different country contexts: Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. Contributions to the focus section also reflect an interdisciplinary array of fields, from geography (Yarwood 2015; Stenbacka this issue), economy (Aransiola, Ceccato, and Justus this issue), criminology (Yates, Bērziņa, and Wright 2021), and rural studies (Ceccato et al. this issue), fully engaged with pertinent theories and state-of-the-art literature. In the next section we introduce the articles and provide a brief discussion of these contributions to geography.

Framing the Contributions to the Special Section

The first article by Richard Yarwood introduces the special section by providing an overview of work

that has examined the geographies of crime and policing in rural areas. It starts by examining the significance of organized and serious crime in rural places using the United Kingdom as a jumping-off point and argues that global rather than community-based perspectives are needed in its study and policing. This global perspective opens up a number of opportunities, including for “care of others” beyond the locality.

This theme is developed and exemplified by Susanne Stenbacka, who examines the challenges faced by police officers when dealing with crimes that are committed against rural populations but are global in nature and perpetrated by people in other places. Given a lack of clear global policing strategy, this article draws on interviews to examine the experience of policing local crime in a global context.

The third article draws on evidence from the Global South to examine the commodification of rural security. High rates of crime, an ineffective criminal justice system, and failing policing practices have driven some people to seek self-protection in Brazil. Using data from the Brazilian National Household Sampling Survey, James Temidayo Aransiola, Vania Ceccato, and Marcelo Justus assess the determinants of adopting safety devices in different urban and rural contexts. Their article draws attention to the unequal commodification of security across the country that penalizes the rural poor.

The fourth article is devoted to an under-researched area of study, namely vandalism in rural areas. The empirical material reported in the article by Donna Yates, Diana Bērziņa, and Aaron Wright was gathered from a series of interviews with managers of rock art heritage in the Southwestern and Western United States. Yates and colleagues first describe the nature of heritage crimes to provide a context to discuss the complexity of policing in these types of rural landscapes in the United States.

With an increasing awareness of animal rights and of the environmental impact of consuming animal products, conflicts between animal rights activists and those who defend ethical animal production have increased worldwide. Drawing on answers from a national survey directed to animal farmers in Sweden, Vania Ceccato, Peter Lundqvist, Jonatan Abraham, Eva Göransson, and Catharina Allwäll Svennefelt characterize farmers’ victimization with a focus on crimes related to animal rights activists. Long distances and poor police presence are often associated with high rates of underreported crimes against animal production. In this final article, Ceccato and colleagues also highlight the importance of incorporating farmers’ safety needs into sustainable rural development policies. ■

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