

Policing the Global Countryside: Towards a Research Agenda

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Introduction

“The rise in rural crime has come about due to two main factors. Social and economic change has seen the number of farms fall and close-knit communities collapse.

Modern transport links now enable thieves to steal farm machinery and move it into mainland Europe in a matter of hours” (NFU Mutual 2017 quoted in National Police Chief’s Council 2018a, 3).

This quote is taken from the introduction of the ‘Rural Affairs Strategy’ of the UK’s National Police Chief’s Council. It reflects an ‘uncritical glorifying of old-fashioned rural life’ (Pahl 1965, 265) that blames crime on the loss of ‘traditional’ rural structures and a subsequent ‘disintegration’ of society¹ (Carrington, Hogg and Sozzo 2015). Although geographical research on rural crime has challenged the social ecological basis of these ideas (Donnermeyer 2016, Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2013, Hollis and Hankhouse 2019, Ceccato 2015a, Barclay 2007, Bottoms and Wiles 2007), this rhetoric continues to influence the policing of the country with important consequences (Yarwood and Gardner 2000, Young 1993).

Although the quote acknowledges the connected, globalized nature of the countryside (Woods 2007), the study and policing of rural crime have remained rather insular by

¹ The UK’s National Farmer’s Union also opine that “rural crime is like a wave as organized criminality spreads through our villages, farms and fells”. It is viewed as something coming outside to threaten and engulf the countryside. National Farmers' Union Mutual. 2020. *A Challenging Time For The Countryside: Rural Crime Report 2020*. Stratford Upon Avon: National Farmers' Union Mutual.

continuing to focus largely on ‘the distinctive character of crime in rural and regional locales’ (Carrington et al 2016 4) and the role of communities in policing them (Ceccato 2015b, Yarwood 2010). In turn, this can neglect some crimes, contribute to social exclusion and support a view that communities are the cause and solution of rural problems (Cheshire 2016, Desforges, Jones and Woods 2005).

To illustrate this point, this paper uses the policing of rural crime in the UK as a jumping-off point to argue that geographers and those tasked with policing the countryside should take a global view of countryside (Woods 2007) to better understand the nature and geographies of rural crime.

Rural Policing in the UK

Increasingly, rural policing in the UK is being driven by concern about thefts from agricultural premises (National Police Chief’s Council 2018a). Surveys by The National Rural Crime Network (2018) have revealed that rural businesses have suffered high rates of victimization (Table 1) while, in 2019, the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) reported increases in thefts of agricultural vehicles (£9.3 million in insurance claims), quad bikes (£3.1 million), livestock (£3 million) and, specifically, Land Rover Defenders² (£2.1 million) (National Farmers' Union Mutual 2020) (see also Figure 1).

| | Rural Dweller | Rural Visitor | Specific Rural Business | Other Business |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Percentage of respondents (n=16,193) | 17% | 5% | 69% | 37% |

Table 1: Proportion of Respondents who were a victim of crime in the past 12 months in UK Source: National Rural Crime Survey (2018)

² These are iconic 4x4 vehicles used widely by farmers and have been particular targets since their production ended in 2016.

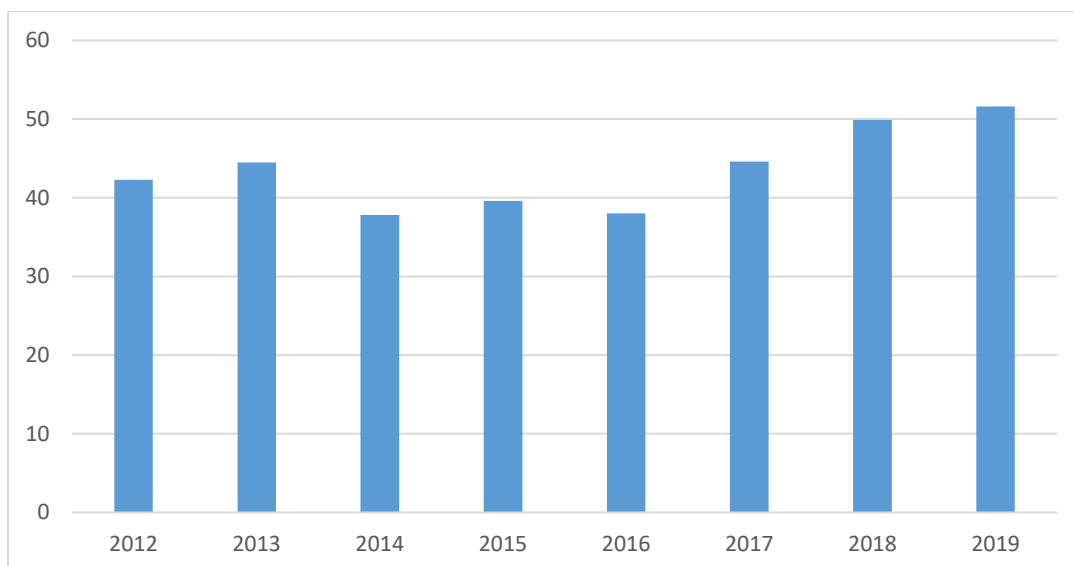


Figure 1: Insurance Claims in Millions made to NFU Mutual (Source: NFU Mutual Annual Crime Reports)

Although further empirical research is needed to establish the significance and geographies of these networks (McElwee and Smith 2015), the UK’s Rural Affairs Strategy (National Police Chief’s Council 2018a) is focused almost entirely on crimes against farms (Table 2). Other crimes that occur in rural areas, but are not specifically rural, such as thefts from homes (Yarwood 2005) or domestic violence (Little 2017), are not included or are the subject of separate strategies (National Police Chief’s Council 2018a) (National Police Chief’s Council 2018b). This sectoral approach is at odds with other rural policies, which seek to consider rural places in territorial, holistic ways (Cheshire 2016) and reflects a rural politics that continues to privilege the interests of landowners and farmers (Woods 2006). Note that the quote at the start of this paper suggests that rural policing strategy is being guided by the views of the National Farmers’ Union (NFU), a powerful rural lobby.

Elsewhere, NFU (2015, 3) suggest that ‘rural communities also perceive “no go areas” for police and a lack of action against certain individuals and groups who are well known to the police as repeat offenders’. While particular groups are not explicitly mentioned, existing work suggests that some minority groups, such as travelers, young people or migrants, are

associated with criminality on the basis of difference or simply being ‘out of place’ the country (Vanderbeck 2003, Holloway 2003, Askins 2009, Yarwood and Gardner 2000) . At the same time, increases in crime have been widely attributed to organized crime (National Police Chief's Council 2018a) and local gangs (National Rural Crime Survey 2018) that: “target and exploit rural communities across a range of crime types, for example organized plant theft, livestock theft, burglaries targeting firearms, poaching and hare coursing” (National Police Chief's Council 2018a, 6).

| Operational Priorities | Examples |
|--|---|
| 1. Farm machinery, plant and vehicle theft | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quad bikes • Modern and vintage tractors • Tools and equipment from outbuildings |
| 2. Livestock offences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock theft • Livestock worrying and attacks |
| 3. Fuel theft | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heating oil • Diesel • Petrol |
| 4. Equine Crime | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horse trailer and horse box theft • Horse theft • Tack theft • Fly grazing and neglect |
| 5. Fly tipping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household and commercial waste • Waste through organized criminality |
| 6. Poaching | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hare coursing, deer poaching, fish poaching, Anti-social behavior, threatening behavior and illegal gambling that can be seen alongside this activity |

Table 2: Operational Priorities of UK’s Rural Affairs Strategy (National Police Chief’s Council 2018a)

While organized crime against property is seen a threat, crimes against people outside ‘rural communities’ is given less emphasis – although these are more likely to be victims of organized crime such as people trafficking, slavery and drug dealing. These groups have little voice (certainly compared to the powerful NFU lobby) and little recourse to justice. There is, therefore, a need to take a much wider, more critical view of rural policing that moves

beyond listening to the powerful and crimes against property. It also challenges us to move from policing rural localities to the policing of the global countryside.

The Global Countryside: From Places to Flows of Crime

Woods (2007) considers the globalized countryside to be: ‘knitted-together intersections of networks and flows that are never wholly fixed or contained at the local scale, and whose constant shape-shifting eludes a singular representation of place’ (Woods 2007, 499). Rural places are not easily identifiable bounded communities but, rather, are constantly being ‘thrown together’ by a ‘constellations of processes’ (Massey 2005, 141).

While geographers have taken up this call to understand rurality and globalization, their attention has mainly focused on legal activities (Carrington et al. 2018). Tim Hall (2013, 380) argues that “discussions of contemporary processes such as globalization, regulation and economic liberalization which admit only licit actors offer both empirically and conceptually limited readings of those processes.” He argues that a focus on Organized Crime Groups (OCG) not only reveals much about the spatiality and regulation of global crime, but also sheds light onto the processes, flows and impacts of globalization. Three examples are outlined below (for full reviews see Donnermeyer 2017, Carrington et al. 2015).

Drug-Trafficking

Rural places are important in the production, distribution and consumption of illicit drugs to the extent that this accounts for ‘8% of world trade, similar in size to the textile industry’ (Hall 2012, 370). These networks are significant to the formation of the global countryside. Despite international interventions as part of a ‘war on drugs’ (Rengert 1996), the cultivation of drugs continues to make a significant contribution to the rural economies and livelihoods of both the North and South (Weisheit and Brownstein 2016). Thus 3.3 million people in Afghanistan derive income from the production of opium poppies for ‘their comparative

advantages and multifunctional role in relation to other crops and ... because it provides access to land and credit (Goodhand 2005, 207). This produce is connected by significant but illicit networks of technology, culture, and finance to other places (Barton, Storey and Palmer 2010), rendering the countryside as a 'space of flows' and reflects 'shifting forces of global capital' (Clark, Fraser and Hamilton-Smith 2021, 259). This is reflected in the growth of 'county lines' drug dealing in which urban gangs recruit vulnerable young people in rural and coastal settlements to distribute drugs. This has been driven by crowded urban markets and networks that have prompted dealers to move out of cities to new markets in rural localities (Harding 2020). These shifts are made possible by a global supply of drugs, new technologies and social media, allowing dealers can exert control over networks rather than territories.

Slavery

A second example is illustrated in the global networks of forced labor and slavery. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that nearly 25 million people are in forced labor and, of these, 11% work in agriculture or fishing (International Labour Office 2017). This includes forms of bonded labor (when people become indentured due to debt); child slavery; forced marriage; descent slavery (being born into slavery) and human trafficking (Byrne and Smith 2016). Transnational trafficking makes illicit links between the global north and global south, reflecting that rural areas are both the suppliers and receivers of immigrant labor (Smith 2018, Woods 2007). Although migrant labor is regulated by the state (Rye and Slettebak 2020), illicit people-trafficking exploits vulnerable and powerless groups by paying no or low wages, stealing passports, and deducted money for substandard accommodation (Allamby et al. 2011). This is compounded because workers may be unaware of their rights (Rye and Slettebak 2020), afraid of authority or isolated by language, rendering them powerless to complain (Allamby et al. 2011).

Strauss (2012, 137-138) contends that trafficking for forced labor has been driven by “increasing interconnections between the demand for flexible, low cost labor in the industrialized economies and a supply of workers unable to commodify their labor at home.” Findlay and McCollum (2013) also state that the increasingly complex sub-contracting of labor means farmers may be unable, or unwilling, to delve into the conditions of workers. At the same time, exploitation of farmers by supermarkets and competition from global supply chains that may themselves enroll exploitative practices pressures farmers to use cheap, perhaps illicit labor, to maintain marginal businesses (Strauss 2012). Globalization is therefore both a cause of modern slavery and has also been shaped by it. Slavery is not only hidden, but its victims are powerless. It is imperative that rural policing strategies look to counter these forms of organized crime and empower its victims to find justice.

More-than-human Crimes

Woods (2007, 499) stresses that globalization creates “hybrid assemblages of human and non-human entities”, binding people, animals, nature and technology into international networks. If the study and policing of criminality is limited to crimes against people, this will lead to a partial understanding of rural crime as well as the changing nature of rural space (Enticott 2011). A reframing of green or environmental criminology (South 2017) in a global context has the potential to bring radical, less anthropocentric perspectives to the study of criminology (Carrington et al. 2015). Poaching, by way of example, links regions of the Global South to urban markets of the North and promoted military interventions by local and global actors (Lunstrum 2014).

Crimes against wildlife have indeed received increased attention (National Police Chief's Council 2018b) (Fyfe and Reeves 2011, Potter, Nurse and Hall 2016) to the extent that the National Police Chief's Council (2018b) refers to the *persecution* of wildlife; a term often used to describe hate crimes against minority groups. Its use in this context recognizes the

significance of crimes against nature as well the unequal power relations between society and nature that can lead to them.

Enticott (2011) suggests that wildlife crime reflects the relationship between contested ideas of rurality and criminality. Thus, poaching, although illegal, has formed part of rural imagination and identity likewise; hunting is highly contested and regulated yet central to some 'folk' lifestyles. (White 2016). Farmers, therefore, may engage in illegal culls as they are justified as necessary and tacitly accepted by some parts of the rural community (Enticott 2011), making it difficult to police. This emphasizes that rural places not only impacted by crime networks but is a significant actor within them. Smith and McElwee (2013) also point out that some farmers also enroll themselves in OCGs to generate income through, for example, engaging in the illegal meat trade. Such crimes, they contend, go unnoticed or under-reported due to social norms and community pressures to 'conform, 'keep the peace' and avoid making accusations' (116). Other work has suggested that some farms can be used as fronts for drug production or illegal commodity chains (Donnermeyer 2017).

Conclusions

This paper has argued that there is a tension between the global, multi-scalar nature of rural crime and the often parochial ways rural crime is considered and policed. Based on this brief review, it is possible to identify three key areas for research.

1. New Theoretical Perspectives. Recent anthologies reveal that research on rural crime has focused almost exclusively on the Global North (Donnermeyer 2016, Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2013, Mawby and Yarwood 2010, Harkness 2020). This reflects a myopia in both criminology (Friedrichs 2007) and rural geography (Milbourne 2017) that has focused attention by and about the Global North (it is not without irony that this paper started by a discussion of British policing), despite the greater significance of rural populations and land-

use to Global South (Donnermeyer 2017, Weisheit 2016). Carrington et al. (2015, 3) argue that the study of crime has been dominated by a ‘metropolitan criminology’ that, amongst other things, has favored the powerful and overlooked ‘major historical and contemporary forms and trends in criminal justice practice outside the metropolitan centers of the northern hemisphere’. This has not only sidelined rural areas but, more importantly, has taken for granted ‘a high level of internal peace within ... a stable nation-state system’ (Carrington et al. 2015, 3). This has not only privileged Northern perspectives, voices and knowledge but has perhaps focused the study of crime within the boundaries of (Northern) states and ignored global connections between and across states.

Southern Criminology has started to challenge these orthodoxies. It attempts to de-colonize the production of knowledge in order to destabilize established binaries and empower those who are seldom given voice (Connell 2014, Dimou 2021, Moosavi 2018). While recognizing geographical differences, it not only seeks to re-focus attention on the Global South but recognize how it has been shaped by colonial and neo-colonial processes and, in doing so, highlights the connections between places (Ciocchini and Greener 2021) . This is not only leading to a reconsideration of the ways in which farm crime is studied (Donnermeyer 2017) but, more importantly, is re-focusing attention on those who have been neglected in the study of rural crime. These include women (Walklate 2018), indigenous people (Cunneen 2018), racial minorities (Currie 2018) and those, such as migrant workers, hitherto hidden or ignored in rural places(Carrington et al. 2015). Crucially, Southern Criminology challenges the hegemony of the Global Northern by calling for research to be by, rather than of or about, those from the Global South and minority groups (Connell 2014).

Research into the geographies of rural crime should embrace these perspectives to better understand differentiated experiences of crime and rurality. Key to this should be a consideration of rural space as networked and porous, rather than bounded and isolated.

2. *Global Perspectives in Policing*. Policing continues to reflect class or economic interest, particular visions of rurality and perpetuates the idea that crime comes from ‘outside’ rural communities. Despite the global nature of crime, rural policing continues to emphasize the idea of community (Kappeler and Gaines 2012, Ceccato 2015a), in part to compensate for scarce resources and the roll-back of state policing (Donnermeyer 2016). Given the globalization of the countryside and the threat of organized crime, there is a need for joined up forms of rural policing that, in common with other developments in rural policy, recognize a wider range of issues that farm crime and, most significantly, look outside bounded communities. Policing should be driven by a form of global rather than local citizenship that recognizes how rural places are connected to and affected by other places (Desforges et al. 2005). This should encourage people to consider distant others by, for example, being alert to forms of slavery in their own localities. Neighborhood Watch might, for example, encompass a wider definition of neighbor in this context (Painter 2012).

3. *Places still matter*. In February 2018 a group of about 100 migrant workers protested outside a police station in Helston, Cornwall (BBC 2018). Earlier the police had arrested three men as part of an operation against modern slavery. The Romanian and Latvian protestors had been working as flower-pickers in the local fields and living in accommodation on a farm. The protestors adamantly denied that they were slaves or were being exploited but, instead, demanded the release of the three men. The arrests were well-intended and reflected a growing awareness of slave labour in rural areas. But it appeared to mis-interpret the situation and, crucially, neglect the voices of those deemed to be victims of slavery. As (Donnermeyer 2017, 123) notes, ‘farm crime is global ... but the context of farm crime is not’. Woods (2017) at pains to point out that globalisation is best thought of as an incomplete series of events rather than a finished product: ‘local actors engage with global networks and global forces to produce hybrid outcomes (Woods 2007, 497). As geographers

we should continue to be sensitive to place, recognising the capacity of different people to act in different ways. Indeed, it is this appreciation of a global sense of place (Massey 1991) that will allow geographers to make important contributions to Southern Criminology and, in turn, give voice to those most affected by rural crime and in need of its policing.

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