

The Pluralisation of High Policing: Convergence and Divergence At the Public-Private Interface

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ABSTRACT: High policing has long been associated with the preservation and augmentation of state interests by the intelligence community. However, this paradigm can neither be examined, nor theorised, within an exclusively 'public' framework; a host of 'private' actors must now be acknowledged on this conceptual terrain. Moving beyond well-acknowledged patterns of outsourcing intelligence, this paper brings sharper research attention to transnational security consultancies as well as the more shadowy realms of boutique intelligence firms, private detectives and freelance covert operatives. By examining these new private categories of high policing, this paper considers the complex patterns of convergence and divergence that characterise the public-private interface. Specific attention is devoted to resources of symbolic power and how these impact the capacity for coercive action.

KEYWORDS: High policing • Private Security • Pluralisation • Symbolic Power

Introduction

Across the various strata of policing and security activities, previously discernible boundaries between the public and private spheres have become indistinct and the contemporary context of policing is at once both pluralised and interconnected (see, for example: Berndtsson & Stern 2011; Jones & Newburn 2006; Marx 1987). The realm of ‘high policing’ (Brodeur 1983) –long associated with the preservation and augmentation of state interests by intelligence agencies– is no exception. Recent years have witnessed progressive acceptance of the proposal that this paradigm can neither be examined, nor theorised, within an exclusively public framework (O’Reilly & Ellison 2006). The activities of a host of ‘private’ actors must now be incorporated alongside those of state security institutions, albeit that the latter generally remain the dominant force. Consideration of these latecomers to the conceptual terrain of high policing also entails much more than the burgeoning trend in outsourcing intelligence functions –particularly prevalent in the US– and necessitates a sharper focus on a range of actors that spans transnational security consultancies to the more shadowy realm of boutique intelligence firms, private detectives and freelance covert operatives. Furthermore, as national economic interests are weaved into national security objectives, ‘espionage on behalf of the state may blur into espionage on behalf of corporations’ (Sheptycki 2000: 12-13; see also, Petersen 2014); some corporations even functioning as *de facto* extensions of the intelligence apparatus (see Weiss, forthcoming, on telecommunications companies). Across this expanding spectrum of high policing activity, the relationship between its public and private manifestations has emerged as multi-faceted and overwhelmingly opaque.

By charting the diverse roles of those actors engaged in private high policing, this paper explores patterns of convergence and divergence in the contemporary high policing field. To achieve this, it proposes a more complex array of ‘auspices’ and ‘providers’ (Bayley & Shearing 2001) than has traditionally been acknowledged. Adopting a less state-centric research approach, it expands upon a number of works that have considered related developments in the ‘pluralization of intelligence networks’ (Lippert & O’Connor 2003), ‘security networks’ (Gill 2006), the intersection of knowledge-work and networks in policing (Brodeur & Dupont 2006), as well as ‘grey intelligence’ (Hoogenboom 2006). However, this discussion is specifically

rooted within the analytical frame and operational context of high policing. As Jean-Paul Brodeur –the progenitor of high policing theory– identified, there are unresolved issues regarding its private dimensions; not least the need to examine how inter-related notions of symbolic power, legitimacy and the capacity for coercive and extra-legal activity vary across the public and private domains (2007: 34).

By focusing upon pluralisation, this paper addresses these deficiencies whilst also developing a more nuanced theoretical platform for future high policing research. This is significant, as the skewed nature of previous academic studies towards public forms has eclipsed a wide-range of dubious activity in the private sphere. Of course, inherent low-visibility has assisted this evasion of critical attention, but so too has conceptual and empirical neglect. The first step in tackling these *lacunae* is, therefore, to identify and address frailties that inhibit existing theoretical frameworks and research agendas. With these ambitions in mind, this paper aims to do the following: to spotlight archetypal private high policing providers and draw attention to their most disconcerting activities; to articulate the theoretical implications of these private manifestations and propose necessary conceptual refinement; to evaluate key areas of public/private distinction as well as to consider blurred boundaries where operational overlaps and strategic coalescences occur; and also, to provide a roadmap for future research ambitions in what is an under-recognised, and highly challenging, field.

The discussion is divided into three parts. In Part One, the conceptual evolution of high policing is retraced and its contemporary relevance reaffirmed. Part Two progresses analysis towards the pluralisation of high policing, proposing a typology of private actors and mapping their interaction with the public sphere. Part Three seeks to identify points of connectivity and contrast. In particular it examines the symbolic power of high policing and tests the assumption that public actors have greater resources in this regard.

High Policing

The influential high policing hypothesis was introduced to policing studies by the late French-Canadian criminologist Jean-Paul Brodeur (1983). In a study that emerged

against a backdrop of social upheaval and suppression of political dissent in North America, he proposed a new conceptualisation of political policing that explicated state security recourse to tactics of questionable legality. For him, the deployment of dubious operational strategies, such as illegal wire-tapping and *agents provocateurs*, was not merely aberrational to normal police practice but actually constituted systemic characteristics of the alternative paradigm of high policing (Brodeur 1983: 508). Through the identification of both ideological and operational continuities, Brodeur traced this paradigm's origins back to the all-encompassing system of *haute police* that was the cornerstone of absolutist rule in seventeenth and eighteenth century France. Equally significant within his analysis was the necessity to create a distinction between high policing and low policing: the former concentrates upon the protection and promotion of the state and dominant political actors; the latter is concerned with the maintenance of order and the general suppression of crime.

From the intelligence communities of contemporary liberal democracies to the secret police of authoritarian regimes, from the social control of colonial policing to the regime policing of post-colonial settings, high policing has provided a theoretical lense through which to analyse a range of questionable policing and intelligence action. However, as following sections set out, the utility of this paradigm progresses beyond those preserving and augmenting executive power and can be extended into the private sphere.

In Brodeur's last statement on high policing he set-out nine key characteristics: protection of the political regime; the state as intended victim; absorbent policing; the utilization of criminals; the use of informants; secrecy; deceit; conflation of separate powers; and, extra-legality (2010: 226-234). For him, it was necessary that several of these features be present for activities to fall within this paradigm –for example, knowledge-work alone could not qualify as high policing (2007: 28; 2010: 224). However, in seeking to maintain conceptual integrity, it is vital to avoid treating these characteristics proscriptively. Indeed, if we are to understand why high policing has proved an enduring concept, with explanatory potential across diverse contexts –not least across the public and private sectors– its flexibility and capacity for recalibration must be recognised as key.

Conceptual Fluidity

In a recent analysis of high policing, Marx (2014) discussed how it extends beyond national security 'to many social control settings in which organizations protect their flanks, try to anticipate or orchestrate events and attend to actions, persons and contexts seen as threats'. He further asserts that high policing can be recognised through its *location* (proximity to power), its *ethos* (pervasive intelligence-gathering on threats to the *status quo*) and its *methods* (a range of questionable strategies). Echoing this conceptual dissection, I would assert that high policing consists of a fluid mix of *constant* and *variable* factors. Its essence is located in a constant ideological orientation that 'reaches out for potential threats in a systematic attempt to preserve the distribution of power' (Brodeur 183: 513). It is the variable means through which this rationale is operationalized that both respond to context and oscillate over time, albeit that they habitually share a dubious nature. For example, the conceptualisation of contemporary high policing would be incomplete without incorporating the impact of technological innovations upon surveillance, epitomised by recourse to signals intelligence (Brodeur & Leman-Langlois 2006; Brodeur 2010: 249). Furthermore, the techno-oriented operations of agencies such as the American NSA and the British GCHQ draw upon a quite different high policing toolkit than their partner agencies. Their operations also reiterate how pluralisation of high policing does not solely refer to its increased manifestation in the private sphere but also to diversification within the national intelligence assemblage itself.

These observations underscore the importance of looking beyond the traditional operational remit of state security actors towards broader re-imagination of not only the intelligence community but also of the wider high policing context. Indeed, progressing from the conceptual standpoint of a constant ideological rationale but a variable operational deployment is fundamental. It reiterates the adaptable nature of high policing techniques as well as the fact that those power arrangements they protect extend far beyond the executive or narrow ruling elites. As Manning (2006) has astutely observed:

'It is in theory, lurking and invisible, often illegal, whilst claiming to produce reassurance. *High policing is flexible, semi-visible and thus rediscovered and reconfigured as befits the times.*' (2006: 60; emphasis added)

Although this comment was directed at state security responses in the field of counter-terrorism, it provides an equally adept reflection on those activities that can be classified as private high policing. In fact, the degree to which private forms of high policing flexibly respond to both market threats and market opportunities indicates a potentially greater capacity for reinvention and recalibration.

'High Times' for High Policing

Whilst Brodeur had previously heralded the 'coming of age' of high policing –both in North America (1983: 645) and transnationally (2000: 43)– it was the controversial counter-terrorism strategies deployed post-9/11 that saw his intuitions confirmed (2007: 20). However, one need not look to the excess of the so-called War on Terror to assert the continued relevance of high policing theory.¹ At the time of composing this work, controversies abound regarding covert operations falling under the high policing mantle, both globally and domestically. In the summer of 2013, NSA whistleblower, Edward Snowden, revealed how US intelligence had been conducting extensive data-mining programmes and surveillance initiatives that extended far beyond suspected parameters (Greenwald & MacAskill 2013). In the domestic British context of combatting subversion, extensive infiltration of protest groups has also been uncovered with attention focusing on special units of the London Metropolitan Police's Special Branch. Revelations regarding these clandestine units include sordid discoveries that police infiltrators adopted dead children's identities to build their cover (Creedon 2013) and that some agents even developed long-term sexual relationships with individuals they were spying on (Lewis & Evans 2013).

In terms of high policing pluralisation, it is noteworthy that both cases possess significant private dimensions. In the case of NSA surveillance, Edward Snowden had left the public sector to work for private intelligence contractor Booz Allen Hamilton

¹ Whilst the systematic reshaping of routine (low) policing to reflect high policing agendas –as with contemporary counter-terrorism– could be considered as a marker for diminishing relevance of Brodeur's bipartite distinction, I would contest that such patterns are more accurately portrayed as symbolising high policing ascendance. Indeed, if low policing reflects, and indeed fulfils, the objectives of high policing agencies, then this only serves to underscore the latter's dominance. Through characteristic 'net-widening', it has successfully colonised other members of the policing family and steered them towards its own priorities (for an in-depth evaluation of the contemporary relevance of Brodeur's conceptual distinction, see: O'Reilly & Ellison 2006: 645-646).

in the period running up to his disclosure of these secrets; there are also indications of collaboration between leading US corporations and the NSA. In the case of the covert Special Branch operations, private detectives simultaneously infiltrated at least one of the targeted groups, London Greenpeace. McDonalds had hired them to infiltrate the group following protests against the fast-food chain. Whilst the extent and nature of likely co-ordination between undercover police officers and infiltrated private detectives remains, all too characteristically, opaque, both groups of infiltrators acted as *agents provocateurs*, displaying a 'commitment to wide dissemination of allegedly libellous material' (Gill & Hart 1999: 258).

These cases not only reiterate that covert high policing activities are a constant societal feature –even in supposed democracies– but also that there are important private dynamics which must be incorporated into both our theories and analysis. The past decade has certainly witnessed high policing resurgence but the nature of its private manifestations as well as the degree of public-private intersection remain under-theorised and under-examined. The following discussion initiates progress towards a better understanding of these relational dynamics, charting processes of pluralisation and setting out key 'private' players in the high policing realm.

The Pluralisation of High Policing

In 1996, Bayley and Shearing heralded a paradigm shift in the delivery of policing, remarking that: 'Policing has become pluralized. Police...have been supplanted by more numerous private providers of security' (1996: 588). Whilst their analysis was firmly rooted within the realm of low policing, similar trends are now acknowledged within its high policing counterpart. Whilst the superiority of its public forms has not been undermined to the same degree, this paradigm can no longer be held out as the exclusive domain of state security actors. As embodied in the re-conceptualised proposal of '*private high policing*' (O'Reilly & Ellison 2006), there was a clear need to detach original theory from its umbilical linkage to the state. However, despite recognition of this theoretical advance, subsequent commentary regarding high policing's private dynamics has proved speculative (Brodeur 2007: 31; 2010: 288-293) and provisional (Ocquetau 2012). Notably, there has been no concerted attempt to identify or to map those providers who engage in private high policing.

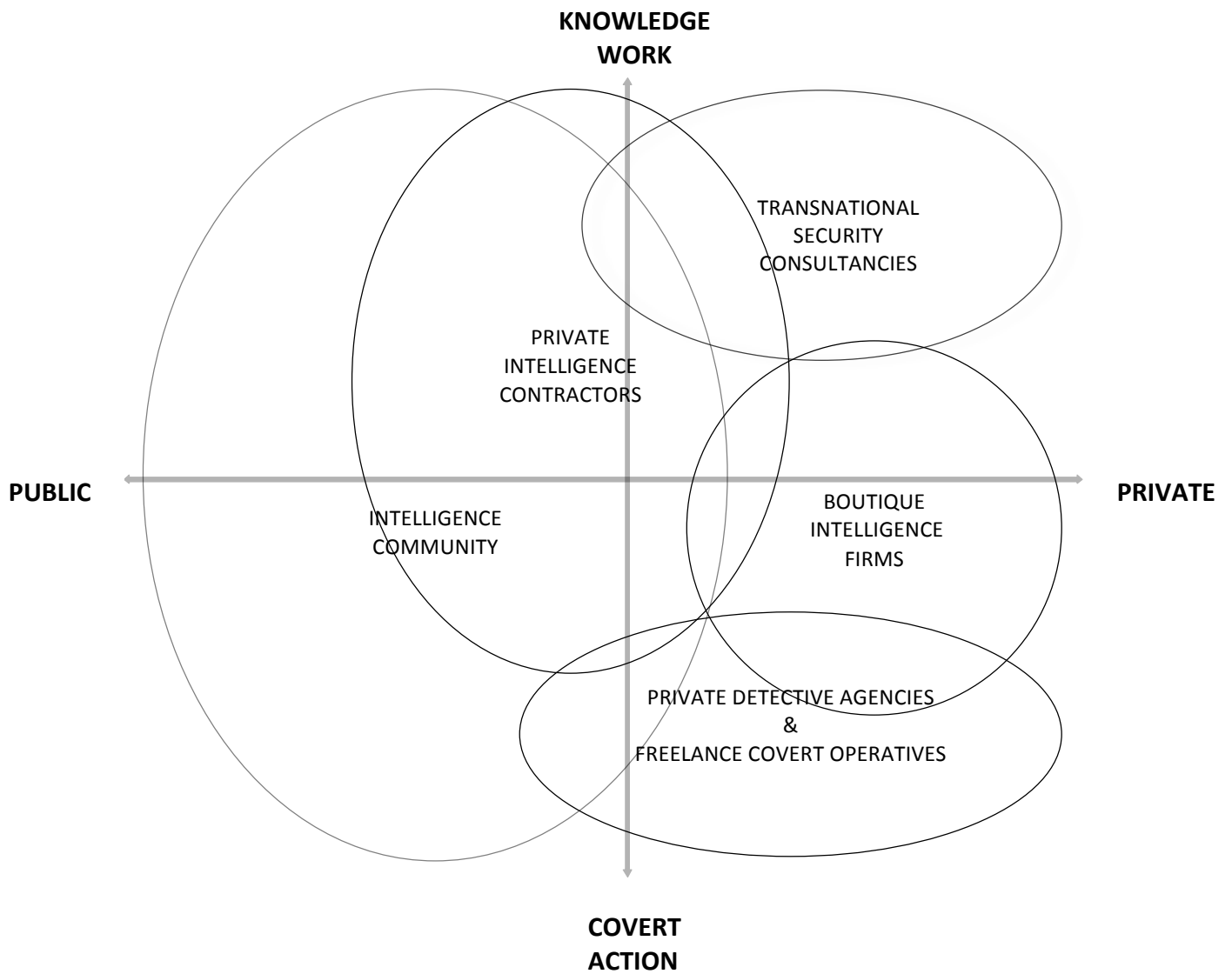
Consideration of similarities and differences between the methods that have evolved to protect and augment corporate interests and those deployed to maintain dominant political arrangements has also been limited. Certainly, shared overarching ambitions to preserve respective *status quos* of power distribution has engendered a degree of symbiosis and strategically orchestrated interaction; as have increasingly bilateral flows of personnel, intelligence and techniques (O'Reilly 2010). However, it must still be emphasized that nuanced differences will often characterise their respective use of dubious methods. Quite simply, those who operate in the private sphere often confront different challenges and opportunities when pursuing their high policing remit. There may also be consequent variations in the ways that the more pernicious effects of private high policing become manifest.

Somewhat inevitably, the analytical framework adopted in this paper is constructed around the public/private dichotomy. However, this is not a strict bifurcation and is principally deployed for heuristic reasons: to reiterate that high policing is not solely concerned with the public sphere; and also, to assist comprehension of its relational dynamics. This is especially important given that strategic exploitation of interstitial areas has been an increasing trend within high policing (see, for example: Lubbers 2012; Marx 1987; O'Reilly & Ellison 2006; O'Reilly 2010). The typology of private actors that is presented must therefore be located within a complex web of duplicity and complicity that is characterised by multidimensional interaction. This ensures that the analysis of private high policing extends beyond a limited focus on *privatization*; essentially a theoretical residue from traditional prioritisation of state security agency which has witnessed privileged attention to outsourcing (see, for example: Brodeur & Leman-Langlois 2006: 179; Brodeur 2007: 31). As indicated above such emphasis masks how private high policing entails much more than the delegation of state security functions and encompasses a diverse range of actors, who may serve both public and private clients alike.

This intertwining of public and private high policing is not limited to 'providers', but also includes their authorising 'auspices' (Bayley & Shearing 2001). For example, the national security interest now openly extends to protecting and enhancing the global competitiveness of key national industries; what has been termed 'economic well-being' in Britain (Gill 2003: 275) or '*Secteurs d'Activité d'Importance Vitale*' ('Sectors

of Activities of Vital Importance’) in France (Ocqueteau 2011: 17; 2012: 16). Such intersection of state security and powerful corporate interests has stimulated developments pertinent to the pluralisation of high policing that include: the appointment of former state security officials to board-level and senior security positions within key industrial sectors (Ocqueteau 2011); the emergence of new strategic partnerships to facilitate intelligence sharing and fusion toward mutual security objectives (O’Reilly 2010); and, the pursuit of economic espionage and industrial spying to achieve strategic advantage over competitors, as well as legal and technological counter-actions (Nasheri 2005).

The (Private) High Policing Field



This diagram conveys the pluralised nature of the high policing field, identifying key private providers and drawing attention to the diversity within this paradigm. The variable operational methods that characterise high policing are amalgamated into a spectrum that spans 'knowledge work' to 'covert action'. These two elements are singled out as end-points not because they represent opposing characteristics – which they do not, intelligence is inextricably linked to covert action– but rather because in their purest forms they can be imagined as capturing more benign/licit and more malignant/illicit indicators of high policing. This spectrum is further set against a public-private continuum to transmit the respective auspices and providers involved. In this way, analysis progresses beyond a strict dichotomy towards greater relational complexity; i.e. significant areas of confluence where public reaches into private and vice-versa. The over-arching spread of auspices also reflects how private providers often serve both public and private clients. Albeit that should they enter the realm of public service, their actions will most likely be directed by the policy objectives of one dominant state, whereas they might have multiple concurrent private clients (Brodeur 2010: 289). It is also important that these providers are not viewed as statically locked but rather as in constant oscillation. Their protean nature is a consequence of both inherent responsiveness to new market opportunities as well as a reflection of how various societal catalysts shape their operational remit. Furthermore, those providers depicted in this typology are archetypes and represent the most identifiable private configurations of high policing characteristics. There are inevitably areas of operational overlap, whether as a result of shared market space or more calculated collaborations; more illicit pursuits are sometimes subcontracted to other, less visible, private high policing providers.

In placing these *caveats* around a diagram that is indicative rather than rigidly comprehensive, one final point must be emphasized: its primary objective is to shed light on the range of providers engaged in *private* high policing only. Although public high policing is represented through holistic inclusion of the intelligence community, no attempt has been made to disaggregate this assemblage into specific agencies. Certainly, there is a need to develop a comparable typology of the institutional framework for state security but that is beyond the scope of this discussion. For now,

our analytic focus is upon those actors who can be categorised as private high policing providers.

Private Intelligence Contractors

Amongst the various contemporary manifestations of private high policing, it is the trend towards outsourcing intelligence functions in the United States that has drawn most critical attention due to the scale and nature of delegated activities (Brodeur & Leman-Langlois 2006; Chesterman 2011; Shorrock 2008). It is estimated that some 70% of the \$52 billion U.S. intelligence budget is currently spent on contractors (Chatterjee 2013). Unsurprisingly, the boardrooms of leading private intelligence contractors such as Lockheed Martin and Northrup Grumman are replete with distinguished retirees from state security service.² Indeed, current public-private interaction has become so intense and complex that simplistic notions of migration from public service to private employ are now antiquated. One report heralding the emergence of a 'National Security Industrial Complex' describes how individuals 'slip from one role in industry to another in government, cross-promoting...and self-dealing in ways that make the fabled revolving door redundant, if not completely disorienting' (Chatterjee 2013).

As recent whistle-blower revelations reiterate, contractors –with top-secret security clearances– have not only participated in surveillance systems to track terrorists abroad but have also been deployed within sophisticated data-mining programmes inside the US homeland (Chatterjee 2010; Shorrock 2008). Such pervasive intelligence-gathering mechanisms invoke key signatures of high policing. However, there are other instances of private participation at the more coercive and extra-legal end of the high policing spectrum that have related to some of the most controversial tactics associated with the War on Terror; notably coercive interrogation of detainees and rendition (Chesterman 2011; Jamieson & McEvoy 2005).

Whilst it is important to emphasize that the trend towards *privatised* high policing has not yet been evident to a comparable extent outside the United States, this case

² For a useful summary of key intelligence contractors, see the database available at: www.crocodyl.org/spiesforhire (Accessed August 19, 2013).

still contradicts one previous hypothesis regarding private high policing, namely that: 'the higher the stakes in security the more will the responsibilities of public government be (re)asserted' (Brodeur 2007: 32). Indeed, even if private firms are less likely to be active in traditional areas of state espionage such as running covert agents, work that they have performed includes devising false identities for overseas case-officers (Miller 2006) as well as recruitment and handling of human intelligence sources in Iraq (Chesterman 2011: 114). What is clear amongst these various anecdotes is that the appetite for delegating intelligence functions has proved insatiable and exists within a permissive neoliberal environment. Moreover, it seems that when private providers reach towards the more coercive, extra-legal end of the high policing spectrum, they invariably act under state auspices.

Transnational Security Consultancies

Transnational security consultancies ('TSCs') represent a more measured form of high policing. Firms such as Control Risks, Diligence and The Risk Advisory Group are characterized by their extensive global footprints and their provision of sophisticated security solutions that reduce client risk-exposure in hostile environments. The fact that many TSC service-lines can be characterized as 'knowledge-work' has raised doubts as to whether they fall within the high policing paradigm (Brodeur 2007: 33; 2010: 224). Certainly, as commercial enterprises, TSCs attach great importance to their established reputations and have traditionally steered clear of the sharper-end of security operations. Practice-areas such as business intelligence, confidential investigations, fraud prevention, political and security risk analysis and travel security appear comparatively benign when set against more extreme forms of high policing. However, it would be naïve to dismiss TSCs as little more than high policing-*lite*. These firms' operating logic speaks directly to the ideological rationale of this paradigm: they are defined by a proclivity to reach out for new threats –principally in the context of global insecurities– to preserve and extend their clients' interests (O'Reilly 2010). This is both a calculated and a calculating business. It involves much more than drumming up business by fostering client anxiety –to continuously do so would prove self-defeating by creating what one security consultant termed 'warning fatigue'– but rather focuses upon creating sustainable markets for their

services. Not only reducing risk exposure but identifying and facilitating profitable business ventures in complex security environments that may initially appear discouraging. Indeed, if we understand *intelligence* not only as information obtained covertly but also as ‘risk assessment intended to guide action’ (Chesterman 2011: 7), then these firms are consummate intelligence entities.

The characterisation of TSCs as providers of private high policing can also be attributed to their engagement in absorbent policing, albeit in a less pervasive form than their state security counterparts. Whilst they cannot match either the latter’s ambitions for ubiquity or capacity for data-retention, they share a proclivity towards amassing utile intelligence that is later expediently deployed. In the case of TSCs this is when it is re-packaged into security products and marketed to clients. Leading firms also compile their own databases to track trends in pertinent security risks. For example, Control Risks maintains a global database of kidnappings that extends back to 1975 with the firm claiming to have resolved over 2,000 cases.³ This propensity to absorb useful knowledge is also evident in recruitment strategies, where expected gravitation towards former state security operatives is enhanced by what one security consultant described as ‘integrating thought-leaders’ from other fields that contribute to the cumulative knowledge base. Such areas include: the energy sector; the extractive industry; forensic accounting; humanitarianism; media; government; and, academics with relevant language skills or geopolitical specialisations.

TSCs also represent model examples of ‘High policing organisations...attempting to harness the power of informal networks’ (Brodeur & Dupont 2006: 21). This is most evident in challenging emerging markets where they will often recruit former state security operatives from their host nation. Tapping into both the symbolic capital and personal connections of these actors improves TSCs’ capacity to assist clients in contexts with elevated risks such as corruption and organised crime. Such *human resources* are invaluable when guiding clients through precarious business terrain where boundaries between informality and illegality are often indistinct and local

³ Control Risks | Kidnap and Crisis Response: www.controlrisks.com/Services/Security/CrisisManagement/Pages/KidnapPreparednessandResponse.aspx (Accessed: August 20, 2013).

law enforcement is at best inefficient or under-resourced, at worst corrupt and dangerous.

Whilst TSCs are certainly keen to resolve clients' security problems, in true high policing fashion their interest does not lie in crime suppression *per se*. Certainly, they may provide strategic support to sympathetic law enforcement contacts to investigate crimes suffered by their clients. However, the primary objective is not to apprehend those responsible and bring them to justice but rather to restore client interests and to avoid future exposure. TSCs may not directly manipulate criminality in the same manner as public high policing actors but there is dependency on its continued presence –and indeed that of other threats– to both legitimize and necessitate their services. Indeed, even if they do not have truck with the underworld and are unlikely to engage in extra-legal action, TSCs have proved adept at dancing creatively on the periphery of those who do.

Boutique Intelligence Firms

The activities of boutique intelligence firms blend highly developed analytical skills with more dubious practices. Operating within a more niche market, their activities not only include traditional high policing tactics of infiltration but also extend to deceptive public relations strategies, online censorship and even the facilitation of private justice. Whilst they rarely cross the Rubicon into extra-legality –and can always turn to freelance covert operatives should such needs arise– their actions are emblematic of corporate authoritarianism in the transnational information age.

To demonstrate how these intelligence strategists sit comfortably within notions of private high policing, British firm Hakluyt –currently trading as the Holdingham Group– and US firm Total Intelligence Solutions –now re-branded as OODA– provide examples. Both firms were established by former state security operatives who brought their intelligence tradecraft to the corporate sphere. Both firms have also attracted controversy despite a shared proclivity towards a low-profile corporate existence. In the case of Hakluyt, one activist group uncovered how it had hired a freelance spy to infiltrate European protest groups and obtain information on future campaigns against leading oil companies (Lubbers 2002; 2012; see also further discussion below). Total Intelligence Solutions has similarly been accused of using

infiltration to obtain information on activists targeting agriculture conglomerate Monsanto (Scahill 2010). Whilst these allegations have not been fully substantiated – characteristically, the precise nature of the services provided remains contested– it should be noted that Monsanto has ‘form’ in deploying private actors to suppress critical voices (Lubbers 2012: Ch.5).

Beyond such orthodox infiltration methods, boutique intelligence firms have also deployed devious strategies drawn from shady sub-fields of public relations and information security. Indeed, the capacity to incorporate techniques gleaned from other areas underlines private high policing’s inherent capacity for reinvention to protect its corporate auspices. Weiss (2007) has previously articulated how throughout modern history, private security has consistently adapted to conquer ‘new frontiers of capitalist expansion’ (p.1). Extending his analysis to private high policing, similar observations can be made regarding new *loci* of capitalist activity; a chain-reaction will often be triggered as organised opposition emerges and becomes the target of questionable tactics to defend powerful interests. Indeed, Weiss (2007) has astutely observed how ‘...today’s “frontier” policing is a throwback to the *laissez-faire* capitalist era of labor spies’ (p.3; see also: O’Reilly & Ellison 2006: 653).

In establishing the new research fields of ‘activist intelligence’ and ‘covert counterstrategy’, the ground-breaking work of Lubbers (2012) charts a trajectory of authoritarianism from the suppression of organised labour by industrial capitalism to contemporary targetting of activists by transnational capitalism. Indeed, there is continuity not only throughout history but also across public and private domains; the (mis)representation of legitimate dissent as violent radicalism legitimises recourse to covert methods in both spheres. Indeed, the amorphous designation of ‘subversive’ has passed from leftist movements to a broader range of activism, often those concerned with environmental issues and usually grouped under the pejorative label of ‘anti-globalisation’. As one activist-journalist has remarked: ‘green is the new red’ (Potter 2011).

In the current transnational information age, the location for both worker dissent and activist opinion has, at least partially, relocated online. Commercial concern as to the scope and impact of such criticism has witnessed the development of advanced surveillance programmes to identify not just militant staff and activist

critics but even those unhappy customers who take their complaints to the Internet. The far-reaching consequences of such cyber-snooping have included firing militant employees and 're-educating' those deemed too sympathetic to labour grievances (Stepanek 2000). As Lubbers (2012) highlights not only does such virtual surveillance, and the corporate authoritarianism it epitomises, pose dangerous implications for freedom of association, freedom of expression and the right to privacy but it can also facilitate extreme forms of private justice. One powerful example is provided by the case of Northwest Airlines who fired militant workers on the basis of evidence collected through an online surveillance system called 'CyberSleuth' (Lubbers 2002: 121; 2012: 118).

Further extending their dubious repertoire boutique intelligence firms have also integrated 'issue management', a variant form of public relations, alongside traditional intelligence work. This semi-visible practice echoes tenets of high policing as it: '...emphasizes the need for scanning, monitoring and tracking external forces that are a potential threat to the company' (Lubbers 2012: 196). Its toxic blend of diplomacy and intelligence is characterised by secrecy, deceit and manipulation. For example, dialogue with activists is cynically initiated for intelligence gathering rather than mediation (Rowell 2002). One firm, Stratfor –short for Strategic Forecasting Inc.– has developed a sophisticated 'divide to rule' playbook for defeating activist opposition (Horn 2013) with tactics that are reminiscent of counter-insurgency strategy, albeit in the different setting of corporate capitalism.

Private Detectives and Freelance Covert Operatives

The dubious exploits of private detectives and freelance covert operatives provide perhaps the most potent demonstration of private forms of high policing. To both protect and augment powerful corporate interests, their activities have centred on two principal objectives: to suppress dissent, whether internal or external; and, to ensure competitive advantage by engaging in corporate espionage. Indeed, the more questionable the activity, the greater likelihood of outsourcing to these clandestine agents. Establishing a critical distance from shady exploits is not only important for corporate auspices but equally for other private high policing actors –notably aforementioned boutique intelligence firms– who contract out assignments to these

ultra low-profile operators in similar pursuit of plausible deniability. This 'dirty work' (Marx 1987) hypothesis can be further extended into the public domain as the police, government departments and even executive interests have all deployed private agents to pursue extra-legal objectives and circumvent their own operational limitations (Brodeur 2010: 292; Lubbers 2012: xiii-xiv).

The pivotal role of these private actors in the genealogical evolution of the high policing paradigm has previously been acknowledged (Brodeur 2007: 31; O'Reilly & Ellison 2006: 647) and is most explicit in the activities of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency (Morn 1982: 68-69). It provided the template for using covert methods to undermine worker movements and to destroy radical political groups; strategic practices subsequently embraced by a nascent FBI. As 'an essential ingredient in industrial capitalism's struggle against working class militancy' (Spitzer & Scull 1977: 22) and a key facet of 'the government-business alliance against labor' (Goldstein 1978: 5), the Pinkerton Agency was an early example of private high policing. Its activities emphasize that private actors are not new to this paradigm and also counter dominant perceptions that dubious methods are cultivated in the public sphere before transplantation into the private. The reality of public-private interactions has always been more complex (O'Reilly 2010: 194-196).

An enduring predilection to both monitor worker activity (see, for example: Chu 2009) and to pre-empt organised dissent ensures that recourse to private detectives, as well as other forms of private high policing action such as 'blacklisting', remain features of corporate authoritarianism; such activities often entailing nefarious public-private connections (Boffey 2010). Indeed, one unexpected revelation from the Leveson Inquiry into unethical practices by the British press was that the Serious Organised Crime Agency possessed a list of some one hundred companies –including leading law-firms, insurance houses and finance companies– who had used 'rogue' private investigators to obtain information in contravention of data protection legislation (Laville 2013).

Delving deeper into the murky world of private high policing, freelance covert operatives are its least visible manifestation. Their supremely clandestine work is usually conducted by lone operators or small teams. Such activities rarely come to public attention and when they do, it is normally as a result of either activist

vigilance or revelations during legal proceedings involving their corporate auspices. Triangulating a range of such sources, Lubbers (2012) has constructed detailed accounts of several notable operations involving these spies-for-hire. The case of Manfred Schlickenreider provides an instructive example. This *faux* activist posed as a left-wing sympathiser and documentary filmmaker to gain the confidence of a number of European social movements. Compiling intelligence dossiers for both corporate clientele –such as Shell and BP through the intermediary of Hakluyt– as well as for the German domestic and foreign intelligence services, his operations epitomise the blurred boundaries of high policing.

The trusted status that infiltrators achieve within activist groups can witness covert operations extend beyond mere intelligence gathering towards multi-layered deceit. Acting as *agents provocateurs*, their influence can be leveraged to sow internal division and to deliver highly calculated disruption. One insidious stratagem involves steering the group towards direct action that damages either the reputation or property of the corporate target (Lubbers 2012: 145). The auspice/victim subsequently takes legal action for resultant losses even though these were, in fact, instigated by its own machinations. Of course, obtaining such damages is not the primary objective; that is the operational paralysis of these groups.

Although tasking covert agents with corporate espionage lacks the social control dimensions of suppressing activism and dissent described above, the clandestine, coercive and deceptive methods deployed to gain strategic advantage over business competitors bear many recognised high policing traits. Whilst corporate espionage has received limited academic attention, those studies that have been conducted reveal an extensive range of techniques: theft of trade secrets; bribery; black-mail; ‘dumpster-diving’; high-tech surveillance; targeting disgruntled employees; inserting ‘moles’ to gather commercial intelligence; circulating disinformation about rival products; and even, sabotaging competitor operations (Crane 2005: 236; Hulnick 2002: 72; Nasheri 2005: 8).

The application of these clandestine activities on behalf of corporate interests has largely escaped consideration through the conceptual prism of high policing. However, closer research attention to corporate espionage has significant potential to enhance existing analyses. There are nuances to this form of private high policing

action that are not necessarily present in its more intensively examined public forms. For example, the recruitment of informants takes on novel dynamics when relocated to the corporate realm. The integration of motivations such as professional advancement, employee dissatisfaction and the exploitation of cultural affinities (Nasheri 2005: 80-81; 88) enhances the scope for recruiting human sources beyond staple tactics of manipulating greed, exploiting personal indiscretions and harnessing ideological empathy. In contrast to state security agencies, corporations also have limited means –both operationally and legally– to conduct counter-intelligence to protect themselves from the enemy within; running double-agents or forcing staff to take polygraph tests is ‘forbidden by law or unworkable in practice (Hulnick 2002: 68).

Consequently, not only is there operational space for human intelligence operations in the corporate sphere but its extent may be an even darker, ‘dark figure’ than previously imagined. This is not solely attributable to the challenges of detection, as even if the perpetrators of corporate espionage are identified, the decision to pursue compensation may be tempered by commercial considerations (Gill & Hart 1999: 252-254; O’Reilly & Ellison 2006: 649). Embarrassing revelations of organisational security failures may negatively impact on shareholder confidence, whilst contested legal proceedings might release further sensitive information into the public domain. Consequently, seeking reparation for the financial loss suffered through corporate espionage is often balanced against market factors.

Convergence and Divergence at the Public-Private Interface

Although the preceding analysis identifies common ground between private high policing actors and their public counterparts, this permeable and uncertain separation is characterised as much by asymmetry as it is by overlap. Similar traits are present but to varying degrees, whilst contrasting operational capacities may trigger functional fusion whereby ‘public and private police may be drawn together to supplement their respective weaknesses’ (Marx 1987: 183). In short there are complex patterns of convergence and divergence to be interpreted. Previous analyses provide some guidance by drawing attention to key similarities and areas of public-private coalescence (see, for example: O’Reilly & Ellison 2006; O’Reilly 2010).

These include: an overarching 'secrecy complex' (Brodeur & Dupeyron 2003: 12-13) that both protects secrets and covers-up wrongdoing; a common 'risk mentality' (Johnston & Shearing 2002: 16-17) that prioritises a culture of pre-emptive threat assessment; a mutually reinforcing insecurity discourse that promotes shared 'mythologies' (Dupont 2004: 18) regarding arbitrarily prioritised threats; and, highly developed complicity in the obfuscation of responsibility for extra-legality and abuse (Jamieson & McEvoy 2005). The fact that most private high policing actors possess backgrounds in state security service also feeds behavioural convergence and informal interaction towards shared objectives.

In his final work, Brodeur (2010) returned to his defining features of high policing to assess whether they were also evident in its private manifestations (pp. 288-293). The principal thrust of his assessment was that the vast majority are indeed present, albeit to a quite varying degree. However, an element of Brodeur's analysis that is problematic was his assertion that: '...most of the characteristics of high policing do not just apply to private high policing as such but also to private security when considered as a whole' (Brodeur 2010: 288). As Stenning (2012: 14) has observed, this seems to inexplicably blur the distinction between high policing and low policing. One explanation might be that Brodeur wished to draw parallels between policing action that prioritises particular interests: those of the client(s) in relation to private security; and, those of the executive in relation to (public) high policing. Unfortunately, the intent that underpinned this connection remains unclear and rests somewhat unsatisfactorily with existing high policing theory. Moreover, by making this association between high policing and private security more generally, Brodeur's analysis became partially predicated upon that body of empirical research concerning contract security providers, the salience of which is questionable. For example, his identification of the high policing trait of *absorbent policing* progressed beyond the strategic accumulation of intelligence by private actors to include the manner in which private security deals with minor infractions such as shoplifting; *absorbing* them through private justice solutions rather than reporting them to the police or pursuing criminal justice sanctions. Such action does not smack of high policing as it reflects a pragmatic solution to address a persistent criminal problem rather than a mechanism for compiling intelligence. The reticence of private security

actors to share such accumulated intelligence with their public counterparts (Lippert & O'Connor 2006: 64) might bear superficial similarity to the high policing tendency of creating information-silos but ultimately also lacks the attendant future-focused dynamics of identifying potential threats to dominant power arrangements.

Notwithstanding this unnecessary extension into private security, Brodeur's analysis astutely mapped the imbalanced manifestations of high policing traits across the public-private divide. For example, he noted how the decreased scope for private actors to engage in *extra-legality* witnesses increased recourse to *deceit*. He also identified the *conflation of separate powers* as the most significant area of divergence: '...there is no equivalent in the private sector of the totalitarian aggregation of all coercive powers and practices' (2010: 292). Such circumstances were only imaginable under extreme cases of economic colonization, Brodeur citing the example of United Fruit in Latin America. However, there are other historical instances where corporate authoritarianism has harnessed private high policing to manifest excess in both its consolidation of power and its administration of private justice. The Pinkerton Agency's suppression of political radicals in the industrial age provides a robust example. Not only did its strategies bear many hallmarks of a counterinsurgency campaign but this firm was also party to an astonishing usurpation of state authority. This was encapsulated by the hanging of nineteen suspected members of the clandestine organisation, the Mollie Maguires, in 1877, which has been poignantly reflected upon as:

'...one of the most astounding surrenders of sovereignty in American history. A private corporation initiated the investigation through a private detective agency; a private police force arrested the alleged offenders; the coal company attorneys prosecuted them. The state only provided the courtroom and the hangman' (Aurand 1971: 25, cited in Weiss 1986: 92)

Whilst such circumstances are rare in practice, they foreshadow the type of societal settings discussed in the next section, where private high policing ascendance can occur and take on more extreme manifestations.

Brodeur's analysis briefly notes public-private parallels in relation to secrecy but I would go further to suggest that divergence is also present where cultures of secrecy

intersect with the varying visibility of high policing actors. Certainly, both sets of providers maintain low profiles and zealously guard their operational secrecy. However, in its more authoritarian forms, public high policing deliberately cultivates a *known presence* to subtly intimidate its target population. State security agencies achieve social control over their populace by being 'felt everywhere, without being seen' (Brodeur 2010: 230). Private high policing, in contrast, will seek to maintain its hidden influence through achieving an *unknown presence*. This (in)visibility also deflects critical attention from their activities; it is hard to research what is rarely seen, let alone detected. The coercive strategies of open secrecy might previously have been evident in the private sector when there was mass deployment of informants and *agents provocateurs* to undermine early American syndicalist movements. However, contemporary private high policing forms lack such grand social control ambitions and engage in much more subtle machinations to achieve compliance.

Further consideration of the divergences between public and private high policing reveals how their respective auspices inevitably shape their spheres of activity. This is significantly more complex than any generalised assumption that the instrumental linkage of public high policing providers to state authority facilitates a greater operational range. Whilst it is broadly true that public trumps private in terms of what it can do and where it can do it, it is important to reiterate that the authorising clients of private high policing are not only corporations but may also include public bodies and state institutions. When the latter is the case, these private actors may enjoy both extended reach and indeed greater protection by virtue of their connection to the state as well as their operational synergies with public actors. Indeed, the 'marginal structural position' (Marx, 2014) of private actors may actually witness enhanced operational freedom when compared to their public counterparts, as they are not subject to the same ethical, legal, jurisdictional, organisational or territorial constraints. This, comparatively privileged, status has proved particularly significant at the transnational level with private actors being deployed to resolve complex security scenarios where state intervention might be diplomatically problematic (for example, when TSCs conduct kidnap and ransom negotiations, see: O'Reilly 2011). Moreover, a divergence of operational reach may actually catalyse a

convergence of expertise to symbiotically overcome security challenges (Marx 1987: O'Reilly 2010).

Additionally, to assess the remit of high policing providers purely in terms of their auspice's domain is to neglect their capacity –whether public or private– to conduct operations at their own instigation rather than acting solely as their master's agent. Brodeur and Dupeyron (2003) have previously characterised public high policing as occupying a space '[b]etween instrumentality and identity' (p. 12). Not only may it be difficult to ascertain whether operations stem from executive decision or state security initiative but high policing providers have also proved quite capable of deploying their skills to their own, personal, benefit through shady excursions into the corporate sphere (Henriques & Bancaleiro 2014). Similar independent dynamics are evident in the private sector where covert operations are also pursued for motivations that extend beyond paymasters' direct instructions. Manfred Schlickenreider, the previously discussed freelance covert operative, conducted intelligence-gathering operations on his own initiative, confident that the information collected would add value to dossiers he was already compiling (Lubbers 2012: 153). Ideological motivations may also underpin private high policing, a reality that has been evident in the surveillance of protest groups and left-wing sympathisers (see, for example: Lubbers 2012: 182-191; O'Toole 1978: 31-32). Circumstances of political transition can also witness high policing actors attempt to take greater control over their destiny. Motives of self-preservation may be reflected in surreptitious attempts to subjugate the change process, whilst mass migration to the private sector may result in continued hidden influence under the emergent political order and the repurposing of their coercive high policing toolkit for private ambitions (see, for example: Łoś & Zybertowicz 2000). The remaining section wrestles with an outstanding question regarding private high policing handed down by Brodeur (2007: 34): what are its resources of symbolic power and how do these impact upon its capacity for coercive action?

Comparative Resources of Symbolic Power

In developing the concept of symbolic power, Bourdieu (1991) articulated how it '...is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and

those who submit to it' (p. 170). Whilst this concept has gained analytical purchase within the low policing realm (Loader 1997; Mopas & Stenning 2001), its application to high policing has been more circumspect. Certainly, Brodeur (2007) identified it as a key element of public-private distinction and underscored its importance for future research but this issue, like most previous discussion of private high policing, was left hanging. This is largely attributable to the fact that symbolic power, this 'almost magical power, which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force...by virtue of the specific effect of mobilization' (Bourdieu 1991: 170) represents a challenging prospect for empirical investigation, even more so in the high policing context. Consequently, the ambition of this section is to refine Brodeur's preliminary observations.

For Brodeur, the symbolic power of *public* high policing was bound-up with the cultural mythology surrounding secret service agents, as well as both the official and tacit endorsement that their activities receive from the executive. In contrast to the police, they derive symbolic power from 'their low visibility, thriving on rumours, innuendo and fear', their depiction in popular culture fostering the belief 'that an intelligence agency is effective in proportion to its disrespect of all rules' (Brodeur 2007: 34). It was further suggested that private high policing is comparatively weak in terms of symbolic power and unable to advance any such legitimacy claims for pursuit of more extreme coercive action. However, there is significantly more to be said on the symbolic dimensions of private high policing.

In considering the wider spectrum of high policing action, rather than a narrow focus upon coercive activity, it should first be acknowledged that both public and private actors exert symbolic power through their capacity to designate security threats with minimal second-guessing of their analyses. Bigo (2000) further explained that for these risk professionals,

'The main source of their power is not in their capacity to muster coercive force (although they certainly do that), rather it is in their capacity to define the sources of our insecurity.' (p. 94)

High policing providers will generally occupy a privileged 'position of enunciation' (Bigo 2006: 125) and wield a 'power of legitimate pronouncement' (Loader 1997)

regarding insecurities. Insofar as private actors are concerned, their risk assessments shape client decisions in a manner that parallels the impact of intelligence agency analyses on government policy. Furthermore, their increasingly pervasive presence, both as agents of the national security apparatus and also as recurring contributors to media coverage of security issues, has also been recognised as influential within security discourse (O'Reilly 2010).⁴ Whilst public will still exceed private in both its scope and degree of influence, there are undoubted similarities across these manifestations of symbolic power.

Returning to the cultural mythology that surrounds high policing, popular perceptions have certainly been shaped by spy fiction and a media focus that is dominated by state security agents (see, for example: Wark 1991). However, the suggestion that their private counterparts lack any comparable potential to generate symbolic power, whilst generally correct, requires some qualification. First, private high policing actors are experts at invoking state security connections in order to tap into the latter's mystique. Whilst private low policing (contract security) may attempt to channel the symbolic power of the public police by emulating their appearance and behaviour, private high policing more subtly harnesses the dark allure of its obverse by emphasizing staff backgrounds in state security as well as the similarly secretive nature of their work. Second, private high policing actors have also demonstrated significant skill in cultivating their own mythologies. The Pinkerton Agency again provides a useful historical example through a range of image-management strategies that included: a panoptical emblem (the all-seeing eye); a motto that conveyed inexorability ('we never sleep'); skilful media manipulation; and, the publication of ghost written novels that eulogised the firm's exploits (Morn 1982).⁵ Such choreographed efforts portrayed this private detective firm as the

⁴ For an indication of the effort that some private high policing providers make to establish their security credentials, to market their service-lines, and, more tacitly, to contribute towards (in)security discourse, see the 'Commentary' webpage of leading intelligence consultancy, The Soufan Group. This web resource gathers together this firm's media contributions, policy briefings, press coverage and public testimonies as well as a host of other forms of media and policy engagement. See: The Soufan Group, Commentary: <http://soufangroup.com/category/commentary/> (Accessed: November 27, 2014).

⁵ Indeed, the air of mystery cultivated by the Pinkertons would even captivate audiences even beyond the United States, as their renown travelled through their transatlantic operations and international policing connections (Morn 1982). Their self-eulogizing efforts fostered such enduring public interest that these 'cowboy detectives' became part of the fabric of the cultural history of frontier America.

nation's premier crime-fighting entity and were later replicated by the FBI when the primary *locus* of high policing in the United States shifted from private to public. Under the stewardship of J. Edgar Hoover, significant resources were devoted to promoting the Bureau as an elite crime-fighting force when in reality, most of its operations –like those of its private predecessor– were focussed on repressing organised dissent.

Today's private high policing actors may not command such presence within the public psyche but calculated strategies to manage mystique maintain; albeit these are now principally deployed to convince potential clients to retain their services rather than to legitimise dubious action in the eyes of the public. Jules Kroll, founder of the eponymous corporate investigations specialist Kroll Inc., successfully harnessed media attention regarding high-profile cases –for example, tracing the misappropriated wealth of a number of dictators– to consolidate his firm's image as an 'international gumshoe', already having been tagged 'Wall Street's Private Eye'. Whilst such cultivation of prestige may enhance a firm's brand, it does little to legitimise the more coercive action with which high policing has been associated. Indeed, for those private actors who offer a darker high policing skills-set, their *modus operandi* is to evade detection and the likely criminal punishment that would follow. Their actions will rarely receive societal or political acquiescence, unless perhaps they happen to be acting under some form of state authority.

Conclusion: The Unfinished Business of (Private) High Policing

The paradigm of high policing represents 'unfinished business' on a number of levels. First, the academic debate regarding its private dimensions is still developing and as this analysis has established, there are a range of key aspects yet to receive close examination. Second, this covert world is an inhospitable and obstructive research terrain, one from which investigators often return laden with unresolved suspicions and an overarching feeling that work is incomplete. Third, high policing is a research subject that challenges us to reassess theoretical frameworks and to recalibrate methodological tools in light of its variable methods and its shifting manifestations.

The Pinkertons are now even the subject of an eponymously titled cable TV drama.

Indeed, the challenging nature of this paradigm may be one reason why it has stimulated as much theoretical debate as it has empirical investigation; a research trend that this paper manifests and one which has previously drawn certain criticism (Brodeur 2007: 31; Brodeur & Dupont 2006: 22-23). However, theoretical refinement does provide a valuable platform for future research ambitions, and important guidance for future empirical investigation. Beyond spotlighting semi-visible private high policing actors and the disconcerting implications of their activities, theoretical development also prompts a more profound reimagining of this policing paradigm. Not only must important new dimensions be integrated into research agendas but existing methodologies must also be refashioned to address the different nuances, and indeed the new obstacles, that are presented by integrating the *private*.

A key objective of this discussion has been to highlight the pluralisation of high policing, identifying key private actors as well as the complex patterns of convergence and divergence that characterise the public-private interface. Whilst *public* high policing forms are sustained targets of critical attention and their actions sporadically provoke sufficient outrage to set public inquiries into motion, their *private* counterparts seem comparatively unscathed by societal scrutiny. One must look back to the LaFollette Committee (1936-41) and its investigation of private detective agencies' anti-syndicalist efforts in the USA to find an adequate precedent for the type of wide-ranging probe that is required to come to grips with the dubious actions of contemporary private agents. Indeed, the recent controversy in Britain regarding the infiltration of activist movements demonstrates the degree to which public has eclipsed private in terms of attention towards high policing action. Despite evidence that both public and private agents were undermining these groups from within, as well as clear overlaps in both their agendas and operations, the terms of reference for existing investigations –most of which have been internal– have largely excluded private dimensions to focus upon abusive actions by undercover police officers. It is doubtful that this trend will change within the much-anticipated public inquiry called by the British Home Secretary. Indeed, it may very well be that private high policing profits in the shadows when the critical spotlight falls on its public sibling. It is for this very reason that those private high policing providers spotlighted in this paper represent such important objects for future research.

Undoubtedly, the diffuse and fragmented contemporary manifestations of private high policing do not lend themselves to scrutiny and, as established in this analysis, there are quite a variety of actors who fall under this conceptual umbrella. Consequently, one of the challenges for academics in this field is to construct a public debate that highlights the cumulative social harms caused by private high policing. One vehicle to achieve this may be liberated sources such as the Stratfor 'Global Intelligence Files'. These were published via WikiLeaks by the Anonymous collective after they had hacked this intelligence firm. Such hactivism not only exposes dubious activities and government connections but also furnishes datasets that may prove useful to the analysis of private high policing. It is somewhat ironic that the surreptitious techniques used by techno-anarchists to obtain information such as this are a replication of high policing methods for anti-establishment objectives. However, such methodological innovation may prove increasingly fundamental if we are to ever illuminate these fields of 'endarkened governance (De Lint 2004).⁶ Whilst the intertwining of activism and research agendas is still in its infancy in this specific area –and has not yet been conducted within an explicit high policing frame– it has already furnished instructive new strategies through which to address this unwilling and dissembling field. (see, for example: Lubbers 2012: 200-206; Taylor 2014). Integrating the theoretical refinements proposed in this paper with such pioneering research methods is essential if we are to productively excavate the exigent terrain of private high policing.

Whilst the public-private distinction is certainly of heuristic value in understanding this paradigm, it must be reiterated that the inherently liquid nature of high policing ensures that it can also transcend neat categorisation. It floats across the public and private spheres, simultaneously harnessing the potentialities of both and taking hold wherever is most efficacious. It epitomises what Weiss has termed 'a flex and frequent permutation of spheres of power' (forthcoming). Indeed, in acting to preserve and augment dominant power arrangements, high policing behaves like an opportunistic infection to society's compromised immune system. It is ever-present,

⁶ In the context of discussing methodological innovations to research high policing, it is worth noting the work of Luscombe and Walby (2014) which highlights how 'access to information' requests can provide a window –albeit it a limited one– on to the activities of security agencies. Of course, private actors will often be outside the scope of such arrangements.

difficult to eradicate and takes advantage of propitious conditions. In considering how to advance research into its private dynamics, mapping the factors that create conducive environments for their ascendance is key. Beyond in-depth empirical work into those private high policing providers that have been identified, we would do well to chart their respective fortunes under such catalysts as, advances in surveillance technologies, capitalist expansion, conflict, ruptures in security governance and societal transition.

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