

YOUTH, POLICING AND DEMOCRACY

Also by Ian Loader

CAUTIONARY TALES: Young People, Crime and Policing in Edinburgh
(with Simon Anderson, Richard Kinsey and Connie Smith)

Youth, Policing and Democracy

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For Mum and Greg

The power of judgement rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement. And this enlarged way of thinking, which as judgement knows how to transcend its individual limitations, cannot function in strict isolation or solitude; it needs the presence of others 'in whose place' it must think, whose perspective it must take into consideration, and without whom it never has the opportunity to operate at all.

Hannah Arendt, Between Past and Future

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Preface

The task I attempt in this book often seems a rather daunting one. Drawing inspiration from recent social and political theory, I strive to bring together within a single account normative theorising and critique, and sociological investigation and interpretation. In particular, I try to develop an understanding of police accountability that is informed by both the recent work of Jürgen Habermas on communicative action, and interview-based research with young people and police officers. My hope is that our theoretical appreciation of democratic communication and its prospects will be enhanced by its encounter with a particular set of social issues – namely, policing and police–youth relations; and that our understanding of those issues can be enriched by looking at them through the lens of democracy.

This book started life as a doctoral thesis (something one hesitates to mention lest one invites the stock refrain ‘this reads like a PhD’). In revising it for publication I have been preoccupied with two overarching concerns. I have endeavoured, first of all, to make sense of the managerialism that has recently become such a predominant feature of the policing scene in Britain. Using Habermas’s theory of communicative action, I have tried to develop both a principled critique of managerialism and an alternative, more democratic way of thinking about police accountability, one I then use to inform the empirical enquiry. In so doing, I hope to have made some small – and accessible – contribution to the important theoretical task of combining normative reflection and social research.

In dealing with the research material I have tried, in so far as is possible, to allow young people and police officers to speak for themselves about the issues which confront them. But I have also interpreted their accounts in the light of my concern with democratic communication, something which inevitably entails pursuing certain lines of enquiry while at the same time neglecting others. I have in this respect – and this has not always been easy – taken care to keep the interpretation within certain bounds. Carrying out and reflecting upon this research has thrown up a host of puzzles, problems and ideas, some theoretical, others substantive. These, concerning such matters as place, crime and insecurity, crime and collective memory, and the social meanings of policing, I am now pursuing elsewhere. It is very tempting, however, to somehow ‘write these in’ to one’s interpretation of the problem that first gave rise to them;

a problem which suddenly appears to demand an analysis couched in these revised theoretical terms. This temptation I have resisted. Thus, to take but one example, while the research was conducted in and around Edinburgh, the account that follows is not primarily about crime and policing in Edinburgh (cf. Anderson *et al.*, 1994). I do not describe the areas in which the young people and police officers interviewed live or work in any detail; nor does the history, culture, or spatial and social structure of the city figure prominently in the analysis. For although these questions are both interesting and important they do not immediately pertain to the theoretical and political concerns which animate this text.

What follows then is a book about democratic policing, its prospects and the consequences of its absence for police–youth relations. First and foremost, I would like it to be judged in those terms.

Since this project began back in 1989, I – and it – have benefited from the encouragement and support of a great many people. I would like therefore to take this opportunity, if not to repay the debts accrued over the last few years, then at least to acknowledge what is owed and to whom. Thanks are due, first of all, to Richard Kinsey and Neil Walker, who supervised the original PhD, and whose enthusiasm, support and criticism have been invaluable. My appreciation also goes to all the young people and police officers who gave of their time to answer my questions; as well as to the teachers, youth workers, youth training supervisors and senior police officers who helped arrange the interviews. Special thanks in this regard are due to David Garbett, (then) Assistant Chief Constable of Lothian and Borders Police, who did much to facilitate the research with the police. Thanks also to Jean Goldring and Margaret Penman for transcribing the interviews.

Intellectually, I have benefited much from friends and colleagues who have at various times read draft chapters, made suggestions or generally engaged me in discussion of the book's themes. I owe a debt to them all. Particular mentions are due here to Pat Carlen for her help in the final stages of the thesis, to Robert Reiner and Peter Young for so constructively examining it, and, more recently, to Penny Fraser, Richard Sparks and Neil Walker (again) whose comments and suggestions have done much to improve the end product. It goes without saying that the remaining faults are all my doing.

Finally, I would like to thank all those friends who have over the last few years shared with me the joys and frustrations of life. For their support, countless good times and a whole lot else besides, an especially big thank you to Simon Anderson, Rachel Early, Connie Smith and, above all, Penny Fraser.

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Keele

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