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**Policing reality: urban disorder, failure and expert undoings**

**Abstract**

This article intervenes in discussions about the circulation of policing knowledge and the politics of expertise. As part of a broader conversation about transnational reconfigurations of state power, critical scholars have drawn attention to the influence of global policing ‘models’ and ‘private’ experts in shaping policy. They show how such figures and forms of knowhow symbolically enforce urban order and dispossess marginalized communities under conditions of neoliberal crisis. While incisive, these approaches can unduly portray expert authority as boundless and unassailable. This article argues that a sustained theoretical engagement with questions about controversies and failure opens up fruitful avenues to unsettle the perceived smoothness, inevitability and omnipotence of experts in relation to politics and governing. Drawing on insights from actor-network theory (ANT), it situates deference to global experts as interventions that seek to enact and *police* the terms of ‘reality’ concerning urban order. This approach allows us to better understand how such interventions work but also how they misfire and come undone. These claims are developed through a close reading of UK Prime Minister David Cameron’s attempt to solicit policy advice from renowned global ‘supercop’ William Bratton in the aftermath of the 2011 England riots.

**Keywords:** 2011 England riots; actor-network theory; policing models; zero tolerance; broken windows; William Bratton

## **Introduction**

The riots that swept across England between August 6-11, 2011 began following a protest of the police killing of Mark Duggan, a British-born African-Caribbean resident outside a police station in Tottenham. They later spread to other parts of London as well as Birmingham, Nottingham, West Bromwich, Bristol, Liverpool, Wolverhampton, Manchester and Salford. These events took place alongside the rollout of a vicious austerity program and amidst rising public concerns about an increasingly racialized, violent and unaccountable police posture. This article is concerned with the riots' aftermath and one aspect in particular. Once order was restored, then British Prime Minister David Cameron called for the adoption of US anti-gang approaches. He appealed to global 'supercop' William Bratton, the Chairman of the private security consulting firm Kroll Associates closely associated with the 'broken windows' theory of criminality and 'zero tolerance' policing. On the face of it, this move was hardly new, if even noteworthy at all. Bratton is cited as the "living incarnation of penal rigor" (Wacquant 2008, 57) and broken windows/zero tolerance are celebrated as global 'models' or 'best practices' in policing (Harcourt 2001). These models have been adopted around the world but with particular enthusiasm in England and Wales (Mawby 2008, 33) where state officials have engaged with US anti-crime experts (including Bratton) since the 1990s (Jones and Newburn 2002, 2007; Swanson 2013). Indeed, to the extent Bratton's relation to the 2011 riots' aftermath has been addressed by critical scholars, it is framed as the continuation of these longstanding patterns of interaction that reflect the enduring salience of these models in symbolically enforcing urban order under conditions of neoliberal crisis (Camp, Heatherton, and Kundnani 2016; Slater 2015).

I follow these authors in apprehending Cameron's calls to learn from Bratton in 2011 as one iteration in the ongoing transnational re-makings of police power. Where I depart, is in unsettling key assumptions about the nature and scope of these models' authority. In her pathbreaking *Violence Work*, Micol Seigel upends core myths of police as quintessentially 'local' and 'public', showing "police constantly and frequently crossing the borders supposed to contain them" (Seigel 2018, 13). Such "crossings", she argues, far from representing epiphenomenal dynamics or aberrations, "*define* state power and policing in the modern world" (50, emphasis added). These insights enable us to move past the ahistorical claim that "blurrings" of internal/external state boundaries associated with the transnational mobility of police personnel were ever meaningfully new (cf. Bigo 2000) and rearticulate the very idea of borders around police as "conceptual" rather than "absolute" (Seigel 2018, 14). Yet powerful as they are, such conclusions neither imply that these crossings are somehow normal or natural nor that their significance is obvious, predetermined or consistent across time and space.

Indeed, when examined closely, Cameron's appeal to Bratton and its fallout unsettles the terms of critical debates on the transnational circulation of policing models in two ways. First, it prompts a reevaluation *how* they are employed in politics and governing that complicates the boundaries between knowing, calculation and *unknowing*. In summoning Bratton, Cameron framed this as a response to a supposed 'gang problem', allegedly the riots' underlying cause. Yet his appeal to Bratton worked to enact this 'reality' whilst actively precluding inquiry into this supposed 'gang problem' itself. In other words, the figure of Bratton-as-gang-expert was paradoxically mobilized in governing this 'problem' by circumscribing the terms through which officials and publics

could *know* it. Second, Cameron's efforts to resolve a crisis of order through deference to Bratton misfired. This move sparked vigorous pushback from British state actors, producing additional sites of conflict and controversy. These events – what I here term 'Bratton in Britain' – therefore prompt useful re-evaluations of the character, vulnerabilities and limits of global policing models. A more sustained theoretical engagement with questions about controversies and failure, I argue, opens up fruitful avenues to unsettle the perceived smoothness, inevitability and omnipotence of 'private' experts in shaping urban policy. Shifting away from the prevailing critical focus on the rhetorical force of policing models like broken windows/zero tolerance and their resonance with neoliberalism, I situate expert interventions in public controversies over urban order as efforts to *enact* and thereby *police* the very terms of 'reality' itself.

This approach is inspired by actor-network theory (ANT) and the broader field of Science and Technology Studies (STS). In locating the relational assembly of the social, ANT provides powerful methodological and theoretical tools for mapping controversies related to knowledge production, governance and politics by 'following' involved actors and using this as the basis of theorizing. Extending the productive recent engagements with ANT in International Relations (IR) (Salter and Walters 2016; Blaney and Tickner 2017; Salter 2015) and critical security studies, particularly those surrounding questions of governance (Schouten 2014; Robinson 2018), knowledge (Aradau 2017; Berling and Bueger 2015; Aradau and Huysmans 2019) and failure (Lisle 2017; Agathangelou 2016), I explore how the 2011 riots gave rise to multiple, competing realities, which became sites of contestation and intervention by interested parties.

The article proceeds as follows. I begin by outlining literature on the mobilization

of policing models. I proceed to sketch an alternative ANT-inspired approach. Following this, I return to the 2011 riots, unpacking how the figure of Bratton intervened in their aftermath. I then outline the pushback against Bratton and reflect on its significance, before theorizing the undoing of expert claims. In conclusion, I reflect on the disruptive potential of failure as well as the possibilities and dangers of radical critique through myth-busting and exposure.

### **Mobilizing policing models**

While neither ‘zero tolerance’ nor ‘broken windows’ were coined by either figure, both are closely associated with Rudolph Giuliani’s tenure as mayor of New York City (1994-2001), during which Bratton served as the city’s police commissioner from 1994-6 (Vitale 2008).<sup>1</sup> Yet the origins of these policing approaches (also known as ‘quality of life’, ‘order maintenance’ or ‘community’ policing) can be traced back further. While some credit urbanist Jane Jacobs as their “godmother” (Schrader n.d.), these approaches are more commonly linked to the establishment of the Police Foundation in 1970 where New York public officials began collaborating with social scientists to combat racial tension in American cities. Out of this institutional “milieu” emerged a new criminological school of thought later popularized by the 1982 publication of James Q. Wilson and George Kelling’s *Atlantic Monthly* article “Broken Windows” (Parenti 1999, 71). The theory is based on the “deceptively simple” logic that minor forms of criminality (such as graffiti, abandoned cars and broken windows) facilitate a breakdown of urban order (J.T. Camp and Heatherton 2016, 19; Correia and Wall 2018). Following this logic, small signs of disorder should be the focus of policing to prevent their proliferation into

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<sup>1</sup> He resumed his role leading the NYPD again in 2014 and also has also led police forces in Los Angeles and Boston.

larger crimes. These approaches thus exemplify a set of governance strategies that Neil Smith (1996) calls “revanchist”—i.e. efforts to “take back” urban spaces from poor and racialized communities by the ruling class, what Parenti (1999, 89) terms a “postmodern version of Jim Crow” (for a slightly different approach see Derickson 2016, 2017).

As soon as they were introduced into New York in the early 1990s, these policing approaches and associated patterns of gentrification became objects of political struggle (Smith 1996, 1998) but also sites of intellectual controversy (Jones and Newburn 2002, 99). Harcourt (2001: 8) notes the “startling fact” that “the famous broken windows theory has never been verified” and that “there is no reliable evidence that the broken windows theory works”. Alongside these controversies, however, broken windows/zero tolerance have emerged as some of the most popular global ‘models’ of policing adopted across the US and around the world (Smith 2001; Harcourt 2001; Maharawal 2017; Mitchell and Beckett 2008). Critical scholars have linked their popularity with structural shifts associated with late capitalism and neoliberalism. Here many focus on the key roles of private consultancies founded by Giuliani and Bratton in promoting these approaches globally as part of neoliberal restructuring (Parenti 1999; Smith 1998, 2001; Mitchell and Beckett 2008; Camp and Heatherton 2016). “Neoliberalism”, argues Heatherton (2018, 168), “requires a method of regulation that can discipline bodies and reconfigure space at the pace of capital’s needs. Broken windows policing is that mobile practice: a portable logic capable of reconfiguring space in the name of regulating disorder”. In addition to locating their practical roles the violent re-taking of cities from marginalized communities, this literature focuses closely on these models’ symbolic political expediency (Garland 2001, 367:132; Jones and Newburn 2007, 106; Swanson 2013;

Wacquant 2009) based on their intuitive “common sense” appeal (Mountz and Curran 2009, 1038). Wacquant (2006, 105) sets out expose broken windows as a “worldwide security myth”. Despite this emphasis on its theatrical and mythic nature, there is a widespread agreement that the circulation of broken windows/zero-tolerance has serious practical stakes as they are put to work in authoritarian and racialized forms governance (Smith 2001, 74; Wacquant 2008; Swanson 2007; Derickson 2016).

This body of literature develops a critique of broken windows/zero tolerance and a framework for understanding their global reach as part of a broader literature on neoliberal urbanism, which situates the central roles of private think tanks in relation to policymaking (Peck and Tickell 2007). Most importantly for the present article, whilst fundamentally challenging the premise that these models circulate *because* they achieve their purported aims (reducing ‘crime’, producing ‘security’, etc.), critical scholars develop a framework for making sense of enduring political appeal across diverse geographies. In short, they qualify their “success” (Camp and Heatherton 2016, 24) by situating them as “*strangely* seductive” (Jones and Newburn 2007, 2 emphasis added) rather than obviously so. Despite its undeniable merits, this literature suffers from two limitations relevant to the present article. First, in elaborating these models’ symbolic political appeal in the context of late modernity/neoliberalism, leading critics unduly portray them as all-powerful, even unassailable. Harcourt (2001, 181) notes that broken windows “leaves most of its interlocutors speechless. Very few contest the policing strategy”. Wacquant portrays their global “export” as “repetitive, mechanical, uniform [...] predictable”, even “inevitable” (Wacquant 2009, xii, xiii). Second, the specific role(s) of expertise in many of these accounts remain vague, sometimes problematically

so. For instance, Wacquant's (2014, 79) approach foregrounds “tracking the circulation of punitive discourses, norms, and policies” in tracing shifts in penal policy. Yet it neither reveals evidence of careful “tracking” nor an accounting of the specific work done through these circulations. Both of these deficiencies reflect a lack of sustained focus on their limits, failures and contradictions. Indeed, Wacquant (2009, xix) declares his explicit disinterest in “prob[ing] policy misfirings, ambiguities, and contradictions, which abound in the penal field”.

So while highly instructive, the linkage of the global ‘success’ of broken windows/zero tolerance and rise ‘private’ experts like Bratton with the entrenchment neoliberalism is at the very least imprecise. As Mariana Valverde (2016, 52) notes, “neither ‘neoliberalism’, insofar as it exists, nor ‘privatization’ (often mentioned as a key strategy of neoliberalism) are terms that succeed fully in capturing recent innovations in the governance of urban security”. The reason is that approaching privatization as an outgrowth of neoliberalism occludes the long genealogy of states contracting-out services (ibid). Similarly, the references to circulations of policing “models” in imperial governance (e.g. Anderson and Killingray 1991) should give us pause in overdrawing the extent to which their contemporary circulations are uniquely neoliberal. This does not mean that we can simply bracket off neoliberalism. It does, however, suggest the value of analytically decentring it to uncover how forms of governing are contested, even if only in minor ways (Walters 2012, 42) and capturing elements of disjuncture alongside continuity (Aradau 2015). As an alternative to the overvaluation of neoliberalism and its zero-sum juxtaposition of public/private, Valverde suggests approaching the production of urban security through the concept of networks as developed in ANT. In the next

section, I take up this call in rethinking the nature, power and limits of policing models' transnational authority by foregrounding difficulties, controversies and failures.

### **Follow the policing controversy**

Before proceeding to do so, it is important to note that although side-lined, concern with failure is not entirely absent in the above literatures (e.g. Ellison and O'Reilly 2008; Jones and Newburn 2007; Loader and Walker 2007; Steinberg 2011; Swanson 2013; Slater 2015). A recent volume on global policing notes that although "global orientation" to the study of policing "seems both to be premised on, and to signal, the increased movement across borders of policy formulas, rhetoric and motifs", paradoxically there is a "growing awareness that policy transfer between different countries or even different police organizations does not always, or indeed often, work" (Loader et al. 2016, 3). Yet while importantly identifying examples of failures, difficulty and breakdown in policy transfer as well as the uncertain interfaces between success and failure (e.g. Ellison and O'Reilly 2008, 397), these authors do little with this information theoretically in reflecting on the nature and authority of policing models.

ANT provides powerful conceptual and methodological insights with which to address such concerns. Building on feminist material semiotics literature (Haraway 1991), ANT (also known as a "sociology of translation") can be defined as a "*semiotics of materiality*", which insists that all entities (linguistic or otherwise) "are produced in relations" (Law 1999, 4, emphasis in original). In this performative formulation, "entities achieve their form as a consequence of the relations in which they are located" as an explicit "war" against the idea of *essential* differences (Law 1999, 4, 7) and challenge to the suggestion that certain locations or types of knowledge are inherently authoritative

(Law and Lin 2010, 142). In contradistinction to commonsensical connotations of ‘network’, which denote a form of “transport *without* deformation”, ANT’s conception of the term is precisely the opposite (Latour 1999: 15, emphasis in original). Its core focus on “translation” draws attention to the painstaking labor involved in bringing actors together through the notion of “enrolment” and how the involved elements and the very terms of reality transform through associations between them (Callon 1984). Here Mol (1999) develops the notion of “ontological politics”, to capture the contestations that concern the character of actors and the very terms of ‘reality’. “If the term ‘ontology’ is combined with that of ‘politics’” Mol (1999, 75) argues, “then this suggests that the conditions of possibility are not given”. The corollary of ontological politics is that reality becomes *multiple*.

ANT also provides dynamic tools for mapping controversies related to knowledge production, governance and politics guided by the principle “follow the actors” (Latour 1987). While engaging closely with expert authority in science and democracy, ANT’s central focus on “knowledge controversies” locates governance not in terms of pre-existing social structures or the interactions of a predefined set of actors but instead as “generative events” involving contestation to stabilize and resolve controversies (Whatmore 2009, 588). Developing this work on knowledge controversies further, Barry's (2012, 330) work on “political situations” offers critical tools for researching “the role of the production of knowledge in the practice of politics”. Closely connected to its focus on knowledge controversies, STS further considers “the *agency* of failure – the work that it does in the world” (Lisle 2017, 5). Indeed, failure is built into the very idea of translation as “a never completed accomplishment” that can “fail” (Callon 1984, 196).

Yet while taking failure *seriously*, STS does not take it *for granted*, emphasizing that the very meaning and terms of reference related to success and failure are often deeply contested (Best 2016; Callon and Latour 1981, 289; Latour 1996). Through engagement with ANT Schouten (2014) productively theorizes security governance in terms of settling controversies over security. Whereas Schouten mobilizes ANT to challenge the notion of security expertise as *the* defining aspect of security governance, my objective is slightly different. I instead seek rethink the circulation of policing models through an ANT lens, as a means “to fathom the role of expert knowledge in politics as well as to understand the politics of knowledge and expert-driven activity” (Berling and Bueger 2015, 5). I approach the circulations of policing models as neither *natural* nor *strange* but instead as *contingent*, both in terms of their conditions of possibility to occur and (potential) consequences. I now return to the aftermath of the 2011 riots.

### **Policing/Knowledge**

Once order was restored in August 2011, there were competing claims surrounding what had taken place and the riots’ meaning. Prominent global intellectuals began weighing in on what they signified and whether they were ‘political’ (Bauman 2011; Gilroy 2011; Žižek 2011; Sennett and Sassen 2011). A major report *Reading the Riots* was also jointly commissioned by the *Guardian* newspaper and the London School of Economics to systematically analyze rioters’ motivations (Lewis et al. 2011). As part of these competing efforts to ascertain the causes and meaning of the riots, interested actors attempted to fix their significance in particular ways. Here British political elites weighed in, attributing the riots to a “breakdown of traditional family structures; lack of work ethic among young people and a desire for consumer goods” (Nijjar 2015), further

alleging the complicity of ‘gang culture’. After condemning the disorder in a speech to the House of Commons the day the riots ended, David Cameron moved on to questions about their causes: “This is not about poverty, it’s about culture. A culture that glorifies violence, shows disrespect to authority, and says everything about rights but nothing about responsibilities”. As he continued: “At the heart of all the violence sits the issue of the street gangs” (*BBC News* 2011). British Home Secretary Theresa May similarly stressed: “It’s obvious that gangs were involved” (Dikeç 2017, 87).

While this pathological reading represented a continuation in how forms of urban unrest have been framed by British political elites since the 1980s, the fabrication of a ‘gang problem’ as *the* cause of the disorder was a departure (Dikeç 2017, 86). When Cameron alleged gang complicity, moreover, there had been no systematic research commissioned by his government into what factors contributed to the riots. Although they represented “arguably the worst bout of civil unrest in a generation”, in contrast to similar episodes in Britain during the early 1980s “there was to be no [...] inquiry into the causes” (Lewis et al. 2011, 1). Indeed, one of the most notable aspects of the 2011 riots was how nakedly British politicians sought to shut down analysis of what sparked them. Mayor of London Boris Johnson declared: “It’s time we heard a little bit less about the sociological justifications for what is in my view nothing less than wanton criminality” (Glaze and Branagh 2011). Yet not all elements of official representations of the riots were so consensual. The post-riots discourse unfolded as a blame game or “contested failure” (Best 2016) about their basic terms and perceived (mis)handling by state authorities. Leading British politicians charged that police were slow and incompetent in responding. These indictments thereby added a new front to already

existing public pressures on policing agencies that Duggan's killing had brought into focus (Somaiya and Cowell 2011). Senior police officials fought back by emphasizing that Cameron and May were vacationing when the uprisings broke out and were slow to return and that Cameron's government was undercutting police forces' strength by reducing their budgets (Burns 2011). Some further suggested that human rights laws constrained police commanders' ability to suppress the riots (*Daily Mail Online* 2011).

It was in this context that Cameron proposed Bratton as a "fast policy" (Peck and Theodore 2015) fix. Following from his claims about gang complicity in the uprisings, Cameron summoned Bratton's record of combatting gangs within US cities: "I want us to use the record of success against gangs in some cities like Boston" (Watt 2011). In later remarks, he invoked Bratton by name: "I also believe we should be looking beyond our shores to learn the lessons from others who have faced similar problems. That is why I will be discussing how we can go further in getting to grips with gangs with people like Bill Bratton" (Collins 2012). He later called for a "zero tolerance" approach (*Daily Mail Online* 2011). While Cameron announced his intention to summon Bratton's expertise on gang violence following the riots, just a month before Cameron called for Bratton to lead the London Met in order to replace its leaders following their resignations in light of the phone hacking scandal<sup>2</sup> (Whitehead 2011; Collins 2012) and Bratton confirmed that he was "seriously" interested in the position (Dodd and Stratton 2011). Yet the reaction to Cameron's proposal for a Bratton-led Met by members of Cameron's cabinet and British police agencies was "cautious" and opposed by some (Travis 2011a). Theresa May

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<sup>2</sup> The scandal emerged after revelations that the British tabloid *News of the World (NOTW)* had been routinely hacking into the private voicemail systems of British citizens and celebrities, resulting in the closure of *NOTW* as well as the arrests and resignations of key media figures, UK political aides and top police leadership.

expressed reservations about the proposition of a non-British citizen leading the Met (Burns and Cowell 2011) and blocked Bratton's appointment by specifying in the announcement for the position that "applicants must be British citizens" (Whitehead 2011). In light of this opposition, Cameron therefore proposed that Bratton serve as an unpaid gang consultant (Burns and Cowell 2011).

Cameron's appeals to Bratton in 2011 were neither new nor surprising; they fit within his government's broader policy agenda based on a major program of economic austerity accompanied by increasingly aggressive forms of policing and surveillance (Slater 2011, 2015). Others suggest that Bratton offered a way for Cameron to soothe public anxieties in the riots' wake (Camp, Heatherton, and Kundnani 2016, 184). In contrast to these authors, who suggest that the inherent rhetorical purchase of Bratton's expertise and its general resonance with neoliberal orthodoxy is what made it salient and useful, I take a different approach, exploring how the figure of Bratton intervened in the ontological politics of the post-2011 aftermath by *producing* new forms of knowledge (Barry 2012).

Cameron's diagnosis of the riots as a gang-driven was convenient and self-serving: it steered public discussion away from structural questions of poverty, inequality, racism, state violence and lack of governmental accountability that Duggan's killing had brought into focus. Cameron mobilized "gang culture" as a label to fix the meaning of the riots in a racially coded way and thereby police the discursive boundaries about what this unrest signified. Indeed as Stuart Hall and his colleagues point out in the classic *Policing the Crisis*, "Labels are important, especially when applied to dramatic public events. They not only place and identify those events; they assign events to a

context” (Hall et al. 2013 [1978], 23). But a crucial question remains: what, if anything, did the entry of Bratton add here?

As I have argued above, Cameron’s diagnosis of the riots as derivative of a gang problem presented this as settled and closed matter in notable absence of any evidence to that effect. Though cloaked in a pretence to ‘evidence-based’ reasoning, his calls to summon Bratton’s expertise served to bolster his unsubstantiated claims about the existence of a hitherto unmanaged ‘gang problem’ and its purported centrality in the riots. In other words, his deference to Bratton offered credibility to Cameron’s shaky gangs-riots thesis by making an association with allegedly ‘similar’ US gang problems. Yet Bratton’s presence in the post-2011 aftermath added little here; it largely upheld and lent credibility to an already-existing image, namely the general pathological framing of the unrest by Conservative elites and gangs’ (alleged) centrality therein. Cameron’s appeals to Bratton were also notably nebulous. Cameron invoked the figure of Bratton and his general association with zero tolerance and fighting gangs with scant elaboration about the nature of his expertise and its relation to post-riots Britain. Bratton’s own statements about his potential contributions to British authorities were similarly vague, though at times contradicted Cameron’s. Thus beyond a general surface appeal, little *about* Bratton’s alleged anti-gang expertise was ever publicly elaborated. It appears to be all symbolism, no substance.

This resonates closely with the critical literatures outlined above and is hardly trivial. *Policing the Crisis* emphasizes that it is precisely that the “loose and unspecified” application of labels in relation crises of order that give them power in connoting misleading parallels and equivalences between disparate places, events and histories

(Hall et al. 2013[1978], 30). Yet even as a symbolic intervention, it would be mistaken to suggest that Cameron's intervention was *intuitive*. It only 'made sense' insofar as the gang problem could be taken as a given, a claim *Reading the Riots* later explicitly challenged. What is additionally perplexing and notable about Cameron's appeal to Bratton, however, is that his expertise was mobilized as a potential means to *know* the 'gang problem' in a very particular (and paradoxical) way. The sheer speed with which Cameron mobilized Bratton on the face of it at odds with a straightforward attempt to gain more *knowledge* about British gangs and their (alleged) centrality in the unrest, however partial, racialized or ideological. Rather, the appeal to Bratton served to reify the supposed 'reality' that gangs were *the* cause of disorder whilst actively avoiding any inquiry into the 'gang problem' itself. What we have here is appeal to expertise that diagnosed and reified the existence of a purported social problem in order to govern it as such, yet by circumscribing the terms through which officials and publics could 'know' it.

Others have begun to grapple with related governing dynamics concerning relationships between ignorance and expertise. In her illuminating study of terrorism experts, Stampnitzky (2013, 187) shows that after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks 'terrorism' has been governed is through an "active refusal" to inquire into the motivations of this supposed type of violence, what she calls the "politics of *anti-knowledge*" (emphasis in original). Puar (2007) makes related claims about how the specter of the racialized terrorist other is depicted and governed as simultaneously monstrous but also unfathomable and unknowable. Taking this concern with social unknowing further, ignorance studies foregrounds the production and leveraging of ignorance as key

governing strategies in their own right (McGoey 2007; Proctor and Schiebinger 2008). Through a focus on “strategic unknowns”, McGoey (2012, 3) contests the conventional binary opposition between knowledge and ignorance in order “to offer non-knowledge its full due as a social fact [...] as a productive force in itself”. Bringing ignorance studies into conversation with STS, Aradau (2017, 328) argues that we need to shift to focus away from the frame of ignorance toward that of “non-knowledge” in order to address the contestations surrounding the very boundaries between knowledge and non-knowledge. Borrowing the term non-knowledge from Ulrich Beck’s *Nichtwissen*, she addresses “how non-knowledge is enacted, how heterogeneous modes of non-knowledge become the object of controversies, and how they have political effects” (Aradau 2017, 331).

Aradau’s emphasis on how forms of non-knowledge are put to work in political controversies and their consequences provides a useful frame through which to examine *how* Cameron’s deference to Bratton worked. As noted above, others have emphasized how the figure of Bratton resonates with Cameron’s neoliberal austerity agenda as a signifier of a return to ‘tough’ policing and ‘order’. Although certainly not incorrect, such approaches overlook some of the more specific and less obvious role(s) he performed in this context. As I have begun to suggest, summoning Bratton fit within a broader effort to govern the uprisings as derivative of a ‘gang problem’. As such, it appears to perform a role as part of a broader silencing and disinformation strategy to mystify publics about the ‘true’ drivers of the riots, reflecting concern about the anti-democratic (Hagmann 2017) and anti-political (Machold 2016) tendencies of urban security policies. While there is an element of this, things are not quite so straightforward. When we look into Bratton in Britain beyond a superficial level, we find something less clearcut than a ‘get-

tough' spectacle that entrenches market-fundamentalist orthodoxy or which removes knowledge, silences certain voices or reproduces doubt or forms of ambiguity (as per the prevailing focus in ignorance studies). What we encounter instead is the deference to expert authority as an attempt to divert attention away from other controversies (surrounding austerity, police budgets, state violence, and perceived mishandling of the uprisings) and fabricate some credibility for claim that the uprisings reflected the 'reality' that a nebulous and ill-defined 'gang problem' caused the riots. The appeal to expertise in this scenario did not capture this 'problem' by bringing in experts to more effectively *know* and thereby resolve it; this move, rather, helped to diagnose and thereby govern the 'problem' by producing non-knowledge about the (alleged) centrality of gangs in the unrest.

This finding warrants further attention for two key reasons. First, it re-orientes the political and policy 'problem' at hand. In relation to Bratton in Britain, the issue of concern is not simply one about the wrong *kind* of knowledge (cf. Gilroy 2011; Slater 2012). Indeed, Bratton in Britain calls into question the particular sense that 'knowledge' is at play in these interventions and the terms on or extent to which it *works*. Second, the idea of experts being used to govern problem through the production of non-knowledge flies in the face of how the expert capture and 'depoliticization' of erstwhile political issues have long been theorized as a matter of rendering 'technical' through the deference to experts and use of calculation (Rose and Miller 1992; Rose 1993). This is a recurring theme in more recent literature on post-politics (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014) and critical security studies (Leander 2011). In relation to Bratton in Britain the appeal to 'private' expertise was mobilized in ways that reflect an active "will [not] to know" (cf.

Foucault 2013) rather than to know better or more accurately. As such, Bratton in Britain offers grounds for a theoretical re-appraisal about *how* expert authority is mobilized in governing social problems and the stakes thereof. If the act of “count[ing] something [...] make[s] it *accountable* as a member in a class of relevant objects” (Martin and Lynch 2009, 246, emphasis in original), then the active will *not* count (or inquire) seems to be an important (and underappreciated) way of actively avoiding, indeed precluding, accountability that is distinct from silencing or the use of ambiguous forms of measurement (cf. Best 2012). As I explore next, following the dynamics of Bratton in Britain also opens up questions about slippages and misfires.

### **Modelling misfire**

I have so far elaborated on how Cameron’s appeal to Bratton intervened in public knowledge about the riots by attempting to enact a particular ‘reality’ to preclude/displace others. Bratton’s arrival in Britain in 2011 was welcomed by mainstream UK news outlets, which indulged his ‘supercop’ status. Yet existing critical accounts of Bratton in Britain have overlooked perhaps the most unusual (and notable) aspect of this iteration of transnational police collaboration, namely that it did not go as planned. Cameron’s endorsements of Bratton “became a political hot potato” (Burns 2011) with his calls for “zero tolerance” provoking particular “annoyance” among British police chiefs (Dodd and Stratton 2011). Even after thwarting Cameron’s designs to appoint Bratton as Met Commissioner, these officials publicly attacked Cameron’s efforts to solicit Bratton as a gang consultant, developing four discernible sets of objections. The first challenged the premise that Bratton’s US policing experience represented a ‘success story’. As Sir Hugh Orde, the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers put it:

“I am not sure I want to learn about gangs from an area of America that has 400 of them”.

As he continued, “It seems to me, if you’ve got 400 gangs, then you’re not being very effective. If you look at the style of policing in the [United] States, and their levels of violence, they are so fundamentally different from here” (Ormsby 2011). Another official pointed out that Bratton seemed to be more interested in promoting himself than policing: “He [Bratton] made a career going around the world to conferences, he only spent 20 months in New York” (Dodd 2011). They thereby contested Bratton’s very status as an anti-gang expert.

The second set of objections centred on applicability. As Orde argued: “The notion that you can ship someone in from another country to run a police force in a different environment and a different culture is quite simply stupid” (Whitehead 2011). Ian Hanson, of the Manchester branch, similarly claimed that British officers had better expertise for addressing their local policing than “someone who lives 5,000 miles away” (Pogatchink 2011). In emphasizing problems of incompatibility, Orde and other officials further argued that the tactics associated with Bratton could not be instituted in Britain, because they threatened policing standards under the European Convention on Human Rights (*Daily Mail Online* 2011).

The third set of criticisms of Cameron’s appeal to Bratton took used the past patterns of US-UK police collaboration to suggest that there was nothing left to learn from US gang-fighting experience. One story cited a senior British police officer as saying “British police had regularly gone to the US to plunder tactics to tackle gangs [prior to 2011], and had been so successful that the US was now sending their officers over here to learn about Britain’s successes” (Dodd 2011). Another noted that Cameron’s

calls to learn from Bratton belied the fact that “many of the lessons of Boston’s Operation Ceasefire have already been absorbed by British police” (Travis 2011b). In contrast to Orde’s remarks, these critiques upheld the ‘success’ of Bratton’s anti-gang credentials but suggested that anything that *could have* been learned from Bratton *had been*.

The fourth set of rebuttals claimed that Cameron likely had no intention of implementing a US-style scheme in Britain and was posturing. Here police officials emphasized that despite British politicians’ past announcements of adopting US models, these schemes “have never really been given huge funding or momentum” (Travis 2011b). These officials thus argued that Cameron likely had no intention of ever implementing a US-styled approach and called his bluff. Here some critics additionally focused on the inherent contradictions between the plan to enrol Bratton and Cameron’s wider policy agenda, particularly his government’s austerity program. British police leadership emphasised that “Cameron was jumping the gun by seeking foreign advice at a time when his debt-hit government was pressing ahead with plans to cut police budgets by 20 per cent” (Pogatchink 2011). Paul Deller of the Metropolitan Police Federation suggested that calls to solicit Bratton were disingenuous, noting that Bratton’s purported ‘success’ fighting crime in US cities was based on increasing police numbers: “When Mr. Bratton was in New York and Los Angeles, the first thing he did was to increase the number of police on the street, whereas we’ve got a government that wants to do exactly the opposite” (Pogatchink 2011). Boris Johnson, similarly quipped: “His [Bratton’s] particular success in tackling crime in New York was very much down to a huge ramp up in numbers, up from about 30,000 to 42,000 officers on the streets” (Dodd 2011). In short, they called attention to Cameron’s hypocrisy in wanting to have his cake and eat it

too – i.e. a ‘tough’ police force whilst cutting its resources. These rebuttals were not taken by Cameron, Bratton and their supporters lying down; they put forward their own set of counter-counter arguments and called out Orde’s comments as “daft” (*Daily Mail Online* 2011).

So what might we glean from the rebuttal to Bratton? First and most obviously it challenges the perceived omnipotence of private experts in shaping issues of public debate and policy, echoing Stampnitzky’s findings about terrorism experts. In line with insights from ANT it shows that within knowledge controversies and political situations there can be a range of actors including (but not limited to) experts (Callon, Lascoumes, and Barthe 2001; Barry 2012; Mitchell 2011; Schouten 2014). In this example the ‘alternative’ voices were not lay people but rather state officials. Nevertheless, Cameron’s deference to Bratton proved unable to fully control knowledge concerning the nature of the 2011 uprisings and what should be done in their wake. This falls in contrast to the representations of global policing models and experts as inherently salient, even unassailable. Second, this rebuttal was notable in terms of how it proceeded. We have so far seen that there were a wide variety of objections to Cameron’s plan, which mirror critical debates surveyed above: questions about the very ‘success’ of US policing approaches and the suggestion Cameron’s proposal was an empty spectacle. In this sense, state authorities proved apt (if unlikely) critics of Bratton. Yet British police officials’ counter-arguments were contradictory. Figures like Orde contested the basic idea that Bratton's anti-gang initiatives were successful and/or consistent with British/European policing approaches. Yet certain officials claimed something else, namely that any potential benefits of US anti-gang expertise had *already* been integrated into British

policing. Others alternatively dismissed the whole proposal as posturing. These assertions are squarely at odds. It is not tenable to claim that US and British policing approaches are inherently incompatible and *also* insist that they have already been so successfully shared between these two contexts that there is nothing left to learn. Similarly, critiquing Cameron's plan as posturing undercuts the assertion that it is problematic because it would implement an inappropriate *kind* of knowledge. As such, these challenges do not 'add up' to a coherent set of objections.

I read the wide-ranging and contradictory nature of the rebuttal to Bratton as evidence that it was not a wholesale disavowal of Bratton or his expertise. Instead, I want to suggest that this pushback intersected with and was informed by a range of grievances, some related to the 2011 uprisings and Bratton but others not. The concept of political situations specifically highlights that "the significance of a controversy is not so much determined by its specific focus" and must instead "be conceived in terms of its relations to a moving field of other controversies, conflicts and events" (Barry 2012, 330). Here is important to note that objections to Bratton by British police were not unprecedented. Although these agencies have extensively engaged with Bratton since the 1990s, "police forces in Britain have largely rejected both the terminology and the practices associated with zero tolerance" (Jones and Newburn 2007, 131). So although Cameron's call to draw on Bratton's expertise had strong precedent, the attack on this proposal from British police agencies did not come out of nowhere. Cameron's calls to appoint Bratton also intersected with more immediate grievances whilst creating new sources of conflict. British police interpreted Cameron's appeals to Bratton before and after the uprisings "as a direct challenge to its authority, to its professionalism and its expertise" (Newburn

2011). Cameron's appeals to Bratton further threatened institutional boundaries between policing agencies and the Prime Minister's office. It emerged that Cameron lacked the authority to appoint Bratton to lead the Met. In this context, attacking the plan to enrol Bratton emerged as an opportunity for state officials to retaliate against Cameron's austerity program and his perceived arrogance in overstepping the boundaries of his power and reclaim their own credibility as the 'legitimate' experts, at a time when tensions between the government and police as well as between police and publics were mounting. As such, officials' opposition to Bratton cannot be understood on the technical merits of the plan; it reflected and fed into wider conflicts over jurisdiction, resources and political responsibility for the riots. This shows the value of situating expert authority relationally (Berling and Bueger 2015), both in understanding how it works but also in terms of charting its limits and vulnerabilities. Indeed, the less-than-straightforward nature of the rebuttal to Bratton further challenges us to theoretically reconsider the conditions under which expert claims come undone.

### **Expert undoings**

As detailed above, in making sense of their global 'success', critical scholars dually address the inherent rhetorical force of the broken windows' logic and the intuitive appeal of zero tolerance as well as their resonances with late capitalism/neoliberalism. In relation to such claims, what is notable about the 2011 British context is that to whatever extent these general theorizations are correct, they held true at this moment. The punitive policing approaches associated with Bratton continued to resonate with many core tenets of neoliberal orthodoxy and associated pathological explanations of social trends. Although politicians like Johnson and May took issue with Cameron's attempt to appoint

Bratton they voiced no similar objections to his diagnosis of the uprisings as stemming from a ‘gang problem’. Cameron’s misadventure in 2011 also hardly signified a general unravelling of Bratton’s expert status *per se*. Bratton did (and does) remain an authoritative figure globally. Nor was Bratton’s authority undone in 2011 by elegant counter-arguments exposing previously unknown secrets about his knowhow.

How, then, might we make sense of how Cameron’s proposal became vulnerable? I want to suggest that what happened in 2011 was that some of the usual upholders of Bratton’s global expert status (politicians and state officials) temporally withdrew their support, thereby isolating him and Cameron. Cameron’s seemingly unassailable plan to appoint Bratton failed to gain traction because part of the institutional machinery that *normally* upholds his expert status refused to play along. In ANT terms, Bratton’s status as a ‘supercop’, i.e. as a “big” figure or “macro-actor” rather than all-powerful and existing on its own inherent characteristics, was predicated on enrolments of various actors (Callon and Latour 1981) that, in this instance, withdrew their endorsements. This invites a theoretical reevaluation of how we understand the production and resonance of expert claims, policy models and ideas in more broadly.

Here Timothy Mitchell’s reflections on the production of “ideas” in relation to democracy provides a useful reference point. As Mitchell (2011, 4) argues: “An idea is something that is somehow the same in different places – that can be repeated from one context to another, freeing itself from local histories, circumstances, and material arrangements, becoming abstract, a concept”. Yet he unsettles the intuitive notion that abstract ideas emerge in a coherent form and subsequently achieve wider salience by virtue of their inherent rhetorical force. In understanding how “self-determination”

became an “American idea; that is, it became both American and an idea”, Mitchell suggests that we need to focus on the “machinery” that makes certain kinds of messages “resound” (T. Mitchell 2011, 68). He argues that making sense of how ideas and ideals like democracy or self-determination become abstract, general concepts, “we need to follow the work done to strip such terms of the varied circumstances that produce them, to translate and mistranslate multiple claims into a common idiom, and to build the acoustic machinery of their circulation” (ibid, 69).

In this article I have not focused on production of ideas or models in the sense that Mitchell articulates though have begun to do so elsewhere (Machold 2015). I have alternatively addressed the extent to which ideas or concepts *already* in existence may be taken apart or otherwise fail to “resound” at particular times and places. Even if we might raise scepticism about his suggestion that they are, in fact, “the same” in different places, Mitchell’s conception of ideas is instructive. If we take as our operating principle that “acoustic machinery” (rather than the essence of ideas) is what makes certain kinds of speeches by the powerful “resound”, we are also given a possible basis for understanding the conditions under which ideas fall flat. What is striking about Bratton in Britain is that when the ‘normal’ machinery refused to participate, the idea of Bratton as a solution to a crisis of order left few, if any, people “speechless” (cf. Harcourt 2001, 181). Instead, Cameron’s tried-and-tested formula of summoning an expert to resolve a political crisis became the basis for a forceful rebuttal of Bratton and his expertise. The key point here that expert power should not be seen as reflective of some ‘essence’ but instead approached as a relation that mediates the boundaries between different entities (Berling and Bueger 2015). Doing so, I have argued, is both advantageous in understanding how

circulations of global policing models work but also in reflecting on the conditions when these interventions misfire or come undone.

## **Conclusion**

Through a close ANT-inspired reading of Bratton in Britain, this article has sought to unsettle the terms of reference surrounding the power and scope of global expert authority in relation to politics and governing practices concerning policing, security and beyond. I have situated the deference to global policing models as interventions that seek enact and thereby *police* the ontological terms of ‘reality’ concerning urban order. In this relational and performative formulation, the authority that such models command cannot be reduced to their ‘essence’. Instead, I have located their power and geographic/political reach as contingent on enrolments and translations between disparate actors, which can give them a sense of coherence and stability but also unravel as these associations come undone, opening up questions about what models *are*, namely as positions within broader transnational forces rather than essences or freestanding entities (see Mitchell 2002, 231). So while agreeing that expert interventions *do* represent tired, “mechanical” (Wacquant 2009) and utterly unimaginative (Gilroy 2011) governance strategies, I argue that making sense of their power, stakes and significance requires following them in-depth. In relation to Bratton in Britain, I have shown three concrete benefits of doing so. First, I have unpacked the highly counterintuitive ways that this expert appeal worked, namely by governing a purported ‘gang problem’ by circumscribing the terms through which ‘it’ could be known. Second, by attending to how this intervention misfired in largely overlooked ways, I have resituated the very meaning of Bratton in Britain as simply more evidence of Bratton’s

unassailable ‘supercop’ status. Third, I have suggested that unpacking this modelling misfire can help us begin to theorize expert undoings and thereby perhaps unsettle assumptions about just how entrenched or salient expert power actually *is*. Indeed, when the machinery that upholds the authority of policing models breaks down (for whatever reason), the associated practices and forms of knowledge – and perhaps even police power itself – begin to look more “provisional” (Jauregui 2016) than they might otherwise.

All three of these contributions point to the disruptive potential that a focus on failure holds – both in revealing what is otherwise overlooked and/or hidden and using these as opportunities to open up new analytical avenues. As Seigel (2013, 115) notes, Bratton “doesn’t trumpet the work performed during his moments of private-sector employment”, likely “because those projects haven’t exactly been an unmitigated success. All the more reason to consider them”. I agree. Yet any such critical value of unearthing such failures must also be carefully qualified. As Lisle (2017, 2) insightfully shows, rather than being necessarily disruptive, “failure” can just as easily be “repurpose[ed]” to do the opposite. According to Lisle the very terms of “failure” are not just flexible but actively *policed*, requiring that their radical potential be recovered. This is one of the reasons ANT scholars’ accounts of failure are so instructive: they do not treat it as a natural object but something that is itself deeply contingent on political spin. As Latour (1996, 78) puts it “Failure and success [...] may gain or lose in degrees of reality [...] Existence has to be added to them continuously, so they can take on body, can impose their growing coherence on those who argue about them or oppose them”. Based on this, I have hesitated to characterize Bratton in Britain as a categorical ‘failure’,

instead situating it as a ‘modelling misfire’. Even though it clearly encountered unanticipated pushback that is worthy of close attention, elements of this intervention had effects that served Cameron’s agenda nevertheless. In short, the very meaning and significance of Bratton in Britain, much like the 2011 riots is both multiple and politically negotiated.

These ruminations on failure can also prompt a rethinking of the possibilities and boundaries of scholarly critique. One of the most common radical ‘responses’ to Bratton and his purported expertise is to discredit the core myths about ‘crime’ and ‘disorder’ they are predicated on. Here I have focused closely on Loïc Wacquant’s analysis because it is highly influential and exemplifies an emphasis on myth-busting as a political strategy. Critical exposure per se is not without its merits. The exercise of police power has always been predicated on fundamental myths and breaking these apart remains analytically and politically paramount (Vitale 2017; Correia and Wall 2018; Neocleous 2000; Seigel 2018). Yet strategies of exposure and revelation as forma of radical critique have serious limits and pose dangers of their own (Cowen 2012; Howell 2018; Seigel 2018, 21; Machold 2018), particularly when taking self-proclaimed experts’ authority as already stable and all-powerful. Indeed, while Wacquant positions his work as a radical challenge to the contemporary neoliberal order, his totalizing account of expert power is itself depoliticizing, even masochistic (see Latour 2005, 252) in contributing to the sense of inevitability and coherence of broken windows/zero tolerance by trivializing the actual frictions that surround their circulations. In reconsidering critical terms of reference surrounding the circulation of global policing models through a focus on misfires and undoings, I have tried to offer an alternative that challenges this sense of inevitability and

which might also open up broader questions about this politics of exposure: how should we go about challenging core myths of state power and associated “police definition of reality” (Correia and Wall 2018, 274) that do not partake in another key liberal myth, namely that simply exposing their ‘true’ character will undermine them once and for all?

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