



## Book Review of *Community Policing: International Patterns and Comparative Perspectives*

**S. Samuel Asir Raj<sup>1</sup>**

Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, India

Dominique Wisler, & Ihekwoaba D. Onwudiwe (Eds.), *Community Policing: International Patterns and Comparative Perspectives*, Boca Raton, FL, USA: CRC Press, Taylor and Francis Group, 328 pages, June 10, 2009. ISBN 10: 1420093584.

At a time when citizens and societies are increasingly coming under state surveillance and formal control, this book on community policing provides an opportunity for societies to understand and espouse informal and formal forms of social control. Through a series of case studies by anthropologists and criminologists this volume provides a comprehensive survey of Community Oriented Policing (COP) as practiced in many states across continents. It aims to elucidate this concept in relation to the work of the police and their relations with civic society. Many of writings of the Editors of this book, Dominique Wisler and Ihekwoaba D. Onwudiwe, have been focused on locating the 'Community' with regard to policing in an attempt to make this concept more people oriented. The editors have worked hard to compile an extraordinary book with distinguished authors on community policing. The scope of the book and the manner that the subject is presented makes it relevant in today's context of establishing social control.

Policing is essentially both political and social and profoundly influenced by existing ideological, cultural, the social capital base and the discourses found in civic society. COP is often considered to be synonymous with 'democratic' professional policing implying partnership, accountability and transparency and different from other policing models. Arising from liberal democracies, COP swiftly extended around the globe mainly to the countries emerging from the painful colonial past and military rule. This book illustrates through case studies, the impact of community policing in developed and developing countries and explores the myriad practices for which the term COP is used to describe what is being done, even though the specifics of policing practices and interactions of formal and informal social control are unique and widely disparate from case to case. The book also looks at the nature of state, bureaucracies and role of legitimate control of coercion in the context of ethnicity, religion, and local communities. Many chapters of this volume trace the historical process and context of hegemony and the monopoly of and legitimacy in use of violence in various societies by the state.

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abhishekapatti, Tirunelveli 627 012 Tamil Nadu, India. Email: asirajs@gmail.com

Security, a fundamental goal of civil society, state and police, is ideologically conceived as social order and is elemental for social reproduction. Whenever and wherever state and its law enforcement agencies have failed to provide security on account of reasons such as effective organization, lack of resources, skills, political interference, commitment, or corruption individuals and communities in different countries have organized themselves to protect their real and perceived interests.

Whereas countries like Nigeria which have experienced colonial rule or military rule are turning to vigilantism and informal policing structure for indigenous social control. Though the Nigerian police force has adopted COP it has established police vigilante liaison officers to advise these groups on the legal limits of their powers.

Suzette Heald in her chapter has brought out the nature of post colonial state and the changing nature of its relation with local communities. In Tanzania, the *sungusungu* was organized as a form of community policing, when hit by a wave of violence and banditry. Initially, working outside the state, the *sungusungu*, “adapted to the cultural repertoire of the area as well as to the developments on national and regional political scene” (Suzette Heald, p. 58). This adaptation was possible due to the constant lawlessness and corruption which encouraged invisibility of state authority and its structures. The *sungusungu* altered the nature of state power for social control at local levels by codifying their own laws and developed local capacity of policing. The *sungusungu* has redefined state community relations by allowing communities to reinvent themselves, retain a certain degree of autonomy and forced authorities to prioritize and respond to the needs of local communities.

In South Africa in a period of political transition of state and authority, community policing was advocated with a core vision of democracy and human rights when it faced almost ‘unique problems... of race mix, high wealth gap (and) inequalities in the justice system’ (Anthony Minnar, pp. 23 -24) states but that community policing ended in failure and was abandoned.

Though the colonial experience has fostered a deep sense of distrust of police, India has been restructuring its political and socio – economic institutions based on modern democratic and capitalistic ideologies. However the existence of semi feudal institutions along with the formidable influence of caste and traditional values shape the culture of informal control. The Panchayats or local self governments have been under pressure to modernize and to have inclusive representation. George Vicentnathan and Lynn Vicentnathan document the weakening of the authority of panchayats by forces of modernization and its inability to enforce social control and resolve conflicts. There is no consistent pattern of police community relations as the police in effort to maintain order end up strengthening traditional values and in many cases suppressing aspirations of communities for development.

Whereas in Latin America Police institutions were fully under military control in most countries of Latin America and had a negative image. Subsequent police reforms and adoption of community policing model as part of the democratization process led to community policing receiving strong public support. Hugo Fruhling hints that COP has shown the way to new internal values with innovation and has propagated individual responsibility that transcends disciplinary systems which on the whole can lead to a decrease in police abuse higher positive impact.

K. C. Wong discusses how “Mass line policing” (MLP) introduced as a revolutionary concept by Mao and abiding by the ideal “from the people, to the people” and in a bid to

formulate and build ‘communities’ has propagated community self control. MLP or policing from the people’s perspective is fascinating as it engages the community more fully to solve all its problems including political and social crimes whereas community policing depends on the police to fight crime. In this philosophy people become the core factor and this bottoms up approach becomes dynamic, empowering and resourceful whereas COP is static and top down backed by coercive machinery for control.

Industrialization and urbanization and the disruption of social order created the “citizen in uniform” to enforce law and order in Britain in the middle nineteenth century. Public decline of the image of the “bobby” in Britain and the (violent) change in the nature of policing particularly during race riots, made the ideology of community policing possible. The formation of Police Community Support Officers and Special Constabulary has helped in improving community participation in policing, but has brought forth the fragmentation and the problematic concept of community in a post modern society.

Barlow and Barlow highlight how the “criminal justice system (as) part of the social structure of accumulation in the capitalist economy” (p.168) and as a state apparatus of social control it enables and facilitates accumulation and economic growth. Tracing the growth and the crises faced by police in the US at various historical periods, the authors critically analyze the role of community policing as *promoting legitimacy* when it emerged as part of image management and improving “community relations”

The French police, a highly centralized force are tasked mainly with provision of security to the state and to maintain public order. Consequently this has increased the fissure between the society and state and has produced an alienated society. While in Belgium, community policing was the effect of two consecutive major reforms. Ambiguity in conception and multiplicity of policing agencies at local and federal levels has caused confusion in understanding of community policing.

By analyzing the diverse models of COP this book adds to the policing in general and community policing in particular. Cultural and philosophical differences play a role in conduct of COP hence it can be asserted that a consensual approach of community policing is not possible. As a guide this book offers an invaluable insight into community policing as practiced and will be useful for students and researchers of policing, criminology, sociology, and public administration, as well as police officers and administrators responsible for the policy's implementation.