

# A collaborator?

## Ethnographic issues of police and peer suspicion<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Suspicion is endemic to police ethnography. As research has demonstrated, the police repeatedly probe into the ethnographer's intent and purposes. Is the ethnographer observing police work to "simply" carry out research? Or is the ethnographer actually there to help develop the profession or, worse, to deviously disclose police secrets? Yet, doing police ethnography not only involves the ethnographer being questioned by the police; it also frequently involves being asked similarly interrogating questions by academic peers. Amplified by present-day critiques of police misconduct, colleagues ask about the police ethnographer's commitment. Has the ethnographer, for example, 'gone native' and thereby lost the ability to shine a needed critical light? Bearing such question(ing)s in mind, this chapter introduces the methodological concept of "the collaborator". Using the oxymoronic meaning of the word, the chapter considers how police ethnography often involves navigating contested waters with both police and peers questioning the ethnographer's allegiances, thereby wrestling with continuous queries about whether the ethnographer is in fact collaborating with *or* against the police. In doing this, the chapter adds to existing methodological debates about the ethics and loyalties of (police) ethnography, pointing to how the question of suspicion and side-taking extend all the way from the offices of the police to the hallways of academia. Drawing on the author's own experiences of studying transnational policing practices across Europe, the chapter concludes by offering five recommendations as to how the police ethnographer may continue to produce quality ethnography while, for better or worse, being cast as a collaborator.

### Introduction

Collaborator:

A person who works jointly on an activity or project; an associate.

A person who cooperates traitorously with an enemy; a defector.

*Oxford Living Dictionaries*

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<sup>1</sup> This is an earlier draft version of the published chapter in *Routledge International Handbook of Police Ethnography* (2023).

The chapter focuses on issues of collaboration. More specifically, it uses the oxymoronic meaning of the word ‘collaborator’ to point to the deeply contested nature of police ethnography. Is the police ethnographer indeed “a person who works jointly on an activity or project; an associate.” Or is the police ethnographer not really to be trusted, being “a person who cooperates traitorously with an enemy; a defector[?]” As discussed in the following pages, these are inquisitive questions frequently posed not only by the police but also by academic peers, each party hoping that the ethnographer is on their side, yet nevertheless being inherently sceptical about the ethnographer’s actual objectives.

To illustrate the nature of such suspicion, here are two examples. The first stems from my own, on-going ethnographic study of transnational policing and detective work across Europe – a study I began in 2015 and which currently involves more than a thousand hours of observations and more than fifty interviews with police officers and personnel working in and out of Denmark, Spain, Romania and Portugal as well as in international organizations such as Europol, Interpol and Frontex. More specifically, the following example is from one of the many days I spent observing the work of a Copenhagen-based Danish investigative unit that specializes in the policing of organized forms of property crime committed by professional thieves from countries all across the world such as Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Morocco and Chile. In many ways, the example illustrates what an average day of detective work often looks like (be it transnationally or nationally oriented), i.e., a lot of office and paperwork; but it also illustrates what an average day of ethnographic work regularly looks like:

I am sitting, or rather slouching, in the back corner of the unit’s office, temporarily using Detective Mikkelsen’s<sup>2</sup> chair and desk as he is off duty today. It is one of those days, of which there are many, where the caseload is too pressing for the unit’s detectives to be able to leave the office and stake out the streets of Copenhagen. This means that Detectives Clausen, Madsen, Larsen and Christensen are all fully engaged in looking at their respective computer screens. They sit there, typing away, working on cases, and the room is completely silent except for the sound of fingers hitting keyboards and the radio playing yet another contemporary pop song. Suddenly a patrolman from one of the downstairs units enters the office. ‘Hello, you handsome devils!’ he says, leaning against the frame of the door. The detectives all look up and turn towards him as they cheerfully echo his salutation. ‘What’s

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<sup>2</sup> All names used in this chapter to describe police personnel are pseudonyms

up?’ Detective Christensen asks him. The patrolman opens his mouth and is just about to answer when he suddenly sees me sitting in the corner.

‘Who are you?’ the patrolman asks distrustfully, looking to Detective Christensen for an answer. ‘He’s with us,’ Detective Christensen replies, ‘No worries, he’s alright. He’s an academic sent here via the National Police.’ ‘Alright,’ the patrolman says, somewhat reassured yet still apprehensive. As my experiences with both the Danish Police and other police research have taught me, neither ‘academics’ nor a reference to the managerial level of ‘the National Police’ are terms that are calculated to make most frontline officers feel entirely comfortable. In seeing that he is still hesitating, Detective Larsen reassures the patrolman once again. ‘Seriously, just say what you came here to say. David’s good enough ... Right? Aren’t you good enough, David?’ he asks me smiling. ‘I certainly hope so,’ I say. ‘Okay okay,’ the patrolman finally concedes. ‘You know how it is. We have to make sure that you’re not someone who isn’t allowed to hear what we say. You know, someone who’ll misinterpret or misuse what we say.’

As a police ethnographer, I have had many front-row insights into the police’s workaday efforts to combat issues of transnational crime in Denmark and beyond – insights which among other things have led me to discuss both the surprising triviality of such work (Sausdal, 2021a; Sausdal and Lohne, 2021), and graver issues such as police xenophobia (Sausdal, 2018c), violence (Sausdal, 2019), surveillance (Sausdal, 2018a) and warlike behavior (Sausdal, 2021a) as they relate to what Bowling and Sheptycki (2010) have termed “the globalization of policing”. This chapter looks at another issue; an issue of methodology rather than theory. The above snapshot, taken from a day spent doing police ethnography, reveals what I and many other police ethnographers frequently experience when we conduct our observations of the police’s working day: it shows that the practice of police ethnography is fraught with moments of suspicion – a sort of police suspicion directed not only at suspects and the general public (cf. Loftus, 2010) but also at the ethnographer (see Reiner and Newburn, 2007). Further, it illustrates how ethnographers have to accept being questioned repeatedly and how we regularly have to seek to reassure our police interlocutors that we are “good enough”; that we are “alright” to use these particular Danish detectives’ own words. Contrary to many other instances of ethnography, the example explains how we police ethnographers are rarely, if ever, able to achieve the full trust of our interlocutors (cf. Rowe, 2012; Sausdal, 2021b; Borrelli, 2020). Even after spending many months with the police, as I had when this situation occurred, there are always reservations to be found.

The second example also relates to the issue of suspicion. However, instead of focusing on how the police tend to distrust the ethnographer, the example shows how a similar scepticism exists among the ethnographer's peers and colleagues. While I have myself experienced much scepticism, or at least a passionate curiosity from peers in academia about where my ethnographic allegiance lies, I find the ensuing example particularly powerful – an example given to me by a fellow European police ethnographer. As I write this, my colleague, together with her/his associates, has been negotiating a book contract with a renowned university press. After submitting their book proposal, including several articles building on police ethnography in and around Europe, they were initially met with positive reviews and a willingness to publish the finished book. Yet, having first received the encouraging news, the publishing house editor suddenly sent another email. In this email, the editor now expressed “a concern” that the book was a bit too “friendly” toward the police. A “friendliness”, the editor stressed, which could be a hindrance to the publication of the book. As I am myself a contributor to this (potential) book, I find it safe to say that the book is not “friendly” toward the police. Nor is it, for that matter, hostile – an added antagonism openly called for by this editor and the university press s/he represents. Though it is ultimately for others to judge how the book is read, the official aim of the book and its chapters is, quite simply, to be true to the ethnographic material it builds on, providing a number of insights into, and critiques of, policing as well as some hopefully constructive inputs. Nevertheless, as the email from the editor exemplifies, there appears to be an impetus, in at least some part of academia, toward making policing scholars, if not choose sides (and here preferably against the police), then to truly ponder questions of allegiance. This illustrates how a police ethnographer must not only convince the police that s/he is “good enough”, but also academic colleagues who make similar verificatory inquiries into the validity and resolutions of the ethnographer's work (see for example Björk, 2018). As in other strands of social science, this involves questions about the study's scholarly rigor and worth. Yet, in police ethnography, it is not uncommon – as the above case exemplifies – to also encounter what may be termed a politico-moral scepticism as colleagues and other academic stakeholders question whether the ethnographer has been able to retain a properly critical-cum-condemning edge. Is the ethnographer indeed being too friendly and insufficiently fierce towards a type of organization known for its misconduct?

In essence, that police ethnography often involves a difficult balancing act between both police and peer scepticism and pressure is the methodological conundrum discussed in this chapter. Adding to existing discussions about the ethics and alliances of criminological

ethnography (see for example Ferrell and Hamm, 1998; Ferdinand et al., 2007), and applying and developing the concept of “the collaborator” (see also Weiss, 2016), the chapter exemplifies how police ethnography involves an almost impossible choice between being seen to be “with” the police or “against” the police (see Reiner and Newburn, 2007; Innes, 2010; Björk, 2018) – or, as Calvey (2020) has recently pondered in relation to the conduct of “covert ethnography”, being someone suspected to be on “both sides”. Indeed, due to the contradictory meaning of the word itself, being cast as a potential collaborator means that the ethnographer may simultaneously be seen as being engaged in a professional partnership *as well as* being suspected of being in cahoots with the enemy. Yet, therein also lies the concept’s strength. Different from other insightful methodological concepts used to discuss the contested nature of the police ethnographer’s loyalties, such as “side-choosing” (Becker, 1966), “the insider” (Holdaway, 1983; Young, 1991; Boeri and Shukla, 2019) or “infiltration” (Punch 1989), the concept of the collaborator more successfully embodies the entire continuum of such contestation, from the ethnographer being seen as an associate as well as an antagonist, friend or foe, and being seen as such by both the police and peers.

Later in this chapter, the collaborator concept will be further unfolded, explaining its methodological worth in relation to the existing literature. Moreover, some concrete coping strategies for the police ethnographer to deal with the strains of being thrown into such a complex suspicious light are introduced. First, however, the chapter ventures on to further exemplify the different forms of suspicion and scepticism that the police ethnographer habitually encounters, using some of my own examples and some from the literature.

### **Police suspicion**

‘Okay. We’ll help your study along. But it would also be nice to know what you think you’ll be able to find out. Like, what do you think you can help us with? What’s in it for us? What’s the bigger picture, really?’

In the “how to” of police ethnography, or any ethnography, a difficult first step is the challenge of getting access to the field of interest (see Reiner and Newburn, 2007). Yet, as Nader (1972) initially discussed through the concept of “studying up”, organizations that have or exercise power are often extra difficult to access for the researcher wanting to do an observational study (See also Schwartzman, 1993). In wanting to make an ethnographic study of the police, for example, there is often a need for official approval by the police management, as well as a

mutual signing off on certain terms and conditions between the police and the ethnographer (Rowe, 2007; Holmberg, 2014). Additionally, being allowed by the police to observe their everyday work also often necessitates a more outspoken and official quid pro quo agreement than one might expect to find in other ethnographic studies. Opening their doors, something which the police are famously reluctant too (see for example Van Maanen, 1978; Punch, 1979; Reiner and Newburn, 2007), the police will ask questions about how the study may be of use not only academically or societally speaking, but for them, for policing (cf. Nader 1972; Holmberg, 2014; Manning, 2014; Borrelli, 2020). The above quotation is an example thereof. It was what I was asked in my initial negotiations with the Danish police management back in 2015, as I was pitching them my research idea. At this specific meeting I had already more or less convinced the Danish police to allow me to carry out the study. Nevertheless, they remained unsure about what the police stood to gain from it. “What’s in it for us?” they asked. “What’s the bigger picture, *really?*” they queried, emphasizing the last word, clearly suspecting I had left something out.

Moreover, questions about what the police will gain from the study, and whether the ethnographer “*really*” tells the whole story, remain central beyond the initial access phase. Such questions are, as Newburn and Reiner (2007) have argued, fundamental to building rapport between the ethnographer and the police officers being observed. For the Danish detectives I followed, I was indeed often asked about, as they put it, the “actual aim and contribution” of my project, fearing that I would not be of much help or, worse, that I had been sent there to spy on and work against them. This was made abundantly clear to me on one of my first days of doing fieldwork. Here, I ran into Detective Madsen who quickly declared that he was

‘pretty sure that what you do won’t be of much help. Actually, I’m more afraid of the damage you might do. But if you want to be of help then please just tell the big guys [i.e. the management and politicians] the following: that we need more men, more resources, that they should close the borders and, most importantly, increase the length of prison sentences because the foreign nationals we investigate see Danish prisons as a complete joke. I tell you, that’s the only way forward ... That’s the only thing I’ll tell you! And it’s the only thing I have to say!’

Luckily, I did manage to convince Detective Madsen and his colleagues to tell and show me a bit more than that – something I have discussed at length elsewhere (Sausdal, 2018b). For now, it is enough to take note of Detective Madsen’s initial distrust and his thoughts about the potential damage that could be caused by my study as an archetypical example of the police

ethnographer's problem of building trust – of ensuring one's interlocutors of one's own worth or, at least, harmlessness.

Besides initial apprehension about why I was there observing their work, issues of trust also came up in certain situations where I had to prove myself more actively as someone they could rely on. Indeed, as Reiner and Newburn (2007: 358) have also noted, the police ethnographer often experiences being put to the test, or being put through what may be seen as 'initiation rituals'. As Karpiak has similarly noted (2016: 105-106), what such testing and initiation includes is neatly captured by Geertz's famous example of what it took for him to become an accepted part of the Balinese community he studied (Geertz, 2000). The example Geertz gives is of a day when the local police raided one of the many illegal cockfights popular in Bali that he was observing. Instead of simply showing the police his scientific credentials (which would have gotten him off the hook), Geertz fled the scene just like everyone else. After the police had eventually vanished and people had reassembled, one of his interlocutors turned to Geertz and saluted him for finally having become 'one of them'. Geertz had acted as the natives did. He had bolted and thereby proven himself to be someone they could trust.

Although this is a crude dramatization of the point at which one's ethnographic interlocutors truly trust and confide in one as a researcher, Geertz does succeed in exemplifying the way in which certain moments and gestures are pivotal in signalling whether the ethnographer is to be seen as a reliable insider or whether s/he is still seen and suspected as an outsider. In a Danish policing context, Holmberg (1999) experienced a similar kind of initiation rite as he was following the daily patrol work of the Western Copenhagen Police District. During his fieldwork, an officer had told Holmberg that they had found and seized some illegal weapons hidden in a flat somewhere. As Holmberg asked the officer how they had managed to locate the weapons, the officer evasively yet also revealingly answered:

It was a tip. We knew something about drugs being sold, so that was a bit lucky. That's at least how the story goes, and we're not going to tell you how it really happened. It can't leave this room ... It cannot be put on paper. (Holmberg, 1999: 24-25, translated from Danish)

In this way, Holmberg was made aware of potential malpractice while being told not to pursue the matter, thereby testing his loyalty. As other police ethnographers have similarly noted, such grey zone ethnographic ethics are indeed common when researching policing as well as in similar social settings, leaving the ethnographer with the difficult choice of deciding whether

to adhere to a standard of emic or etic ethics, to side with the principles of one's interlocutors or not (Ferrell, 1998; Ferdinand et al., 2007; Rowe, 2007; Calvey, 2020)

During my time spent with police, my commitment and ethics have also been put to the test. On a more minor scale, this has involved everything from detectives asking questions about my background, and who (if anyone) I know in the police, to them asking about my political and moral beliefs. Moreover, it has involved the police openly and rather provokingly talking about matters in my presence that they knew were controversial (Sausdal, 2020), such as immigration politics and policing, with some of them flaunting controversial beliefs and most of them arguing for a (much!) harsher approach. As Vigh (forthcoming) argues, our ethnographic interlocutors may simply do so not just to provoke but in order to better gauge what the ethnographer's actual position on such matters is – to lure the ethnographer out of an alleged neutral stance. To take one example, after spending a couple of weeks in the field, two detectives eventually asked me:

'But, David, what do you think? You're probably one of those left-wing, soft academics who think that we should just be good to all people and open our borders, right? Maybe that's why you are here snooping around, right? To show how awful we are and tell us off!'

Talking to me about issues of criminal justice or politics more generally would sometimes even lead officers to burst out in tirades in my presence, saying for example:

Yeah, if I didn't care about my job, this is exactly what I would go tell the management or some newspaper. So, if you want to get me in trouble, you just go ahead and print that. I'm honestly so tired of things around here. You've been with us for quite a while now, right? Isn't it a complete joke? We keep imprisoning these idiot foreign nationals and they just keep coming back. It is of no consequence to them. And the management and the politicians do nothing about it. They just force us to carry out all these scheduled 'activities' so that they can point to the numbers and say that things are being done. But let me tell you: we're being screwed! ... We're helpless clowns.

There have also been more hands-on examples of them testing my leanings and loyalty. For instance, sometimes the detectives would check how far I would go in order to help them in their actual work. As an example, they would ask me to carry things for them, to briefly guard arrestees or, on one or two occasions, to be an active part in pursuing and catching fleeing



suspects. ‘Relax. It’s OK. We just want to know where you’re at. Like, it’s good to know if you – when shit hits the fan – are actually here to help out or not’, they would respond, dubiously grinning, as I always politely refused to take an active part in any actual policing activities.

Bearing this conversation in mind and returning again more squarely to the issue of police suspicion being directed at the ethnographer (and at the ethnographer’s (ulterior) motives for doing the ethnography), what the above examples simply serve to illustrate is that questions of access and trust cannot be easily ignored when doing police ethnography. There is no easy fix. Instead, doing police ethnography may better be described as a matter of perpetual access and rapport negotiation (Reiner and Newburn, 2007; Borrelli, 2020) – negotiations largely based on persistent police suspicions and questionings of whether we as researchers are “really” with or against the police. Are we, as the police have asked me, “there to help”? Or, are we perhaps there to unveil and conspire, to make police (mis)conduct into frontpage news? These are endemic rather than episodic questions that almost haunt the people we study – and arguably much more than in many other areas of ethnography. And being so, it inevitably becomes a question of commitment that similarly come to if not haunt then occupy the ethnographer’s mind. Are we, indeed, there “merely” to do research? Or are we in fact there to help or, rather, expose the police?

### **Peer suspicion**

“Sorry. I have to ask: What’s the purpose of your study? Are you there [doing police ethnography] to just support them [i.e. the police] or there to truly analyse policing? Listening to and reading what you present it sometimes seems like you’re not really critically engaging with what the police say and do, but, rather, that you’re sometimes just corroborating their point of view ... Do you think that you might’ve gone a bit native?”

As shown in the last section, doing police ethnography leads to the police examining what the ethnographer’s “real” motives may be, hoping that we are a friend, fearing that we are a foe. Yet, as noted in the introduction, similar reservations may also be found among the ethnographer’s university colleagues. Indeed, there have probably been few moments when collegial wariness about the purpose and rationalities of police research and ethnography have been greater. Spurred by the 2020 murder of the black American George Floyd by a now convicted police officer and the ensuing uprising of Black Lives Matter protests (alongside an underlying history of police violence and misconduct evident not only in the US but across the world (Fassin, 2017b; Karpiak and Garriott, 2018)), activists and academics alike have been

calling for reforms, “defunding” and even the abolition of the police as we know it (see for example Vitale, 2017; McDowell and Fernandez, 2018; Fleetwood and Lea, 2020; Sparks, 2020; Loader, 2021). Such condemnation of contemporary police practice has not just found its way into critical research publications – with a recent one aggressively termed “F\*ck the police! Murderous cops, the myth of police fragility and the case for an insurgent anthropology” (Alves, 2021) as especially indicative – it has trickled into academia more widely and seen existing critical perspectives applied to the causes and consequences of contemporary policing (see also Sausdal 2022 for a similar Danish example). Derogatory terms like “copaganda criminologists” have even been used by a group of critical-cum-radical criminologists, working for an “insurgent criminology”, as a condemnation of policing scholars who point to the fact that the police are not just the conductors but also the recipients of violence.<sup>3</sup>

That many scholars – both those study policing and those who do not have policing as an area of expertise – look at the police with a critical eye is understandable. Scrutinizing a societal institution that in many parts of the world embodies one of the central ways in which the state’s monopoly of violence is exercised is of great importance. And as both history and research have shown, police forces around the world are too often the culprits of state-legitimated violence as well as themselves being guilty of mismanaging their mandate (see for example Linnemann et al., 2014; Fassin, 2017b), hence strengthening the impetus to keep the police under (ethnographic) scrutiny. As Reiner and Newburn have underlined, one of the main drivers of police ethnography is exactly the insight that “[a]ll other methods rely on some sort of account offered by the police themselves (whether in interview or official documents and statistics), the veracity of which is often precisely the question being studied” (Reiner and Newburn, 2007: 354). Or as Van Maanen (1978) has put it, the goal is to “penetrate the smokescreen” laid by the police.

Certainly, widespread scepticism toward what the police say and do explains why police ethnographers, then and now, have been faced with colleagues asking for (more) critical analyses of policing (see also Björk 2018). And this is probably also why I myself have frequently experienced colleagues questioning my ability to critically dissect my empirical material. In the above cited case, it was a prominent senior colleague of mine who felt the need to comment on what they suspected to be the lack of a critical edge in my work. Referring to the anthropological-cum-ethnographic *faux pas* of “going native” (Powdermaker, 1966), I was

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<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/critcrim/status/1374756783101648898?lang=da>

asked to reflect on whether I had truly managed to keep the appropriate analytical distance from my police interlocutors – or, if I had indeed lost the ability to look beyond the police’s self-serving reasoning. Specifically, the question was directed to me at a larger seminar and at my efforts to further theorize why the (Danish) police have certain negative attitudes toward foreign nationals and minorities.

Whether my theorising (Sausdal, 2018c) is on point or not, and whether my otherwise first-rate colleague was right in pointing to my lack of analytical prowess, is not what is of interest here. I simply mention the stark critique of my work as an example of how we police researchers regularly have to be ready to mount a defence of our ethnographic work and the analysis that springs from it – defences against a critique of having left the right course of academia and, perhaps unwittingly, joined forces with the police. In the context of Scandinavian police ethnography, such damning accusations are, for example, something Swedish police ethnographer Micael Björk (2018) has been at the receiving end of, having his work and his worth as a scholar questioned (Björk and Flyghed, 2010; Flyghed, 2010).

Yet, peer scepticism does not only come in the form of “going native” suspicions. In my still relatively few years in academia, I, for example, have also been suspected/accused of belonging to the political far right, as well as being faulted for being “completely naïve” and “colour-blind” in my theoretical work. As a researcher, I admittedly aim to not mix politics with research – something I believe (different from other openly-declared “engaged”, “activist”, “insurgent” or even “militant” ethnographers and criminologists (see for example Scheper-Hughes, 2009; Shantz, 2012; Belknap, 2015; Shantz, 2016; Canning, 2018; Moffette, 2021)) remains of importance, even if it may be an utopian ideal. For clarification, I can say that I do not belong to the political far right. And in relation to questions about whether I am naïve or colour-blind, then that is not for me to judge. What I have tried to illustrate by offering these different examples of collegial circumspection is that police ethnography is obviously not only a troublesome balancing act in terms of how the police see and inspect one’s methods and motives; the same sort of critical inspection follows as one returns from the field and starts analysing and presenting the study’s findings. Such peer scepticism, or oversight, I would say, is quite particular to police ethnography, though only scarcely discussed in the literature. Contrary to many other areas of scholarship where empirical and analytical authority is more easily granted to the ethnographer, the police ethnographer often – and sometimes for good reason – has to remain ready to further explain and even defend their role and insights. Were

you there to do *proper* critical, analytical work, or, as my good colleague queried, are you just doing ethnography “to support the police?”

### **More than an insider or infiltrator**

I am not the first, and will not be the last, to notice to the contested nature of ethnography – in policing and beyond. Speaking of the question of ethnographic allegiance and transparency, this is a methodological as well as ethical aspect of criminological and police research frequently discussed in textbooks (cf. Punch, 1986; Ferrell, 1998; Noaks and Wincup, 2004; Reiner and Newburn, 2007; Brunger et al., 2015; Björk, 2018; Treadwell, 2019), but perhaps even more so under headings such as “inside(r) ethnography” (Young, 1991; Boeri and Shukla, 2019) or “covert ethnography” (Pearson, 2012; Calvey, 2017). Discussing the latter, Calvey (2017) has persistently made a case for the criminological need, contribution and creativity of, if not covert then at least not fully overt, ethnography (See also Herrera, 1999; González, 2012). Though acknowledging that covert research is problematic in itself, and particularly in an age increasingly governed by scientific ethics and data protection regulations, Calvey (2013; 2017) also points to the historical yet often unnoticed use and benefit of more or less covert studies in criminology and police research – studies which have provided otherwise unattainable insights and helped produce political change.

Furthermore, speaking more directly to the issues of fidelity and ethics, the covert ethnographer, Calvey argues, cannot be assumed not to care about the people and politics of what they are studying; or not to care about ethics and morality whatsoever. Rather, doing covert ethnography turns the question of ethics, as well as Becker’s famous question “whose side are we on?” (Becker, 1966), into an innately situated rather than categorical one (cf. Calvey, 2020 – it becomes something for the ethnographer to constantly ponder and choose upon *in situ* rather than something to “merely” decide upon through an initial declared adherence to officially formulated standards and the collection of informed consent (see also Pels, 1999). To be sure, no matter what kind of ethnographic approach one adheres to, what Calvey and others conducting more or less covert or insider-style ethnography successfully reminds us all is that ethnographies of crime and criminal justice almost inevitably require at least some surreptitious behaviour – and that we should therefore bear this in mind and discuss its methodological, ethical and analytical consequences more openly.

In policing research particularly, one of the more famous methodological meditations on the issue of ethnographic surreptitiousness is Young’s *An Inside Job* (1991). The book builds

on the many insights Young acquired through his 33-year career in the Newcastle police force, first as a cadet, then detective and later as a superintendent, coupled with the ethnographic prowess of having in the meantime obtained a PhD in Social Anthropology. In particular, Young spends the first part of the book discussing the clash and complication of him having to balance two very different worldviews, i.e. that of the police and that of the university. This balancing act, Young tells the reader, is not only the cause of many methodological concerns, in terms of both old and new peers being sceptical about his dual role, but also the cause of analytical difficulty as Young reflects on how he struggles to positively apply inside perspectives from both policing and academia without either one outweighing the other. To highlight the troubling aspect of his endeavour, of his “inside job”, Young discusses what he has experienced as “deconstruction of identity” (Leonard, 1993); and if not complete deconstruction, than complication of his identity, not only in the eyes of police and academic colleagues but also very much in terms of how he came to view himself (for other methodological discussions of the police officer-turned-ethnographer see Holdaway, 1983; Leonard, 1993; Wender, 2008).

Though methodological, ethical and analytical issues of being on both sides become even clearer when the ethnography is carried out by a police officer turned academic, it nevertheless remains central to all police ethnography. One of the better examples of this, I believe, is that of Punch’s discussions of his study of the Dutch police in Amsterdam. Here, Punch contemplates how ethnography essentially involves a matter of “infiltration” (see also Jauregui, 2013). As he puts it:

[I]nfiltration constitutes the key technique of participant observation. Although the word infiltration has a negative tone related to espionage and deception [it] emphasize[s] that entry and departure, confidence and trust, and attachment and desertion in the field may sponsor social and moral dilemmas that spell out a virtually continuous process of negotiation of the research role (Punch, 1989: 178-179).

Acknowledging the more obviously negative aspects of the word, understanding ethnography in terms of infiltration, and the ethnographer as infiltrator, allows Punch to point to the inherent dilemmas of police ethnography – the same methodological and ethical dilemmas clearly embodied by the aforementioned inside(r) or covert ethnographer. Even though we ethnographers rarely want to admit to it, we do inevitably approach, enter and hang out in our chosen fields of study somewhat duplicitously. The inherent duplicitousness of ethnography is

also something Pels (1999) has pondered. For example, though not exactly lying, we do tend to pitch our research in ways we believe to be most efficient. We also seldomly just want or look for one thing when doing our observations. We have multiple interests and aims. We may have a stipulated research agenda, but this does not keep ethnographers from being interested in other things.

As ethnographers we are indeed taught to keep our eyes and minds open, acknowledging that we do not already know the facts and that we may be surprised by what we find. On the one hand, this is a positive thing from our interlocutors' point of view. The police, for example, often appreciate that we “may actually learn how things really are out there in the real world”, as they have told me on several occasions. Yet, it also comes with a negative twist. This inquisitiveness can easily be interpreted as the ethnographer being unserious and uncomfortably nosy, the police suspecting that we are not being professional and that we are mostly there to poke around, as illustrated earlier in this chapter. That ethnographers – and specifically ethnographers of state control and policing – are risk not just being suspected but actually investigated for being moles is something that Verdery recently and expertly discusses in her book *My Life as a Spy* (2018), looking into the extensive file the former Romanian Secret Service had built on her while she was carrying out ethnographic studies in and around Romania. And to be honest, in some ways and sometimes, we *are* doing fieldwork to poke around, looking for what we do not already know and what the police may be hiding from the public – an aspect of prying known to the ethnographer as well as the police (see Fassin 2013: 21)

### *The collaborator*

In this way, for better *and* worse, as a former or still-on-the-job officer or as more “pure” academic outsider, the police ethnographer “infiltrates” (Punch 1989, 178-9), paying attention to the etymology of the word with ‘filtrate’ indicating the process of something passing through a filter. The (police) ethnographer looks for ways in which to pass through a finely meshed net to access and see what is on the other side, *while* having to filter and reflect on what they eventually see and find.

Although Punch’s conceptualizing of the ethnographer as a sort of infiltrator does include a move beyond a pure negative understanding of the word, it does not capture the same kind of wide and dichotomic tension as the concept that I want to introduce, namely that of “the collaborator”. One the one hand, using the concept of the collaborator does point to how

ethnographies of policing involve ideas about being an insider, about infiltration, about getting behind enemy lines or being a plant. This is something that the police suspect and some of the ethnographer's academic peers almost expect. Yet, on the other hand, the concept of the collaborator also captures how police ethnography is not just a matter of sneakily getting inside and, thus, getting insights or, for that matter, to become too insnared to be able to see clearly (here thinking about how "infiltrated" also means the process of something becoming completely emmeshed and overtaken by something else); as a concept it additionally captures how we as ethnographers often become (understood as) associates of the people we study.

As the anthropologist Margot Weiss (2016) fleetingly contemplated some fifteen years ago, this is the neat duality captured by the concept of the collaborator, namely that the ethnographer, and, I would argue, police ethnographer especially, is strung out on a continuum between being perceived as an adversary and/or as an associate at the very same time – being both suspected of being a collaborative partner and a *collaborateur* – and importantly, often both by the police and peers. In many ways, viewing police ethnography through the lens of the collaborator offers a unique way to encapsulate and ponder the methodological-cum-ethical tension of what Innes (2010) among others has described as the three ways in which police ethnography may be done, namely "for", "on" or "against" the police (see also Björk, 2018). Of course, the ethnographer is not doing it all at the same time. Rather, applying the concept of collaborator offers a way to bear in mind the often-inescapable contestation of police ethnography in all its shapes and colours. What are the ethnographer's intentions in having successfully ventured into the backstage of police work? This is a question the people we study ask themselves as well many of our colleagues – and, this being the case, it unavoidably becomes a question with several possible answers that police ethnographers are forced to ponder and eventually attempt to answer themselves.

### **Five ways to deal**

That the police ethnographer is at constant risk of being seen as a collaborator can be discouraging. Therefore, moving towards its conclusion, I now want to take a more constructive approach in the rest of this chapter – by highlighting five ways by which the police ethnographer may actually deal with the "collaborator" label. Other strategies certainly exist yet the following five seem to be of the essence:

#### 1. Prepare for it

To recommend “preparing for it” (that is, preparing for the collaborator label) as a coping strategy may seem redundant. Ever since Malinowski (2014: [1922]) proposed “participant observation” as the ethnographer’s principal method, making preparations before going away on fieldwork has been seen as an inescapable first step. As Malinowski and ethnographers following him have all emphasized, ethnographic preparations first and foremost consist in reading up on the specific field and theme that one is about to enter and explore – i.e. reading up on both scientific (theory as well as method) as well as more public and popular works, nowadays including various written, oral and visual productions, all informative of the more official sociocultural, economic and political context and discourse of the place and people studied (see also Van Maanen, 2011). In terms of policing, this means that the ethnographer starts out by reading up on scholarly publications about policing, acquiring knowledge about both general aspects of police work as well as the specific theme of interest. It also means reading up on laws, regulations, decrees, available codes of conduct, policies as well as media outputs etcetera, as these together form the particular context that shapes or otherwise affects the police practice and perception you are about to study.

Moreover, (police) ethnographers have ever since the 1970s argued for the need to further reflect on how the ethnographer will never – before or after fieldwork – obtain a full perspective. No matter how much they read up on before going away on fieldwork or how skilfully they conduct the fieldwork, the ethnographer and the ethnographic perspective remain constrained by the inevitable presuppositions they bring to the field as well as by the role and position offered to the ethnographer in and by the field (see Punch, 1978; Van Maanen, 1978; Hunt, 1984; Westmarland, 2001; Reiner and Newburn, 2007; Fassin, 2017b; Bacon et al., 2020). Though the police ethnographer does have some say in how they become understood by the field and its people, varying among other things in relation to how the ethnographer presents themselves, this remains very much out of our hands. For example, we may here refer to Hunt’s study on ‘The Development of Rapport through the Negotiation of Gender in Field Work’ (1984). As she writes in relation to her ethnography of the police:

When the researcher enters the field setting, he/she inevitably brings with him/her certain features which the subjects interpret in culturally prescribed ways. In the case of the police, the researcher was perceived as a “feminine,” “inside” person who was allied with management against the rank and file. The process of rapport therefore involved the transformation of the researcher’s identity from untrustworthy “feminine spy” to a trustworthy category of person who belonged in ... a masculine domain (Hunt, 1984: 283).



Hunt thus successfully reminds us of how the ethnographer may be seen and met in different ways depending, for example, on their gender, ethnicity, sexuality and social background (see also Sausdal 2018b).

Translated into the interest of this chapter, all of the above points to how one may for fieldwork in general, and for the collaborator label specifically. Particularly, it means that the ethnographer, by having obtained at least a preliminary understanding of what kind of field they are entering, will be much better prepared to handle the ambiguous role of the collaborator, be it for example that of Hunt's "feminine spy" or its potential opposite, "the masculine ally". Also, in having acquired a useful back catalogue of ways in which other ethnographer colleagues have navigated their positioning and partialities – both in relation to the police, but also in relation to peers keenly interested in how we situate ourselves as police ethnographers, the ethnographer may more consciously think about their own place and placement in the field. Simply put, by "preparing for it", the question of collaboration is no longer that is suddenly sprung on the ethnographer, but rather something they start preparing for long before they enter the field.

## 2. Consider the purpose

As mentioned earlier, one way to classify the different purposes of policing research since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century has been to speak of police research as being either 'about', 'against' or 'for' the police (Innes, 2010). A similar way of conceptualizing these three different approaches is to speak of the existence of 'consensus', 'controversy/conflict' or 'crime control' perspectives in police research (Reiner and Newburn, 2007: 349). To understand and deal with the collaborator label, reflecting on the above distinctions between different kinds and purposes of police research is pivotal. Simply put, when doing police ethnography, it is a good idea to carefully consider whether what one is doing is ethnographic work 'for', 'about', or 'against' the police, thereby being clearer about where the project belongs on the collaborator continuum from confrere to critic. This will make it easier to organize the study, to know to what to look for empirically and analytically, and not least, to present to the police, to peers and other interested parties.

I would however suggest – a suggestion further discussed below – not to let initial decisions be set in stone. For many an ethnographer it remains good practice to allow for the ethnography to inspire, evolve and challenge their predispositions. It is also worth remembering

that whatever the intended research purpose may be, the envisioned purpose will have certain methodological and theoretical consequences for the study. For instance, when doing work “for” the police, the ethnographer will probably have an easier time being granted access and being accepted by the police. This, however, also comes with the police expecting that the ethnographer will end up delivering something of use, that we are on their side and act accordingly, and thus possibly leaving little room for criticism or radically new ideas. Now, if the ethnographer sets out to do ethnography “against” the police, they may try to hide or at least slightly veil this fact from the police in order to be granted access and insights. Yet, as further considered below, the odds are that the ethnographer will eventually be found out – which may lead to being cut off entirely, or at least being heavily restricted from observing certain aspects of police work. As Reiner and Newburn (2007) have correctly argued, doing police ethnography is always a balancing act between choosing what to reveal and the risk of losing access (Rowe, 2007; Borrelli, 2020). Should we, going back to the questions raised in terms of “covert ethnography” (Calvey, 2017), ultimately tell on the police, knowing that this also means that we then lose the possibility to study and report on other important aspects of police work?

Setting out to do ethnography “about” the police may sound like a path of least resistance. I, for example, identify as an ‘about the police’ ethnographer. Yet, as Björk (2018) has considered, wanting to do “an about the police ethnography” may in fact often be the most troublesome one. Rather than solving the collaborator conundrum before or after the fact, doing “about” ethnographies keeps the conundrum very much alive and thus central to the work and its reception, throughout the study. It becomes something that cannot fully be resolved, and something where the police ethnographer has to live with the tension and continuously argue for the fact – in front of the suspicious officer or an unconvinced peer – that one is neither a teammate nor turncoat. Instead, which tends to feed rather than reduce suspicions about one’s sympathies, the about-ethnographer’s allegiances may be said to lie with something as annoyingly abstract as “data”, “the empirical material”, “facts”, “findings”, “truth” or “science”. Although I personally have such conventional academic allegiances, haughty or naïve as they may be, saying so is normally not an answer that truly satisfies the inquisitive colleague nor the police officer. Because, “come on”, as a detective once asked me, mirroring what any contemporary social scientists could have asked, “you can’t stay completely neutral, can you? You have to side with someone, with something, haven’t you?”

While this is a clever line of questioning, I do try to remain undecided, committed to be caught up in the collaborator conundrum. I do so to allow for constant reflection rather than

a potentially false sense of resolution. As the following coping strategy also reveals, my suggestion is for police ethnographers to do the same for as long as possible – or, at least, to consider the intended purpose of their study, *but* to remain open to the possibility of changing their perspective.

### 3. Do the ethnography

Although it is important to reflect on what the exact purpose of the research is, it is as important to postpone judgment. To many leading ethnographic methodologists, the *sine qua non* of ethnographic method is indeed to allow for the field and those in the field to inform our analyses and theorization (Goffman, 1989; Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Ferrell, 1998; Wolcott, 1999; Brewer, 2000; Fassin, 2017b; Treadwell, 2019; Bacon et al., 2020). This is also an ethnographic diktat found in many conventional police research guidelines (cf. Newburn and Reiner, 2007). Whether in the form of analytical induction or abduction, the methodological quintessence of ethnography is, to this day, still largely understood to be its commitment to understanding how the world looks through the eyes of its interlocutors and to allow this inside perspective to steer the ethnographer's analyses. This is not to say that the ethnographer blindly and uncritically buys into the interlocutors' explanations, and thus "goes native". But it does imply that ethnography is essentially of an iterative and explorative nature. Although often not completely possible, the objective is for the ethnographer to momentarily bracket their theoretical as well as politico-moral preconceptions, to allow for the possibility of finding and developing alternative explanations. While some disagree with this, arguing for a more openly political, activist or even 'militant' approach (Scheper-Hughes, 2009; Vitale, 2017; Friedrichs, 2018; McDowell and Fernandez, 2018; Canning and Tombs, 2021), many if not most (police/criminological) ethnographers still believe in the worth of postponing judgments, be they conceptual or political (cf. Fassin, 2017a).

Furthermore, the very purpose and use of doing ethnography may become obsolete if we approach the people we study already knowing what to think. If we already know our reasons for "being there" (Bacon et al., 2020) and, hence, what to reason, then why even do the ethnography? If we do "activist (police) ethnography" without any real attempt to suspend our ideas about that and those we study, police ethnography risks being demoted to nothing but an "inside job" or "infiltration" in the simplest and negative sense of the words as pondered by Punch (1989). It merely becomes a matter of searching for the predefined problematic or the proverbial "dirty secrets" that the police are presumed to be trying to hide from us. While the

clearing of the many murky “smokescreens” (Van Maanen, 1973) laid by the police is important (for instance to shine a light on issues of police misconduct), it also significantly limits the scope of police ethnography if this is the only thing we are interested in, making it a case of investigative journalism more than social science. Besides, if the activist ethnographer does not really do the ethnography before doing the analysis, they should perhaps openly accept the adversarial aspect of the collaborator label from the onset. If ethnographers enter the police’s working day, notebook in hand, already knowing what to look for and how to use it, they can hardly claim objectivity. My simple recommendation is, nevertheless, to always be as ethnographically open-minded and curious as possible. We should collaborate with what comes in our way, good or bad, surprising or unsurprising as it may be, instead of just corroborating the stories we already believe in.

#### 4. Be honest

Be honest! This is likely the best advice I can offer – yet it undermines the possibility of the ethnographer hiding their actual ethnographic purpose from the police (and peers), or even hiding the fact that they are an ethnographer all together as proponents of “covert ethnography” may argue (Pearson, 2012; Calvey, 2017). In my experience at least, fighting fire with fire rarely helps. That is, being surreptitious around the already surreptitious and innately suspicious is too often a pathway toward methodological as well as ethical failure. First of all, according to available guidelines for both ethnographic and criminological work, it is seen as, if not unethical, then as a minimum, ethically dubious if the ethnographer does not disclose her/his research objectives to the people involved (cf. Punch, 1986; Reiner and Newburn, 2007; Jauregui, 2013). This is both a matter of transparency and a matter of securing informed consent and thus allowing research participants to know what they are participating in. Second, in stricter methodological terms, being purposefully unclear about why one is conducting an observational study is, in my own experience and that of others (for example Holmberg, 2003), something that police officers tend to see right through. The ethnographer should remember that the police deal with deception on a daily basis – both when it comes to detecting whether a suspect is telling the truth as well as the police themselves using half-truths or lies as part of their everyday work (Manning, 1974). Therefore, the odds are that the police will suspect that the ethnographer is not being honest with them and treat him/her accordingly, cutting the ethnographer off from certain aspects of their work and perceptions and thereby further limiting the ethnographic insights gained.

Obviously, as Fassin (2013) has argued, the police ethnographer will probably never obtain full access to every aspect of the police's practice and thought, just as the ethnographer being fully trusted by the police is a utopian ideal. Yet, as the police are intrinsically suspicious of the ethnographer, the more open and honest rather than the more deceptive ethnographer stands a better chance of building trust and gaining a fuller form of access. It may sound naïve to think that the police will respect displays of honesty and thus engage more openly with the frank ethnographer than, for example, with the ethnographer who keeps unpopular opinions to themselves. Nevertheless, I have had several positive experiences being forthright with the police, even in controversial situations. For example, police officers in Denmark, Romania, Spain and Portugal have frequently asked me about what I thought about their work as they, for instance, aggressively or even violently handled suspects. Officers have also often asked me about my political views, suspecting that I am of a (much) different persuasion than them. These are testing questions I have always sought to answer as truthfully as possible, engendering the expected critical reaction from the police, yet, perhaps puzzlingly, also words of appreciation. As an officer put it with a smile on her face, as I admitted to voting for one of the political parties many in the Danish police really dislike:

“You're not right in the head. It's obvious you're one of these naïve and goodhearted academics. But, hey, now we know something about you we kinda already knew, right? And then maybe you can actually learn something from hanging out with us. I mean, maybe, just maybe, we can help change your mind”.

This is not the place to say whether the police succeeded or not. The point I am making here is that the police actually tend to prefer that the ethnographer shows their cards as far as possible. The reason for this is that they do not expect to have an ethnographer around that easily agrees with them on issues of police practice or politics. So it is often better for the ethnographer to go ahead and speak one's mind. They expect and they “can take it”, as my interlocutors have themselves put it (For a similar argument, see Bourdieu's (2003) critique of “the reflexive turn” in anthropology).

To be sure, being honest may also often be a better antidote to pervasive police suspicion than an insincere adherence to their worldviews. The police may heavily disagree with the candid ethnographer, but this can prove to be productive rather than a hindrance to the ethnographic endeavour. As discussed in other studies (see Teitelbaum, 2019) aired

disagreements between the ethnographer and their interlocutors do not necessarily lead to a breakdown of trust and restricted access (as one might expect), but to interlocutors more openly discussing their worldviews and explaining why they think that way both to underline their viewpoints as well as to try to change the ethnographer's perspective. In this way, candour may paradoxically end up providing the ethnographer with some of their best empirical material. And to be honest, I have not infrequently found the police to be more accepting of my alternative views than some academic peers, the former thinking I am wrong yet remaining willing to engage with me (often to prove me wrong), the latter mostly thinking I am wrong and a lost cause.

##### 5. Know that things are ambiguous

A fifth way to deal with the tensions of being seen as a collaborator of all sorts is to acknowledge that policing research and policing itself are fraught with similar tensions. Things are rarely as straightforward as they appear. Some instances of police work are legally and obviously right or wrong, but many are not, something illustrated by the vast literature on 'police discretion' (Davis, 1975; Waddington, 1999; Holmberg, 2000; Lipsky, 2010; Phillips, 2015). One of the best discussions of the tensions and complexities of ethnography vis-à-vis police (mis)conduct remains Westmarland's "blowing the whistle?" (2001). In her article, Westmarland asks when ethnographers should break their promises of confidentiality and report issues of misconduct to the appropriate authorities, the press included. While such a question may seem easy to answer ("see something, say something!"), in working life it is often difficult to be sure whether what the ethnographer saw was truly a case of police violence. For example, Westmarland (2001) reminds us of how the police's (in)appropriate use of force is a contextual and situational rather than categorical question. The police are mandated to use the amount of force needed to handle a given situation; not that they may use whatever kind of force they want to, *but* that they are expected to use just enough to make sure that the situation is under control. Like discussions of police discretion, this means that officers have to decide *in situ* what to do in the given the situation. There is no one-amount-of-force-fits-all formula to be found. And as Westmarland (2001) illustrates, this inherent ambiguity also means that police officers are often themselves unsure about whether they have in fact handled a given situation within the boundaries of their mandate. "Did we do too much or too little?" "Were we too forceful or not?" are questions the police mull over either with each other or by themselves.

Like many other professions, the police are therefore often uncertain about the appropriateness and efficiency of their choices. Yet, contrary to other professions, these professional contemplations are rarely openly aired. The police tend to deal in certainty and command rather than hesitancy and contemplation (see for example Loftus, 2010). Still, and this is the point, for the ethnographer marked as a possible collaborator – as someone who is either on their side or against them – it is worth remembering that what is right and wrong in policing is also something the police debate among themselves. They do this perhaps not as much as the academic-cum-ethnographer trained in the need for reflexivity, but they do give it some thought. To the outside world, the police stand united, but internally and individually it is sometimes less obvious which side of the story they adhere to. In this way, one may say that the police also share in the collaborator conundrum. Or, remembering how anthropologists for a long time called the people studied “informants”, it is not uncommon for the police ethnographer to have officers telling the ethnographer what they are not telling their colleagues or even them telling on their colleagues.

As already noted, other ways of thinking about and dealing with the collaborator label surely exist – some of which are offered in the many methodological writings on the difficulties of doing ethnography for/against/about the police (Reiner and Newburn, 2007; Innes, 2010; Björk, 2018), including this very handbook. I nevertheless feel compelled to re-emphasize that it is not only the police and peers who continuously make queries about what the ethnographer is about, but also the ethnographer themselves. Why am I here? What am I supposed to do? What did I in fact see and learn? And – what to do with it? These are questions that inevitably follow the ethnographer from start to end. A research proposal and its objectives may be formulated with great conviction and certainty to convince relevant parties of their worth and feasibility, but, in the end, much social science, and ethnography especially, deal in doubt from its infancy to its conclusion. This is an uncertainty that comes to define ethnography and therefore something the ethnographer has to learn to live and work with.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have engaged with the question of the ethnographer as collaborator. In a wider sense, the perspectives included relate to discussions about the overall purpose of policing research. Are we doing research “for”, “against” or “about” the police? Though differences exist, I suspect that many, if not most, policing researchers see themselves as engaged in all three activities. For example, although I see myself as belonging mostly to the “about”

approach, I also go “against” the police when need be (just today I spoke to journalists about issues of ethnic profiling in the Danish police), as well as willingly offering my recommendations in terms of how policing practices may be improved. In this way, many police ethnographers may be said to embody both sides of the collaborator label, being occasionally both an opponent and an associate – and sometimes something in-between. It may surely vary where we mostly belong on the continuum, between its two poles, but the odds are that police ethnography will always entail a certain amount of collaborative fluctuation. Police and peers will look to us and our efforts and contemplate what kind of collaborators we may be, while we are similarly scrutinizing them and ourselves. This is the central message of this chapter, and of its many examples and discussions; namely that police ethnography comes with constant musings about the alliances it implies and incorporates. What kind of collaborators are we? What kind of ideas and ideals do we want our collaboration to involve? Thinking about such questions through the oxymoronic concept of the collaborator perfectly allows for such needed reflexivity.

Lastly, while this chapter has concerned itself with the collaborative issues of police ethnography, it is not unreasonable to think that the issues discussed are of relevance beyond the field of policing. The collaborator conundrum may similarly pertain to ethnographic studies of, for example, other actors in the criminal justice system, the wider state apparatus, political and policy work, big business, other private or powerful individuals and organizations as well as people engaged in criminal or otherwise illegitimate activities. In general, the ethnographer as collaborator – as a potential ally and/or antagonist – may indeed be an inherent, yet scarcely discussed issue of “studying up” (Nader 1972); that is, the study of those who wield power or who otherwise stand to lose something if exposed by a potentially falsehearted ethnographer. The aim of this chapter has therefore been to reflect on some of the inherent difficulties of doing (police) ethnography and enable a substantial discussion of the subject. “Well begun is half done”, people say. Knowing from the onset that we ethnographers will be “granted” the role of the collaborator will not teach us what to do exactly. However, it will prepare the ethnographer to better deal with this role and to make more enlightened methodological and ethical choices accordingly.



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