



## **Terrorizing police**

### **Revisiting 'the policing of terrorism' from the perspective of Danish police detectives**

Sausdal, David

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# **Terrorising Police: Revisiting ‘the policing of terrorism’ from the perspective of Danish police detectives<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

A common conclusion in criminology is that fears of terrorism are being (mis)used. The media have used them to market their products, politicians to promote themselves as protectors, and the police have profited through being granted increased powers and resources. Some scholars even argue that one outcome has been a growing militarisation of the police. This paper revisits this debate. It does so by taking an ethnographic look at how the war on terror has affected a number of Danish police detectives’ daily work. In doing so, the paper shows how the idea that police (mostly) benefit from the war on terror somewhat misses the mark – at least when seen from the perspective of frontline officers. As the paper demonstrates, rather than mobilising Danish detectives, terrorism most often makes them feel mired.

## **Keywords**

War on terror, Fear, Policing, Detective/Police culture, Militarisation, Frustration, Ethnography.

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## **Introduction**

*Terror is ruining the Danish police!* – Danish Police Detective

In late February 2015, Denmark was hit by a terror attack dubbed the ‘2015 Copenhagen Shootings’. The culprit, a young Danish citizen with Palestinian parents named Omar El-Hussein, tried but failed to shoot one of the ‘Muhammad cartoonists’, the Swede Lars Vilks. Later that day, while still on the loose, El-Hussein attempted to break into the Copenhagen Synagogue. He didn’t manage to do this either, but he did manage to kill two civilians and wound five police officers during his rampage, only to be shot and killed by the police later that day.

Following the Copenhagen Shootings and in the wake of previous terror attacks and threats in other cities around the world, the threat level was heightened in Denmark and the Danish police were ordered to increase their counterterrorism efforts. All this happened just two weeks before I started what would become 900 hours of ethnographic observations of the Danish police. In early 2015, the Danish police had granted me access to pursue a specific research agenda. I had been given permission to conduct an ethnographic examination of the way in which the Danish police were dealing with an increasing amount of transnational, cross-border crime, something which Denmark (not unlike many other countries worldwide) had been experiencing since the beginning of the millennium. More specifically, I had been given the opportunity to observe the daily work of two specialised detective units in the

greater Copenhagen metropolitan area, Task Force Burglary (TFB) and Task Force Pickpocketing (TFP), with both units investigating international suspects from countries like Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Chile and Morocco. My observations included insights into all aspects of the detectives' working day. I was present when they were working at their desks, when they were checking and updating computer records, when they were examining CCTV footage, when they were running wiretaps or using other surveillance technologies, when they were on stakeouts, when they were interviewing suspects, when they attended meetings, when they were in court and when they were discussing their work amongst themselves over a coffee. Methodologically, my research thus followed the longstanding tradition of *in situ* ethnographic observations of the police – a methodological tradition which Van Maanen and Kolb amongst many others have argued to be particularly important as the police are otherwise widely known for being selective and even misleading in their external representations of their work (1982). *In situ* ethnographic studies are important as they help to clarify the behind-the-scenes reality of police work whereby the ethnographer “seeks to describe what it is that can be said to be happening from the point of view of those for whom it is happening”. (1982: 5). In regard to my specific study, I was trying to shed ethnographic light on the viewpoints and workings of Danish detectives engaged in policing cross-border criminal suspects.

In recently published works, I have described and discussed how Danish detectives went about policing cross-border crime (Author 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Here, however, I wish

to expand on some other, and somewhat peculiar, ethnographic observations that I made during my time with the two detective units. These observations relate to the aforementioned terror attack and, specifically, to how a subsequent Danish ‘war on terror’ affected the detectives’ working day. Put differently, this paper is about the ways in which the many demands placed on Danish detectives to prevent and police terrorism were something they frequently found troubling. It is about the reasons why one detective even declared that “terror is ruining the Danish police!” – reasons I was allowed to witness first-hand during the many hours and days I spent with the two detective units.

In explaining how and why the detectives I was observing found this development troubling, this paper revisits both broader criminological and more policing-specific discussions of terrorism. Here, prevailing arguments often run along the following lines: first, research tends to notice that contemporary fears of terrorism have been capitalised upon by both politicians and the police (cf. Altheide, 2006; Pickering, 2004; Rothe and Muzzatti, 2004), leading to a problematic increase in police powers, material resources and discriminatory potential (cf. Amoore and de Goede, 2008; Mythen and Walklate, 2010). Secondly, some scholars even argue that this has furthered a problematic militarisation of the police. The war on terror has, the argument goes, turned the police from being “mere” crime controllers towards increasingly being a “blue army” (McCulloch, 2001) (see also Kraska 2007).

*A different Danish story*

While my research into the matter strongly supports many of the prevailing arguments, it also differs with them – a difference which this paper homes in on. It differs, in particular, from the explicitly or implicitly shared notion that contemporary fears of, and subsequent war on, terror are something that the police and thus, by proxy, police officers readily buy into. Bowling and Sheptycki, for example, argue that police officers have little hesitation in endorsing the terrorism narrative as it follows “the dualistic world view [of] labelling others as ‘you’ or ‘them’” prevalent in police cultures worldwide (2012: 127). “The label ‘terrorist’ provides”, they elaborate, “a powerful image of a suitable enemy legitimating any and all paramilitary policing efforts.” (ibid).

To be sure, Danish detectives did, in my experience, buy into widespread xenophobic notions that, for instance, a Moroccan suspected of pickpocketing might in fact also be connected to ISIS, although little or no evidence existed to prove this. They also eagerly bought into the popular belief that a terrorist attack was imminent in Denmark and that many and drastic steps had to be taken to prevent this from happening. In this sense, they confirmed conventional thinking on the matter. Yet, when it came to considering how these drastic steps would affect their daily work, their support for an increase in anti-terrorism policing waned. Indeed, what my observations of the TFB and TFP detectives’ working day showed me was

that, for the detectives concerned, the professed war on terror often didn't require much warfare from the detectives themselves. This is not to say that the political and institutional context in which the detectives worked was not increasingly geared towards a war on terror. It was – and it is. The point I am making is merely that a difference exists between the reasoning of the Danish Police as a societal institution and the thinking of individual frontline police officers – or, exactly as Van Maanen and Kolb argued in relation to the importance of ethnographic research, that a difference exists between the point of view of managerial representations and that of everyday police work. Where the former is – evidently – officially engaged in a mounting war on terrorism, the latter – for reasons described in this paper – lags behind. Indeed, as this paper seeks to argue, for many Danish police officers, the policing of terrorism was more 'terrorising the police' than actually aiding them. The policing of terrorism was largely something that made frontline police officers feel mired rather than mobilised. In other words, whereas Danish counterterrorism and intelligence units quite surely experienced the policing of terrorism as vocationally worthwhile, most other Danish frontline officers who were engaged with other and more customary criminal justice matters, like the detectives described here, saw – and still see – the policing of terrorism as a vocational burden rather than it being of any real benefit or significance.

In the pages that follow, I will develop this point. I will do so by providing three substantial empirical examples that both separately and together explain why terrorism is

something of a bother to (Danish) police work. Specifically, the examples include illustrations of how the detectives felt “terrorised” by, first, different incidents and, secondly, practices and how they in more general terms felt that their “working conditions and private life” suffered because of the policing of terrorism. In terms of theory, the examples all follow and confirm Cottee and Hayward’s (2011) approach to a more existential and emotive study of terrorism and, by extension, counterterrorism. In their work, Cottee and Hayward stress how such an approach entails: (1) the desire for excitement, (2) the desire for ultimate meaning, and (3) the desire for glory that terrorism might offer and satisfy (2011). Although Cottee and Hayward’s emotive approach to terrorism is framed and furthered to provide an understanding of why people become/don’t become terrorists, they actually mostly develop their theory not from specific studies of terrorists but from more general studies of violent and armed behaviour. In this way, Cottee and Hayward point to the above three “existential attractions” (ibid) which they believe to be key enablers of such behaviour. With this in mind – i.e. that the theory originates and extends beyond acts of terrorism to other extreme actions, such as counterterrorism – it becomes even clearer how their proposed threefold requirement can also help explain the vocational problems that the Danish detectives were facing.

### **The policing of terrorism: theoretical framework**

First, a few words on how the policing of terrorism has typically been analysed: as Mythen and Walklate have argued in their seminal paper on ‘Criminology and Terrorism’ (2006b),

the general criminological approach is to “critique the ways in which the terrorist threat is being discursively and materially shaped by law and order institutions” (ibid: 379). Stated differently, criminologists tend to look for the *symbolic* and/or the *substantive* effects that have been furthered by the contemporary fear of terrorism (see also Cottee and Hayward, 2011, for a similar critical appraisal).

### *Symbolic issues*

On the symbolic level, one of the primary ways of analysing the fear of terror, as manifested by politicians, the media or the police, for example, is to argue that the way these groups represent this fear involves a certain amount of fearmongering. A prototypical example in this regard is Altheide’s ‘Terrorism and the Politics of Fear’ (2006). Here, Altheide argues that ever since 9/11 there have been continuous representations in the media and by politicians that link terrorism to existing fears of victimisation in ways that “often decontextualize rather complex events to offer simplistic explanations” (2006: 417). This one-dimensional coupling, Altheide concludes, has made it easier for “moral entrepreneurs ... to market to audiences anchored in fear” (ibid: 434). Pointing to the terrorist threat is thus a means by which willing actors can “harnes[s] a culture of fear” (Mythen and Walklate, 2006a). Or, as Pickering has put it, the fear of terror is “consciously mobilised for political point scoring” (2004: 223).

In more direct relation to the question of policing, several authors have therefore reasoned that, even though it is undeniable that a terror threat exists, the threat is simultaneously being symbolically exploited by policing actors (cf. Mueller and Stewart, 2016; Pickering, 2004). As Flyghed has argued, discussing the policing of terrorism in particular:

[T]he manufacture of dangerous situations constitutes one means of promoting efforts to normalise the use of extreme weapons and spectacular policing methods ... This too constitutes an example of the normalisation of coercive measures. (Flyghed, 2002: 35)

Viewed from the perspective of Flyghed's analytical framework, the police knowingly promote and even overstress the terror threat as a means of "normalising the exceptional", allowing them to retain the provisional resources and rights allocated to them to combat an otherwise exceptional threat. Considering the Danish context, in which the police, alongside politicians, continuously represent the threat of (Islamist) terror as being omnipresent, Flyghed's Swedish-based assertion rings true (Højer et al., 2018; Rytter and Pedersen, 2014). This critique of police representation has been repeated more broadly by Bowling and Sheptycki, who remind police researchers that it is:

important to acknowledge that appearances can be deceptive and [that] it is not always the case that the social actors claiming to be 'good guys' and pointing fingers at the 'bad guys over there' have anyone's best interests in mind other than their own. Indeed, we would even go so far as to say that it is more important to unmask the taken for granted assumptions, because the rhetoric of 'war on terror' ... have well documented harmful effects. (2012:135).

### *Substantive issues*

Although the discourse surrounding terrorism and counterterrorism is sometimes more engaged with symbolic rather than substantive matters, the declared war on terror has led to a large number of concrete initiatives – many more than this paper allows space for. Yet there is a general tenet that cuts across the various debates, namely that the:

fear-inducing tales of criminality and ‘terror’ are often the basis for establishing expansions in real-world panopticon surveillance, thus endorsing calls for more street cameras, more prisons, more data checks and greater police powers. (Coleman and McCahill, 2010: 28)

Or as Lyon has repeatedly pointed out, “the war on terror” has been the primary catalyst in “the growth of globally networked surveillance” (2007: 30). In other words, the war on terror is understood as one, if not the main, facilitator in an ongoing Orwellian expansion driven by widening legislation, increasing tactical resources and growing policing cooperation around the world, including Denmark. This is a point repeatedly made by many criminological scholars, especially after 9/11 (cf. Altheide, 2006; Brodeur, 2007; Ericson and Haggerty, 2006; Lyon, 2003)

*Mundane and discriminatory effects.* In scrutinising this Orwellian expansion, criminological analyses focus on, amongst other things, its problematic side-effects. A recurring critique is that voiced by Mathiesen (2013). In his work, Mathiesen has criticised the way in which the expansion of various transnational European surveillance systems – which together amount to a ‘surveillance monster’ (2013: 177) – is not effective in relation to its proclaimed targets,

i.e. to increase surveillance and prevent cross-border crime and terrorism. Instead, Mathiesen points out how much the expanding means of surveillance are actually used to track political opposition, to solve more mundane criminal justice cases or simply used in relation to standard public order issues. Here, the alleged policing of terrorism becomes a policing of both much broader and more mundane criminal justice and societal issues (Brodeur, 2007; Kroener and Neyland, 2012: 143ff).

Hence, evidence suggests that the people who are often most affected by the increasing policing of terrorism are actually not potential terrorists but ‘ordinary’ citizens with no connection with terrorism – people who are now incessantly monitored, both overtly and covertly. This (mis)use has led to stark criticism of the legitimacy of many counterterrorism initiatives, particularly in relation to how the expansion of surveillance involves both breaches of personal privacy and general violations of human and civil rights (Flyghed, 2002; Mathiesen, 2013). It has, for example, been widely documented that the expansion of police surveillance and control frequently includes many discriminatory practices. As Morgan and Poynting for instance argue, fear and terror and the practices produced in their name are directly tied to a rising Islamophobia in the West (2016) – a prejudiced and stereotyped connection which has “[negatively] affected the Muslim community”. (Hörnqvist and Flyghed, 2012: 319)

*Problems of accountability.* While it is clear that there has been an increase in surveillance and other means of overseeing the public, there is simultaneously a conspicuous lack of public knowledge about the inner workings of this panoptic increase – inner workings which this paper sheds some light on. As Ericson and Haggerty have described this problematic paradox:

[t]he ongoing war on terror accentuates how the state is [...] concerned with carving out a sphere of privacy, even as it tries to render the actions of others more transparent ... Hence, legal claims to privacy are being invoked as a means to render actions of powerful interests more opaque.... (Ericson and Haggerty, 2006: 10)

Similar critiques have been made by many criminologists (Bowling and Sheptycki, 2015; Coleman and McCahill, 2010: 28).

This surveillance double-standard is also present in the Danish context, where parliament in the wake of 9/11, again in 2006, and then following the 2015 Copenhagen Shootings, passed anti-terror bills that have included the allocation of several hundred million Danish Kroner, of which the lion's share has been given to the Danish Intelligence Service Agency whose work largely remains beyond public and even political scrutiny (cf. Kublitz, forthcoming). As in other countries, when it comes to the policing of terrorism, this obfuscation is excused by the necessity of following suit. That is, the state and its agencies must, just like its opponents, work in the shadows in order to be effective. While there might be some truth in this, it nevertheless gives rise to significant problems of accountability. As Bowling and

Sheptycki have disparagingly concluded in relation to a worldwide increase in global, surreptitious policing measures, this development ‘is antithetical to transparent and democratically accountable policing’ (2012: 71).

*Towards a police militarisation.* The above points to how areas of “high policing” or “political policing” (Brodeur, 2007) have been significantly endowed with extra resources and rights in the name of terror. However, as Mathiesen’s study, for example, shows (2013), there is evidence that normal criminal justice law enforcement, or “low policing” (Brodeur 2007), has also been affected by contemporary terrorism politics (cf. Murray, 2005; Pickering, 2004; Stuntz, 2002). The core argument here is that “most constitutional limits on policing are transsubstantive – they apply equally to suspected drug dealers and suspected terrorists” (Stuntz, 2002: 2140). It therefore follows “that when courts approve police tactics designed to fight terrorists, they will also be sanctioning use of the same tactics against other sorts of criminals” (ibid). Such a possible spill-over or trickle-down effect is nothing new. The transsubstantive nature of law, and thus its spread to areas for which it wasn’t initially intended, has been documented by many other researchers – with regard to both anti-terror legislation, anti-narcotics legalisation and also migration law, for example (Stumpf, 2006). In Denmark, this spill-over effect has also been noted and criticised by several legal and human rights scholars (Hansen, 2011).

In following this transsubstantive analysis of the spread of counterterrorism policing measures, scholars have therefore argued that the many policies and practices introduced in the name of terror should be seen as a growing “conflation of crime and national security concerns” (Pickering, 2004: 212), i.e. as a conflation of high and low policing. The most emblematic example of this is found in the fact that the various forms of governmental work intended to prevent terrorism are repeatedly framed as warfare rather than as a manifestation of criminal justice. Such a framing, it is argued, has:

significant consequences for the expansion of national security issues into traditionally internal policing domains, and the utilisation of external military apparatus for non-war functions involving international policing tasks. (Pickering, 2004: 212)

In its most dramatic form, this perspective includes the police “militarisation” or “para-militarisation” thesis (Kraska, 2007; McCulloch and Pickering, 2009), i.e. that police are increasingly becoming a “blue army” (McCulloch, 2001). Here, scholars point to how the continuous labelling of various criminal justice issues as ‘wars’ (war on drugs/crime/terror), and the legislation and tactics that it has given rise to, have made both the police and policing methods more extensive and aggressive.

In sum, much informative work has been done on the fear of terrorism and the counterterrorist measures applied to combat this fear. Irrespective of whether it is approached symbolically or substantively, what the above examples demonstrate is that there is a common denominator with regard to criminological analyses of the policing of terrorism. This

denominator amounts to an understandable evaluation of the policing of terrorism as something problematic – it is problematic either because it is used in the form of exaggerated and self-serving politics or because it has somewhat uncontrollably extended, biased and even militarised the means and ends associated with, in particular, high but also low policing.

*An Additional Approach: An Everyday, Ethnographic View of The Policing of Terrorism*

[T]he domestic war on terrorism is ... affecting local police departments' ability to deal with more typical sorts of crime. A lot of police manpower has been diverted to various forms of homeland security, such as guarding at-risk public spaces and responding to reports of possible attacks. (Stuntz, 2002: 2139)

Having touched upon the general tenets of existing criminological research, let us now turn to how the terrorism policing was experienced by a number of Danish detectives. During my study I did indeed witness how the war on terror had become a part of Danish police work, producing (intentionally or unintentionally) the various and often problematic material, practical and perceptual outcomes noted in the aforementioned literature. For example, Danish officers had become more heavily armed, they had been legally granted extra surveillance and stop-and-search discretions and their ethnic profiling had become cruder due to racialised stereotypes.

However, the question of terror also became part of a daily police reality not as an example of an orchestrated “police militarisation” (Kraska, 2007), as much of the literature would have it, but rather as something that the Danish detectives perceived as an occupational

burden. This obviously relates directly to observations of Stuntz, quoted above. Such an observation is also what has led Deflem to argue that there is something:

peculiar about police work against terrorism relative to other efforts in the wider constellation of counterterrorism. All too often, sweeping statements can be heard about counterterrorism that are based on interpretations of very specific aspects of certain responses to terrorism, without clarifying which institutions and agents play a part in these practices and how they might differ from other efforts. (Deflem 2010:5)

Deflem here raises a critique of previously mentioned studies, claiming that criminologists and scholars of policing have tended to conflate their analyses of exceptional counterterrorism activities with the wider realities of everyday police work – unfairly taking discourse, policies, legislation and other extraordinary measures as examples of how the policing of terrorism and other specialised means of police work is practised and, not least, perceived in the ordinary everyday life of a police department (cf. Sheptycki, 2017b). In Deflem’s reading, the police, especially regular criminal justice officers such as investigators and patrolmen, actually tend to resist the external politicisation of this issue, and thus the rhetoric of war, and “continue counterterrorism activities that rest on an efficiency-driven treatment and depoliticized understanding of terrorism” (2004:75). Or as Deflem has stated elsewhere, in relation to everyday police work, “the ‘War on Terror’ is no war at all” (ibid:87). As a result, Deflem first argued in 2004, and then reiterated six years later, that “the policing of terrorism presents an as-yet relatively unexplored and often not properly understood topic of research” (2010: 1).

When it comes to ethnographic studies of the daily and different ways in which the policing of terrorism is actually carried out, Deflem's words still ring true. Such studies are few and far between – and those that do exist tend to highlight the exceptional combative and discriminatory nature of the work rather than delving deeper into its much wider everyday makeup (cf. Drotbohm and Hasselberg, 2015; Maguire et al., 2014; Pickering et al., 2008; Sheptycki, 2017a). This is in itself a reason why this paper's discoveries are of empirical value. Moreover, like Deflem's, my ethnographic study of the Danish police also revealed how the war on terror was most commonly not a war at all. In line with Cottee and Hayward's (2011) contention that the psychosocial draw of both terrorism as well as counterterrorism is founded on a particular emotive and evocative productive engagement with terrorism or other kinds of extreme violence, the Danish detectives I studied tended to find their policing of terrorism acutely unproductive – immobilising rather than mobilising, bad rather than good for police morale.

### **Terrorising Danish police detectives**

To substantiate this last point, I will now provide fieldnote-based descriptions of three ways in which terror (negatively) affected ordinary police work. The first includes examples of possible terror incidents that ultimately turned out to be false alarms. The second concerns the consequences that terrorism has in relation to the extracurricular practices that it forced

the detectives to participate in. Thirdly, I provide examples of the damaging effects that terrorism has had – and still has – on detectives’ working conditions and, not least, family life. I call these three ways in which the Danish detectives felt disturbed by having to police terrorism ‘terrorising incidents’, ‘terrorising practices’, and ‘terrorising work conditions and private life’ respectively.

### *(1) Terrorising incidents*

The political discourse in Denmark as well as across many Western countries is that terrorists will strike if given the chance. This has had many consequences for the Danish police who have been ordered to be extremely vigilant and alert to even the slightest hint of a possible attack. Below, I have included written-up fieldnote examples of such situations where the detectives’ working life was affected by mere suggestions of terrorism – incidents which nevertheless turned out to be normal criminal justice cases:

*No-one’s around when I step into the TFP office just before 6am on this 2015 summer morning. I hang my jacket on the coat rack behind the door whilst wondering where the detectives are. Yesterday, before going home, I had agreed to come in early “to go hunt for breakfast thieves” as the detectives put it. In other words, the detectives wanted to scope out different downtown hotels, looking for potential thieves who steal hotel guests’ belongings whilst the guests are otherwise occupied with eating their breakfasts. However, looking around the office and elsewhere on the fifth floor, everything is deserted. I’m the only one there. Then, suddenly, I see the shadow of Detective Larsen with Detective Mikkelsen just behind him. “David, we’re downstairs”, he shouts to me from down the hall.*

*We walk into one of the station superintendents’ offices. Detectives Clausen, Christensen and Madsen are already there alongside a couple of officers from other units. The superintendent starts to explain what’s going on (and hence why the TFP detectives are not preparing to go out and catch the aforementioned ‘breakfast thieves’). “We need you to stay*

*here at the station so that you can be prepared to help if needed”, he starts, before going on to explain more precisely why this is. “As you have no doubt already heard, this morning a Danish Railway Company employee was found tied up, sitting inside a train carriage that was being cleaned and prepared for service. His hands and body were tied together with duct tape and, as the employee explained it to our colleagues who arrived when it was reported, he had been attacked by two unidentifiable assailants whilst he was cleaning the train. Furthermore, he said that he heard them talking about how they wanted to blow something up. So, gentlemen, as a result of this possible terror threat, Copenhagen Central Station has been shut down and all train traffic has been halted for now. It’s a pretty major decision as this disturbs the morning rush hour, but it’s our only option. We have to take the threat seriously. Right now, we have people searching and sweeping the whole area looking for anything suspicious, people or explosives. Therefore, until we know more, I need you to stay put and for you guys to be prepared to help if needed with the investigation and, God forbid, if the whole thing blows up.”*

*The TFP detectives and I then leave the superintendent’s office and walk back upstairs. Whilst walking, Detective Mikkelsen says, “No doubt it’s a hoax. It’s the work of a desperate man, taking advantage of the whole terror frenzy to make people feel sorry for him. Right? Wanna bet?” The other detectives don’t want to bet but merely agree. “Anyhow, no matter what it is, it’s going to keep us from catching any breakfast thieves today. It’ll be yet another day at the office, sitting and waiting,” Detective Larsen declares somewhat discouraged. Having said those discouraging words, we get a cup of coffee and the detectives sit down at their respective desks, waiting to see how this possible terror threat plays out. With the threat of terror looming, their workday, in the words of Detective Larsen, “is suspended until further notice!”*

The detectives were right in being sceptical. Later that day, the duct taped man admitted that he had staged the whole thing. For various reasons, his life was in ruins and, it was supposed, he had put on this suspected terror performance as a desperate cry for help. Nevertheless, the detectives didn’t get any work done that day.

Similarly, whilst I was following TFB, another possible terror episode occurred. It instantly hit the front pages of the Danish news media, as shootings were being reported in Denmark’s biggest shopping mall, *Fields*, located to the east of Copenhagen. Amongst other

things, the headlines, screaming ‘BREAKING NEWS’, read “Three people wounded by gunshots and knife stabbings in a shopping mall”.

When this was happening, I was in court witnessing a TFB prosecution of a group of Romanian defendants. So my first awareness of the incident was via these media reports, which I read on my smartphone. In these reports, the media were still trying to establish exactly what was happening without being able to provide any certainty. However, only a few moments after the incident, I got a group text from Detective Jensen, sent to me together with the other TFB detectives from his team. In it, he asked whether we had “seen what just happened in Fields?” and explained that “it is Hussein’s group getting back at Abi’s group”. When I came in to the office later that day, Detective Jensen elaborated on this:

*You see, I was just randomly following the news when they suddenly broke this story. And at the same time, I heard through the wire that Abi and his gang were hanging out in the shopping mall. And just after that, they started calling each other on their phones, screaming. Then I knew that it was our burglary suspects who were doing this and not some crazy terrorists. Yet, knowing how this could easily blow up in our faces – like the [police] radio was on fire – and suddenly be seen as some major terror thing, I got Andersen to find out who was the lead investigator on the Fields case and then to call him and tell him that we knew who these people were – and of course to tell him that it was not terrorism, before he went ahead and suggested anything like that to colleagues or, worse, to the news. You know, it was lucky that I was here listening to the wire. If I hadn’t been, this whole thing could’ve escalated beyond our control. You know how it goes, right? As soon as someone even whispers terrorism it all goes completely nuts ... The only damned thing now is that instead of having a good and solid case on some burglars, our case will become secondary. You know, attempted murder in a public place trumps burglary.*

Detective Jensen’s take on the situation neatly summed up the central issue for the TFB detectives. For over two months they had been running a wiretap, working every day to build a

case against a group of young men living west of Copenhagen who were suspected of having committed several burglaries over the past six months or so. TFB not only had a wiretap running, they had conducted house searches and had also put a lot of other surveillance resources or, as they called it, “technical observations” into collecting evidence and securing an arrest. As a result, I was told, “a good case had been built” which they thought was very close to being strong enough to get the suspects convicted of organised crime. A few days before the shootings in the shopping mall, the detectives had even discussed whether they should “just go ahead and bring these guys in”.

However, as demonstrated by the above example, the case had suddenly evolved in a rather unexpected way, with the crime extending to attempted murder instead of being simply a case involving a number of burglaries. This process had already started some weeks before the shootings at the shopping mall. As it happened, the two groups shooting at each other had initially been close acquaintances who, it was suspected, had even committed crimes together. Something had happened to divide them and pit them against each other. The story that I was told by the detectives was that it had all started because of a romantic conflict that had then escalated into a stabbing in downtown Copenhagen, a drive-by shooting west of Copenhagen in which two people had been severely injured and, now, shootings in the shopping mall and fears of terrorism.

But it wasn't terrorism. In this case, it was broken hearts and offended honour and in the previous case from Copenhagen Central Station it was a matter of a possibly mentally

unstable and distressed individual. Nevertheless, although quite ordinary criminal matters, they, alongside other incidents, forced the Danish detectives and their colleagues to put other matters aside and prepare for the worst possible scenario – something the police, as one detective put it, “wouldn’t normally have done before today’s terrorism focus”.

## *(2) Terrorising Practices*

It was not only these ‘might-be-terror’ incidents that (negatively) influenced the detectives’ daily work. On a more daily basis, the fear of terror and the demands placed on the Danish police to counter it, meant that almost the entire Danish police force was affected, with criminal justice police officers being asked to perform certain extra terror-related practices regularly. Here are two examples based on my fieldnotes:

*“Here we go again. I can’t believe that I have to do this”, Detective Clausen tells me, as I watch him put on his uniform preparing to go on terror guard duty for the fourth time this month – a uniform he rather dislikes wearing, since he is a detective used to wearing his own civilian clothing, and is used to the professional distinctions that come with such differences in attire. “I tell you. It’s boring as hell, standing outside that tiny Jewish butcher’s or wherever the management puts you for so many hours at a time. And it gets terribly cold also. Even though this is summertime, it often gets cold when you just stand there. And just think about how it’ll be during the winter! No matter how many clothes you wear, when you just stand there without really moving, your body doesn’t get any heat. In the end, you’re fucking freezing ... And yeah, I guess it gets a bit better when you are on your break and you get to eat some sandwiches and drink some lukewarm coffee, but that doesn’t really outweigh the fact that it’s a shit job.”*

The fact that Detective Clausen had to spend his entire day guarding a suspected terror target instead of being able to carry on with his actual work (i.e. apprehending pickpockets), was

something that greatly annoyed him. He wasn't alone. Journeying around Copenhagen at this time, you would be able to see many armed police officers standing in front of specific storefronts, the parliament building, the synagogue, various embassies and other targets judged to be at risk of terrorism. At some point, when the risk of terror was estimated to be at its highest level, you could even find heavily armed police officers patrolling railway stations and a number of selected streets in Copenhagen – a rather warlike sight not familiar to the Copenhageners' eye.

Unfortunately, from the detectives' point of view, their being included in such intensified protection work and other ways of policing terrorism was becoming increasingly common as a result of the assessed terror threat in Denmark. As Detective Christensen noted a few days after my conversation with Detective Clausen:

*Standing out there like simple sentries is really not what I expected I would be doing after becoming a police investigator and having spent almost fifteen years on the force. I get that the job is important, but I think it should be someone other than me, to be honest. On the one hand, I'm overqualified for the job. On the other hand, I'm underqualified as I haven't received any proper training in this kind of security work for many, many years.*

At TFB, the detectives echoed their TFP colleagues' frustrations, although they were thrilled that they were one of the country's few police units that had not been asked to participate in guarding terrorism targets. "We're lucky", TFB Detective Jensen told me. "Politically, there is still too much focus on burglaries for us to be removed from our daily work. But, trust me, it's just a matter of time before we also get sucked into this frenzy. It's all just a matter of politics." This was a point substantiated by the management itself who admitted to me that

“these days planning ahead seems rather futile. The best thing to do is to listen to the morning news if you want to know what the day is going to be about.”

TFB and its detectives did nevertheless manage to stay clear, avoiding having to stand on guard duty in the name of terrorism. They were, however, the exception to the rule, with police officers from all around Denmark being told to report for duty in Copenhagen in particular. I will later return to what a very long commute from the western parts of Denmark meant for the officers who were ordered to make it. For now, these examples are sufficient to demonstrate the general perception shared by every police officer I came across, namely that standing on guard to protect places and people against terrorism was understood as an important but nevertheless a boring and bothersome task.

When it came to other practices implemented in the name of terror, however, neither the TFP nor the TFB detectives remain unaffected. The following is an example of something they were all forced increasingly to do and how they in general reacted to it, namely going to the shooting range to develop their firearm and combat skills – something which fits the police militarisation narrative:

*Driving back to the station from the shooting range after having fired an assortment of both handguns and assault rifles, Detectives Larsen and Clausen start to make negative comments to each other about this time expenditure. And as we punch in the code and unlock the station's front gate, Detective Clausen says, “Yes... and there we have it. The day is almost over – and the only thing we managed to do was to shoot some holes in a piece of cardboard.” “Indeed”, Detective Larsen says, “this is why I've been trying to avoid going to the shooting range for quite a while now. It takes up the whole day. And”, now looking at me, “even though it can be fun and while it's definitely important these days that we're not complete idiots when it comes to using our weapons, it still feels like a waste of time.” Detective*

*Clausen agrees by looking at us with a like-minded and, it seems, fatigued expression. Finally, back at the office, we pass Detective Mikkelsen who is himself on his way to the shooting range. "Gotta get this shit out of the way!" he says grinning as he walks towards the elevator.*

*With Detective Mikkelsen gone, the office is empty besides Detective Larsen, Detective Clausen and me. We all walk out on the balcony to smoke and, before going home for the day, Detective Larsen remarks rather ironically, "So, at least now we're ready to shoot the terrorists when they come. But", he continues, "it was also yet another good day for the cross-border criminals out there. I for instance wanted to follow up on what our Swedish contact had told us, but I guess I'll do that tomorrow instead. Tomorrow is a new day. Or... maybe it'll be just same...? Yet another day of us not doing our job."*

On this particular day, the TFP detectives couldn't postpone the shooting practice, which every officer in the force was increasingly required to do because of the heightened terror threat level. As they said themselves, they would otherwise have tried *not* to go until they really couldn't avoid doing so. At TFB they were similarly annoyed about having to go and spend the day at the shooting range, although they tended to acknowledge the need to do so. However, Detective Jensen had told me that "personally, I don't really care", since he never wore his gun or intended to use it. Other detectives said the same. "I'm a detective. That's not what I do, you know", Detective Jensen said. Nevertheless, Detective Jensen and all his TFB colleagues eventually had to spend a day at the shooting range away from their normal work.

Being ordered to go to the shooting range constitutes a simple yet telling example of the practical consequences that the fear of terror had on the detectives' everyday work. Relatedly, the detectives had been ordered always to carry their service weapons and the detectives, together with all their colleagues in the Danish Police, were also regularly ordered to

wear bullet proof vests when leaving the station and to wear their badges visibly on their bodies when at the station – the weapon and vest to protect and prepare them, the badge to make sure that no outsider intent on causing harm could easily infiltrate them. Such various intensifications and manifestations of the use of police insignia and equipment are in line with Manning's contentions that policing involves a performative or spectacular quality – a spectacular quality that often becomes increasingly dramatised in moments of societal crisis in which the legitimacy and effectiveness of the police are threatened (2010). Here, the war on terror constituted such a crisis, prompting the police to bolster themselves both symbolically and substantively – to prove themselves willing and capable of mobilising against the terrorist Other.

However, as the above examples illustrate, the detectives did not entirely appreciate these dramatic and militarising aspects. Mostly they were seen a necessary evil. Add to this a number of other less-than-appreciated practices that the fear of terror forced the detectives to participate in and it becomes obvious that the increasing policing of terrorism was not welcomed as a useful addendum to their work. The detectives, who preferred and were normally allowed to dress in their own civilian clothes, now had not only to carry their weapons but also to wear vests and visible badges, as well as other emblems demonstrating that they were indeed police officers. This obvious parading of themselves as police ran counter to how they liked seeing themselves professionally. For example, it muddled the difference between the patrolling officers and the detectives. This was a problem since the detectives,

hereby denoting a specific detective subculture, thought of themselves as being different from and, perhaps, in some ways better than their patrolling colleagues (cf. Bacon, 2017; Manning, 2006; Westmarland, 2008)

Furthermore, besides being sent to the shooting range and having to buff up emblematic police symbols and practices in other ways, the detectives also had to attend different mandatory training courses in, for example, 'how to spot radicalisation'. One morning at TFB, all the detectives were, for instance, told that they had to come down to the lecture hall for a three-hour session. During the long and PowerPoint-based lecture the detectives were taught how to, as an add-on to their everyday work, look for signs of possible radicalisation. "So", I asked Detective Ibsen as the lecture had ended, "what do you think?" "What do I think?" she answered strongly, "I think I'd like to get back to my cases!"

### *(3) Terrorising working conditions and private life*

In this way, the policing of terrorism, in the form of possible incidents and time-consuming and often tedious practices, had increasingly become a part of the detectives' working day. While these incidents and practices were generally perceived as vocationally frustrating, and something they therefore sometimes made efforts to avoid, what arguably remained the most troublesome aspect was what terrorism meant for the officers' working conditions and private lives.

As a result of the Copenhagen Shootings in February 2015 and the European refugee crisis, in particular, the Danish Police have been forced to acquire and employ a growing number of police personnel – personnel used to guard and patrol the previously mentioned terrorism targets, for example, and for postings at the Danish border. This need for more officers caused the Danish Government to reshape the police education system, reducing it from a three-and-a-half-year university bachelor's degree to only two years' worth of course work. This restructuring was heavily criticised not only by commentators but also by many of the police officers whom I met, because it was seen as a move in the wrong direction. Contemplating both the increasing complexity of policing (for example the call for intelligence-led policing and the difficulties associated with transnational, cross-border criminal issues) as well as the problems of an old-fashioned police corps, a good and substantial education was and is still viewed as being essential (cf. Mikkelsen, 2018)

In this way, the decision to scale back the police education/training was seen as an ill-advised and desperate move – and by the detectives it was (and still is) seen as emblematic of how little politicians thought of the police profession. As one of them put it:

*You see? They don't take us seriously ... Although the education wasn't a bachelor's when I went to the academy, I would have liked it to be one. I mean, don't get me wrong, I hated the academic stuff, but looking at it from where I am now, it would've provided a way for me to progress in the police or more easily leave the force. You know, having a bachelor's gives you access to different master's programs and so on. I could have gotten a new life! But now, I'm stuck. And so will the new cadets be.*

The detectives understood that the downsizing of police education was probably necessary because of the demands of terrorism and other global issues. However, it was also seen as a hindrance to their personal career paths and exit strategies.

Something that was even more disliked was that the drastically heightened need for and use of police personnel had forced officers already on the force to work overtime, resulting in Danish police officers in 2017 together working a total of more than 969,000 hours of overtime spread over only 11,000 officers. This represents around a 50 per cent increase since 2014, when the number of overtime hours was 633,000 (Dansk\_Politi, 2017). This rather extreme overtaxing of Danish police officers has made both the police service itself and also most Danish politicians admit that the Danish police are currently seriously understaffed. Furthermore, the extra workload placed on the Danish police has given rise to a powerful and public criticism of management and politicians by frontline officers, who are otherwise known for keeping their criticisms in-house. Both during and after my fieldwork, police officers from all around the country wrote critical Facebook status updates that have gone viral. Officers have written op-eds in national newspapers and the police officers' own union has openly referred to the situation as "a bomb under the Danish Police", stressing that this "might cost officers both their health and their family life" (Bæksgaard et al., 2015).

The detectives at both TFP and TFB agreed that these new developments were disintegrating both their jobs and them personally. They openly spoke about being overworked and stressed how it made them do a bad job: "Seriously, how do they expect us to do a good

job when they just throw us around like that and take advantage of us?!” This was also what an old employee at TFP told me as he was visiting his former TFP colleagues. He had moved to the countryside with his family, precisely in order to get away from the stressfulness of Copenhagen and the Copenhagen police. However, he pointed not only to the troublesome working conditions that had been produced by the fear of terror but also to how it was having a very negative effect on his private life and his family. As he put it:

*It's extremely frustrating not being able to take proper care of our everyday work and not living up to the promises we have given to a victim of a crime or the public because we're told to not work the cases we have but instead to stand somewhere in the freezing cold like political poster boys. We are overworked, our families are falling apart, and the rate of officers calling in sick is increasing dramatically ... Of course, we all gladly help when there's a need for it. That's our duty. But one starts to feel fooled when we're asked to do all these extra things without really getting any extra resources. Yeah, I know that many millions have been allocated to counterterrorism activities, but they all seem to go to the Danish Intelligence Service Agency and not to us. And we do a lot of the work! It makes me extremely angry. Like, the other day I had promised my wife that I would pick up the kids and take care of them as she was going away on a job seminar. But then they [the management] called me in and ordered me to stand guard somewhere and my wife had to cancel her thing. Do you think that kind of thing is good for things at home? They sometimes suddenly call me early in the morning and tell me to report for duty in Copenhagen, some two-hundred kilometres away, even if it might be my day off, making it impossible for me and my family to plan our everyday life. It not only frustrates me, it also frustrates my wife. She's carrying a lot these days.*

As this shows, the detective and his family felt weighed down by the pressures placed on Danish frontline officers in response to terrorism – and so did many of his colleagues and their families.

### **Conclusion: a *blue* army**

In conclusion, let us return to where this paper started, namely the Copenhagen terrorist shootings of February 2015. This tragic incident apparently differs from the other examples presented in this paper as it actually ended up with people being killed. Prior to the incident, the assailant, El-Hussein, had also shown signs of having been radicalised and had openly declared that he was carrying out the attack in the name of Allah. As such, the stage was set for everyone to regard the incident as an act of terror.

Given this official terror labelling, together with the perpetrator's intention and the outcome, this incident diverges both symbolically and substantially from the other examples presented in this paper. However, if we focus on how the incident was understood by Danish police officers, it doesn't differ very much. When it comes to the average opinion of police officers, what was officially called an act of terrorism was, unofficially, not understood as such. This was the impression I was given when talking to both the TFP and TFB detectives and other colleagues of theirs. Although they admitted that the assailant who had carried out the shootings had indeed carried out these horrendous acts thinking of himself as a righteous terrorist, the officers still tended to see him as "a stupid young man with serious issues". As I heard several police officers say: "Most of all, he was a loser with some connections to gang criminality – a loser who was trying to explain away all his senselessness and shortcomings by reinventing and redeeming himself through religion." Phrased differently, the Danish detectives did accept that the acts themselves could be seen as terrorism but felt that

the person who carried them out should rather be viewed as a stereotypical misguided criminal.

What this again demonstrates is that the terrorism discourse that has been so forcefully presented, if not promoted, by politicians, the media and at times the police organisation itself, were not unequivocally echoed by frontline officers – even when incidents were officially labelled as terror and where one could expect the police to readily buy into such a threat-based framework. Recalling Deflem's earlier words, in the eyes of many Danish frontline officers, terrorists were not necessarily that war-like but instead rather common criminals and, hence, the war on terror was not always a real war.

Thus, in sum, the simple yet significant point that this paper has sought to make is that many frontline officers working with more or less regular criminal justice issues – in this case a group of Danish detectives – do not automatically accept and endorse (counter)terrorism in the way much of the literature suggests, i.e. as something that is of supreme value to their work. They are not, as Bowling and Sheptycki propose (2012: 217), eagerly buying into a dualistic and antagonistic worldview in which terrorism acts as an unconditional suitable enemy. Most certainly, in Denmark, terrorism is (over)perceived as a threat and as something that consequently requires extra policing. However, when it came to its workaday consequences, the spectre of terror sometimes haunts Danish police work more than it helps. Put differently, policing terrorism has undoubtedly become a both symbolic and substantive part of Danish policing, but terrorism is also, so to speak, terrorising the Danish police.

On this point, we can return to Cottee and Hayward's theoretical threefold approach when it comes to a study of the more existential and emotional aspects of terrorism. The threefold consisted of: (1) the desire for excitement, (2) the desire for ultimate meaning, and (3) the desire for glory that terrorism might offer and satisfy (2011). If we see the examples given in this paper through this theoretical lens, it becomes apparent that, to Danish detectives, policing terrorism is precisely *unexciting*, *lacking* in any ultimate meaning and that it does *not* bring them any apparent glory. As primary antagonists of terrorism, they do not experience an emotional draw – an emotional draw which much of the literature on counter-terrorism otherwise strongly hints at by arguing that the police have become militarised and Orwellian and that police officers naturally enjoy this as it fits the stereotypical attractions of 'police culture' with its action-based, dualistic and often oppositional norms and values.

Therefore, to reuse McCulloch's figurative phrasing, I would say that the Danish detectives have indeed become part of a "blue army" (2001), yet with an emphasis on the sensation evoked by the former rather than the latter part of the concept – i.e. sometimes more blue than armed. Although the war on terror certainly put weapons in their hands and gave them tactical vests and increased powers, for a number of Danish detectives the policing of terrorism was – and still is – primarily dull and inconvenient. Importantly, this observation should of course not dissuade criminologists from continuing to criticise how the police as a societal institution has become increasingly militarised, powerful, and potentially prejudiced. It does, however, serve as a reminder that significant differences exist between the police as

an institution and its individual officers as well as between specific counterterrorism units and the wider police force's working day. This is of course also true, as this paper has demonstrated from a Danish perspective, when it comes to the conspicuous, composite and in many ways calamitous war on terror.

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