

TWILIGHT POLICING: PRIVATE SECURITY PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Many studies have emphasized the pluralization of policing and the interactions between security providers. However, such studies generally employ a top-down and structural approach, emphasizing the organizational ties between policing bodies. This article employs an ethnographic approach to security and focuses on localized policing performances that materialize from the interactions between security providers. Based on 20 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Durban, South Africa, this article introduces the concept of twilight policing, which refers to punitive, disciplinary and exclusionary policing practices that simultaneously undermine and support the state, resulting in actions that are neither public nor private, but 'twilight'. This article calls for a shift from a plural and organizational approach to policing towards a 'twilight' and performative one.

Key words: private security, policing, anthropology, securitization, urban, South Africa

Introduction

Walk down any road in (urban) South Africa and the immensity of the private security industry is unavoidable: the streets are marked by high walls, barbed wire, electric fences, CCTV cameras and the emblems of private security firms. South Africa is a country where private security officers greatly outnumber police officers, where private security companies guard police stations, where private security company vehicles look like—and are regularly mistaken for—police vans and where (privileged) citizens increasingly refer to private security firms as 'their police'.

Although South Africa is globally regarded as the 'absolute "champion" in the security industry' (De Waard 1999: 169), this depiction of urban South Africa can be applied to various urban centres across the globe. It is increasingly the norm that 'non-state policing bodies', security providers who are not (directly) aligned with the state, largely shape the governance of security in the urban realm. The growth of non-state policing has unbridled numerous questions across disciplines concerned with violence, (in)security and what this means for the authority and legitimacy of the state. In criminology, research primarily focuses on the relationships between different policing bodies within security networks (Dupont 2004), security assemblages (Abrahamsen and Williams 2011) or through a nodal governance framework (Shearing and Wood 2003). These studies highlight the entanglements between 'non-state' and 'state' policing bodies that lead to pluralized forms of policing that move beyond the public-private divide.

In this article, I employ this pluralized approach to policing but extend the analysis by focusing on the performance of everyday security practices that emerge from these interactions. I do so by using an ethnographic approach and applying the concept of sovereignty that many anthropologists have used to understand how state and

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non-state actors simultaneously police urban spaces (Buur 2005; Rodgers 2006; Jensen 2007). Through this approach, I analyse everyday policing practices in which boundaries between state and non-state are constantly negotiated, resulting in multifaceted forms of policing, which I label as ‘twilight policing’. These are practices that are neither public nor private, but something ‘twilight’. Furthermore, these are disciplinary, punitive and exclusionary practices that are performed in a twilight zone between state and non-state and are marked by uncertainty. I base my argument on 20 months of ethnographic fieldwork on armed response officers, a specific type of private security officers, in Durban, South Africa, between 2007 and 2010.¹ Armed response officers are armed private security officers who patrol communities in vehicles and respond to triggers such as alarms and panic buttons that are installed on clients’ premises. I argue that armed response officers perform *twilight policing* practices.

Through the framework of twilight policing, the core focus of this article is to move beyond an analysis of how policing bodies are interconnected on a structural and organizational level, towards an analysis of localized policing practices that are performed by individual providers amidst a diverse security landscape. This on-the-ground focus allows us to examine how these interconnections (re)produce particular performances that are iterative: they are based on existing understandings of violence and security, and through their habitual enactment, they lead to further actions and meanings. This approach, through the framework of twilight policing, contributes to the existing policing literature in two ways. Firstly, it incorporates the individual and personal experiences, which is a dimension that is often overlooked in policing studies. I argue that the emotions evoked while performing particular policing practices shape the nature of those practices and therefore the ontological nature of the individual performer. This dimension must thus be included in any analysis on policing and can primarily be achieved through ethnographic fieldwork. Secondly, my bottom-up approach enriches our understanding on how borders between state and non-state policing are constantly reconfigured on the ground and how notions of legitimacy and authority continuously shift along the public–private divide.

I will present my argument by first reviewing some of the existing interpretative frameworks of pluralized forms of policing. In the second section, I explain how I developed and define twilight policing. In the third section, I discuss the private security industry and the armed response sector in South Africa. In the fourth and largest section, I present an empirical case study, namely a car chase, and then systematically analyse it through the twilight policing framework. This article ends with some concluding remarks on how twilight policing can serve as a conceptual framework to analyse the interconnections between public and private policing beyond the South African context.

The Pluralization of Policing

In studies on security, it has been recognized that the public–private policing divide is blurry, weak, non-existent or frequently trespassed as state and non-state policing have become increasingly alike and interconnected (Owens 2008; Williams 2010). However, studies of non-state policing continue to voice both political and conceptual

¹ Armed response is also referred to as armed reaction. These terms are used interchangeably.

concerns about the position of ‘the state’, thereby maintaining a ‘state-failure’ perspective. [Abrahamsen and Williams \(2011\)](#) term this the ‘mercenary misconception’, which refers to a reigning perspective that employs a Weberian state model and associates non-state policing, such as private security, with militarization and illegal behaviour that defies state legitimacy and authority, particularly in the African continent. In this view, non-state security providers are able to operate due to state failure, absence and/or weakness. And as the use of violence (or the threat of such) is ingrained in the provision of non-state policing, the state loses its presumed monopoly on violence.

However, the state-failure hypothesis does not adequately account for the global proliferation of non-state policing and has therefore increasingly been met with criticism. This critique is based on three main claims. The first is that the state-failure perspective ignores how states are increasingly framing people as ‘responsible citizens’ ([Johnston 1992](#)), outsourcing state functions and thereby cultivating a political, social and cultural climate that encourages the increase of non-state security solutions ([Goold et al. 2010](#); [Goldstein 2012](#); [Jaffe 2013](#)). The second is the rise of the ‘penal state’, which is characterized by increased funding for the state’s law enforcement institutions ([Wacquant 2008](#)) and does therefore not necessarily concern an absent state whose institutions are undermanned. This is linked to the significant role the state plays in shaping insecurity ([Goldstein 2012](#)).

Yet the third and perhaps main critique is that the state-failure perspective disregards the interconnections between state and non-state security that disintegrate the public–private divide. Public policing is traditionally defined as policing carried out by the state, executed in public spaces that (ideally) serves all citizens, is impartial and centres on crime control. In contrast, private policing is carried out by private actors, is executed in private spaces, is not available to all and centres on loss prevention ([Rigakos 2002](#)). This policing dichotomy is thus based on differences between the executing actors, the spaces in which they operate, the beneficiaries of their services and their fundamental goals. However, numerous studies have emphasized that public policing is increasingly privatized ([Hornberger 2011](#)) and ‘commodified’ ([Loader 1999](#)), while private policing is increasingly punitive and executed in public spaces ([Rigakos 2002](#); [Berg 2010](#)). Therefore, rather than thinking in terms of public versus private policing, policing is best analysed within ‘a pluralized security landscape’ ([Loader and Walker 2007](#): 3).

There are three main frameworks that serve as interpretative concepts to understand the governance of pluralized policing: nodal frameworks, security networks and security assemblages. All three frameworks move beyond a state-centred approach by analysing how various actors and practices coincide to produce a particular social order. The nodal framework analyses different policing agents, both public and private, as nodes, which are defined as governing entities. This framework does not inherently focus on interactions between nodes, as certain nodes may operate in segregation and/or (relative) isolation ([Shearing and Wood 2003](#)). The second conceptual framework, the security network approach, focuses specifically on these interactions and analyses the different relations between organizations ([Dupont 2004](#); [Krahmann 2005](#)). Each network consists of ‘dominant and dominated actors’ ([Dupont 2004](#): 84) and the interactions in a security network are primarily shaped by competition for the dominant positions.

The third conceptual tool, global security assemblages, refers to ‘new security structures and practices that are simultaneously public and private, global and local’

(Abrahamsen and Williams 2011: 3). Although similar to the other two approaches, security assemblages incorporate the global and transnational ties to security and focus on ‘deterritorialized security governance’ (Abrahamsen and Williams 2011: 90) to understand how state power is reconfigured. Several studies, such as Berndtsson and Stern (2014) and Schouten (2014), have used this framework to examine how different security providers interact at particular sites.

All three frameworks are useful tools to analyse the interactions between different policing actors. However, they tend to present these interactions as structured and are analysed from a top-down and organizational perspective, thereby overlooking ad hoc and informal interactions that occur between individuals. Furthermore, there is little emphasis on how the ontological nature of different security providers changes through the various interactions. Although the widely used concept of ‘hybridity’ (Jaffe 2013; Albrecht and Moe 2014) does emphasize how new forms of governance emerge due to multiple interactions between public and private actors, there is little focus on how these entanglements shift on the ground and how individuals experience them. In contrast, twilight policing analyses the performance of everyday practices from a bottom-up and individual perspective and thereby shows how policing agents continuously change through such entanglements, resulting in forms of ‘twilightness’. I thus call for a shift from a plural and organizational approach to policing towards a ‘twilight’ and performative one.

Twilight Policing

The framework of twilight policing rests on two conceptual pillars: the anthropological conceptualization of sovereignty and ‘twilight institutions’ (Lund 2006). In this section, I will outline these two pillars and show how twilight policing expands on them.

Similar to other anthropologists working in South Africa (Buur 2005; Hansen 2006; Jensen 2007), I define policing as the performance of sovereign power. Within anthropology, sovereignty has been used to examine how state and non-state actors claim authority to produce a particular social order. Such studies represent a move away from a focus on *legal sovereignty*, which refers to ‘sovereignty grounded in formal ideologies of rules and legality’, towards the analysis of *de facto sovereignty*, which refers to ‘the ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity wherever it is found and practiced’ (Hansen and Stepputat 2006: 296). Although based on different contexts and approaches, these anthropological works view sovereignty as a socially constructed source of power that is reproduced through daily practices and repetitious public performances and is based on the ability to enforce punishment and to do so through violence. Sovereign power is therefore not a form of authority that one can possess or execute; it must be repeatedly reclaimed.

Furthermore, many anthropological studies have outlined how the relationships between different sovereignties, including the state, are not linear, but diverse and complex. Rodgers (2006), for example, talks of ‘competing sovereigns’ in his study of gangs in Nicaragua, while Sieder (2011) refers to ‘contesting sovereignties’ in her research on indigenous authorities in Guatemala. In her study on the *marshrut* system in Russia, Humphrey refers to a ‘localized form of sovereignty’ that is ‘nested within higher sovereignties’ (2007: 420). In a similar vein, Rigi (2007) develops the concept of a ‘chaotic mode of domination’ to analyse the shifting balances of power and the means by which

the coercive apparatus of the state transcends ‘the boundaries between the legal and illegal, the formal and informal, the legitimate and illegitimate, public and private’ (2007: 41). Taken together, these various studies highlight the multiplicity of relationships between sovereignties that cut across the state versus non-state and legal versus illegal divides.

I concur that there are multidimensional relationships between state and non-state sovereign bodies, which are continuously in flux due to shifting temporal and spatial circumstances. Sovereignty is thus a form of power that is relative to the performance, assertion and infringement of other sovereign bodies (Hansen and Stepputat 2006; Humphrey 2007; Rigi 2007), and as such practices are iterative, they transform the ontology of the actors that are performing them. In this regard, I define armed response officers as ‘performers of sovereignty’ (Hansen 2006) that habitually make claim to sovereign power through their ability, and actual use, of violence. I thus employ the anthropological work on sovereignty to define ‘policing’.

‘Twilight’ originates from ‘twilight institutions’ defined as institutions that ‘operate in the twilight between state and society, between public and private’ (Lund 2006: 678). Such institutions exercise public authority, actively shape governance and enforce decisions and rules on a collective level. They do not replace the state, but they provide alternative forms of governance in specific local contexts and operate like the state by incorporating state-like characteristics. Twilight institutions simultaneously challenge the state by exerting governance and legitimized authority and mimic and strengthen the state through ‘symbolic borrowing’ (Thumala et al. 2011: 294) and the performance of statist practices.

To understand this relationship, I employ the ideas of Abrams (2006) and Mitchell (2006), for whom the state comprises two features. The first is the state system, which refers to various institutions and practices. The second is what Mitchell (2006) calls the ‘state effect’, which refers to particular representations and understandings of the state. These two different features are connected, codependent and mutually reinforcing. The state is thus not simply the sum of the institutions and bodies, such as the state police, that execute ‘state functions’; rather, it is imagined and socially constructed through everyday practices. The state is not something that can be separated from society but is ‘constituted *through* society’ (Sieder 2011: 170, emphasis in original).

Non-state policing actors operate like state actors (Rodgers 2006; Davis 2010; Jaffe 2013) by performing statist functions and appropriating ‘languages of stateness’ (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 5). Although non-state policing actors may view themselves as separate from the state apparatus, they are simultaneously acknowledging the state and demarcating their role in relation to the state. For example, armed response companies portray themselves as ‘service providers’ that operate in a market system, but they also mimic the state police in their design of uniforms and vehicles that look like ‘cop cars’. In other words, they are appropriating the state’s ‘marks of sovereignty’ (Bodin 1992, in Hansen and Stepputat 2005: 7) to obtain legitimacy. This multidimensional relationship creates a particular twilight zone, a zone of ‘ongoing contestation’ (Buur 2006: 741). This zone does not necessarily comprise of processes where public actors become more privatized or private actors become more publicized—two processes that are frequently discussed in the policing literature—but it concerns the imbrication of public and private elements, resulting in something ‘twilight’. As Buur argues in his research on policing in South Africa, this leads to a state of blurriness, in

which it becomes ‘difficult to distinguish unequivocally between what is state and what is not’ (2006: 750).

However, to classify all armed response companies as twilight institutions would be to ignore the diversity among companies, armed response officers and their interactions with others. Thus, rather than speaking of ‘twilight institutions’, I focus on ‘twilight policing’, and this involves three conceptual changes. The first is that a focus on policing, i.e. the habitual performance of sovereign power, analyses everyday practices that are performed by individuals, rather than looking at institutions in which practices are seen to be performed top–down. The second is that through my agency-based perspective, I incorporate the emotional experiences of performing such practices and how they shape the actual performance. In this regard, I also use the term ‘twilight’ to evoke a personal sensation of uncertainty and murkiness that is experienced by armed response officers. According to Lund (2006: 673), the term ‘twilight’ in ‘twilight institutions’ implies that the ‘contours and features of these institutions are hard to distinguish and discern’ and does not refer to the temporal aspect of twilight, which would suggest ‘that these institutions should gradually disappear’. I use the term ‘twilight’ to evoke a state of uncertainty and obscurity. Third, in relation to my conceptualization of policing as the performance of sovereign power, I regard both the ability, and the actual use, of violence as central to the security practices of armed response officers. Twilight policing thus concerns punitive and disciplinary practices, which differs from twilight institutions where violence is not a prerequisite.

Private Security and Armed Response in South Africa

South Africa is an ideal context in which to study the relationships between different security providers due to the prominence and ubiquity of non-state policing (Buur 2006; Jensen 2007; Marks and Wood 2007). South Africa currently has the largest private security sector in the world, valued at approximately 2 per cent of the country’s total gross domestic product (Singh 2008; Abrahamsen and Williams 2011). In 2013, there were 9,031 registered private security providers and 445,407 active registered security officers (PSIRA, 2012–13).² These figures are compiled by the Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority (PSIRA), the state-led regulatory system that stipulates how the private security industry must operate and determines forms of (judicial) punishment in the event of misconduct.

Although the private security industry originated already existed in for several decades in South Africa, it particularly exploded during the height of the political resistance of the late 1980s and into the political transition circa 1994. During apartheid, the industry formed an alliance with the apartheid state. When political resistance against the apartheid state intensified during the 1980s, the state armed forces needed extra manpower and outsourced former state functions to the industry through various forms of legislation. The main change in legislation was the establishment of the National Key Points Act (NKPA) 102 of 1980, which stipulated that responsibility for

² This figure only includes the ‘active’ registered private security officers, which is to say security officers who are actively employed in the industry. PSIRA also maintains a database of ‘inactive’ registered security officers, that is security officers who are registered with PSIRA but are not currently employed in the industry. In 2013, there were a total of 1,953,605 registered security officers.

security provision (predominantly guarding) at strategic sites deemed crucial for national security should be transferred to the management/owners of these sites, who in turn, hired private security firms (Singh 2008). The NKPA thus allowed the apartheid state to outsource some of its security responsibilities, which in turn, resulted in the growth of the private security sector. Another crucial legislation was the Security Officers Act (SOA) of 1987 and the accompanying Security Officers Board, which was the official state body to monitor and regulate the employees in the industry. The Act entailed compulsory registration with the Board and laid down rules regarding disqualification and withdrawal of registration.

Although the NKPA primarily affected the guarding sector, other parts of the industry, such as the armed response sector, also grew due to increasing political pressure on state law enforcement. The armed response sector emerged in the late 1970s through 'techies', companies that installed alarms for commercial businesses, and followed in the 1980s by 'one-man shows', which refers to companies run by ex-policemen or ex-SADF (South African Defence Force) soldiers who served a handful of clients using their own vehicles and firearms. By the late 1980s, the private security industry had largely established itself in the urban centres. However, the main economic boom occurred during the transition period (1990–94), an era marked by uncertainty and fear. Combined with the restructuring of the post-apartheid South Africa state police, many citizens increasingly relied on private security for protection (Singh 2008).

Since the transition, the industry has continued to experience continuous growth and has transformed from a 'Club to a Business' (Singh 2008: 43). This is partially due to the suspicion that was directed to the industry by the post-apartheid government, who saw the industry as part of the old order. This was particularly true for the SOA, which was seen as a partnership between the industry and the old state (Singh 2008). To further tighten control over the industry, amendments were implemented to expand the scope of the industry and this resulted in the birth of the Private Security Industry Regulation Act No. 56 of 2011. Whereas the SOA was regarded as a partnership between the two bodies, PSIRA was conceived as an industry watchdog. Furthermore, over the past decade, the discourse of private security has changed in order for companies to acquire government support. While state support was previously obtained by framing security in terms of state sovereignty, it is now obtained by marketing security as a commodity.

Similar to the rest of the industry, the armed response sector operates within an oligopolistic market, with several companies possessing a large share of the market. In my research, I included four different companies to represent the diversity of the industry. The first is an internationally owned company that operates globally. The second is large company that solely operates in Durban. The third and fourth are community-based companies: one operates in an affluent, predominantly white area while the other operates in a former Indian township on the outskirts of the city. Although I used a range of qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus group discussions and life histories, my main method was participant observation, which involved accompanying armed response officers during their shifts for a total of 750 hours, an amount that only includes the actual time spent in their vehicles during their shifts. Elsewhere (Diphorn 2013), I elaborately discuss the advantages of conducting ethnographic fieldwork on security. I argue that an ethnographic approach allowed me to observe the daily policing practices of armed response officers, inquire about their personal

perceptions and experiences of their work and analyse how they interacted with others, such as state police officers and citizens. My long stay in Durban allowed me to analyse how the policing actions of armed response officers are embedded within larger social structures. Furthermore, I also interviewed other related security providers, such as state police officers and members of community policing initiatives, to analyse how they framed their actions and viewed the private security industry. Thus, similar to [Chisholm \(2014\)](#), my methodology allowed me to ‘engage in a deeper level with the men I was researching’ (350).

Although there is great diversity among armed response officers, all armed response officers are men and must be at least 21 years of age. The vast majority of them are non-white and reside in lower income areas of the city due to rather low salaries.³ I characterize armed response officers as ‘wanna-be policemen’, a description that is assigned to them by the general public and a means in which they describe themselves. As is shown by other studies on security officers ([Rigakos 2002](#); [Button 2007](#)), the majority of armed response officers initially wanted to be policemen, but failed to do so, and entered the security industry instead. Many reaction officers describe fighting crime as a passion and a ‘lifestyle’. For example, Kenny’s statement was rather typical among my informants:

Ever since I was a child, I wanted to be a police officer. I always loved the action, you know, fighting and catching the bad guys. I tried to enter the force, but it didn’t work (...). So I became armed reaction.⁴

This ‘wanna-be’ policemen attitude, so prevalent among armed response officers, also points towards the numerous similarities between the two forces. Throughout my fieldwork, it was palpable that armed response officers strongly differentiated themselves from other security officers, such as guards, and identified themselves more with state police officers. In fact, I argue that the occupational culture of the armed response sector bears more resemblance to the state police than to other security officers and that it encourages practices whereby the sector at large mimics the state police, both operationally and symbolically. A few examples are the predominant macho subculture and glorification of masculinities, the constant presence of risk and the thrill and adrenaline experienced by many armed response officers. In concordance with [Loyens \(2009\)](#), I argue that there are many similarities between the private security industry and the state police as a whole, particularly in the armed response sector, and these similarities play an important role in the creation and nature of the twilight zone.

In the following section, I present a vignette that is based on my field notes. The writing up of this vignette was based on numerous keywords that were jotted down immediately after this incident, followed by extensive note taken afterwards. This was the most common method during my fieldwork. However, there were also times that I recorded parts of conversations, which were then immediately transcribed and incorporated into my field notes. Although time consuming, it allowed me to capture the detail of such incidents. This resulted in what I label elsewhere as ‘mosaics of data’ ([Diphoorn 2013](#)).

In this vignette, I describe a car chase that occurred in November 2008. This car chase, which was one out of several that I experienced, transpired while I was on duty

³ I am not excluding the possibility of females working as armed response officers, yet I did not encounter one during my fieldwork and all my informants stated that they did not know of any.

⁴ Interview: 20 November 2008.

with Gayle, an Indian armed response officer in his early 40s, who has a long history in various sectors of the private security industry. For armed response officers, a typical day on duty consists of patrolling and attending false alarms; it is an occupation marked by boredom, particularly as they operate alone in their vehicles. Yet incidents, such as this car chase, occur regularly and account for the ‘excitement’ of the job. Furthermore, although violence is not a daily encounter, it is also not rare and I witnessed numerous violent incidents during my fieldwork (Diphooorn 2013).

Gayle was one of the first armed response officers that I accompanied, as he was a supervisor (i.e. of higher rank), and in the eyes of the company owners, was better equipped to ‘show me the ropes’. Out of the dozens of armed response officers whom I spoke to, Gayle was one of the ten that I developed close relationships with, of which I spent a great deal of time, also off-duty, visiting them at their homes and meeting their families. As I will outline in more detail later, I analyse this car chase as a performance of twilight policing. This entails that Gayle makes claim to authority based on the ability to use violence, through ad hoc and unstructured interactions with other actors, and includes his perceptions and emotions.

The Car Chase

November 2008

It’s been a long day; no real positives, but an exhausting day nevertheless. The heat of the midday sun has taken its toll on Gayle and I, and our usually lively conversations have been reduced to a few terse comments punctuating a deep silence. Just as we think that we’re done for the day, we receive a call-out: an alarm at a nearby residence has gone off close by. Gayle immediately speeds off in the direction of the client’s residence, but a few seconds later we hear that Tim, one of his colleagues, has already attended and that it was a false alarm. Gayle sighs deeply. We turn around and slowly drive back from Durban North towards Morningside.

Just as we come off a bridge, I spot a short, bald white man standing at the side of the road by a petrol station, screaming and waving his arms frantically at us to stop. We’re caught by surprise, and Gayle breaks sharply and pulls up next to him.

‘Open your window, let’s see what this guy wants’, Gayle instructs me. Wracked with panic, the man tells us that a woman has just been robbed not far from here and that the suspects are in a vehicle close by. It’s extremely difficult to make out what he’s saying, but it emerges that he has the suspects’ license plate number written on the palm of his hand.

‘Get in the back, come on’, Gayle tells the man. I’m shocked. I know this is against the rules: armed response officers aren’t allowed to take other people in their vehicles, especially non-clients. I look at Gayle, and try to make eye contact with him in order to understand why he’s doing this, but he doesn’t look back at me; he just slams on the gas and races off. The man sits in the back of the car and continues to yell, ‘Oh my god, I just had them. The fucking assholes, I almost had them!’

Shortly afterwards, the man points to a car on the other side of the road. ‘It’s them, that’s the car’, he exclaims. ‘You see, those two Coloured guys and that fucking *kaffir*,⁵ that’s them. Go after them!’ Gayle squeezes in front of the other cars, makes an abrupt

⁵ *Kaffir* is a derogative word for non-white South Africans, especially Blacks. It derives from the Arabic term ‘unbeliever’.

U-turn, and chases after the vehicle. The suspects in the car look back at us and, spotting that the bald man is with us, start to accelerate. The vehicle is now in front of us, but there are two other cars in between. We're back on the bridge, but Gayle can't get right behind the car because other cars won't let us overtake. The man continues to scream at Gayle: 'Fucking hell, can't you just pass this car? Fucking *coolie*,⁶ do you even know how to drive properly? Drive faster, fucking drive faster! Get these assholes! Put on your sirens, get them!' As we approach a set of traffic lights, we see that the suspects' vehicle has just gone through them. We're forced to stop at the lights, and then it dawns on us that this is an intersection: the car could have headed in any direction; we've lost them. 'Fuck! I can't believe they just left!' screams the bald man from the back seat. 'Why didn't you just drive through the traffic light? We should have driven faster, you should have hooted at that car in front of you... Fuck, fuck...' He continues like this for a while longer, yelling and swearing at Gayle and blaming him for letting the suspects get away.

We drive around the area for a while, taking different passageways to see where the car could have headed, but it's clear that we've lost them. The man is still screaming at Gayle, at himself, and at the suspects in the vehicle. I'm extremely irritated by him and finding it difficult to stop myself from shouting back at him. I try to make eye contact with Gayle, but he's practically ignoring me and appears to be extremely calm, his eyes focused on the road. When the man finally calms down a little bit, Gayle asks, 'So what exactly happened?' And then the story comes.

The man was working in his office when he heard a woman scream. He and a colleague went outside to see what was going on and found a woman in tears. She explained that while she was walking down the road, a black male had pointed a gun at her head, grabbed her handbag, and then ran across the road to a waiting vehicle and sped off. Out of anger and frustration, the bald man and his colleague had decided to chase after the vehicle, but they lost it. They then drove to the petrol station as they had often seen police vans parked there, but when they arrived there were no police officers about. His colleague decided to phone the police while he went to the side of the road in the hope that a police van would pass by. And then he saw us.

Only at the end of his story does the man finally acknowledge my presence and inquire, somewhat curtly, 'Who the fuck are you?' I explain to him that I'm doing research, but I keep it brief. I'm annoyed with his attitude and I don't feel like explaining myself. I ask him why he stopped us and he answers, 'Well, that's what you're here for, to catch criminals. I mean, you guys got a gun, you can do more than I can, you know? You're practically the police'.

Gayle drops the man off at his workplace, near where the robbery took place. When we get there, several people are standing outside. We join the crowd, and the bald man explains what happened. He describes how he personally chased the vehicle with the suspects. Everybody concernedly tells him that he shouldn't act like that again, which is seconded by Gayle: 'You shouldn't be chasing guys like this – they could have had a gun. What would you have done?' The man replies, 'Man, so many of my friends have been robbed and shot, I'm sick of this shit, I really am. I can't just sit around and do nothing anymore... People need to step up!'

We find out that the woman who was robbed is sitting inside the office and that the police are on their way. Gayle provides his contact details in case the police want to

⁶ *Coolie* is a derogative term for Indian South Africans.

contact him for further information, and then we get back into the car and drive off. Gayle finally looks at me and starts laughing. We then have the following conversation:

Me: What is it? What's so funny?

Gayle: You know that guy, I know him. I've had to take him out of a bar about three times because he was drunk and getting into a fight.

Me: Is it? Where?

Gayle: Thunderroad, that place on Florida Road. He got all racist and aggressive on me, calling me a *coolie*, refusing to leave, that kinda shit. And now he doesn't even fucking recognise me. And now here I am helping the racist drunk out. [Starts chuckling]

Gayle: You okay?

Me: Yeah, I was just a bit irritated. I know he was upset, but he had no right to scream at you like that. And you were so calm; I almost flipped out at him.

Gayle: You see, that's how it goes. I have to put up with his stupid shit. If I get aggressive at him, he's gonna phone the head office and I'm gonna have to explain myself. And I'm gonna give the company a bad name. Like I've said before, the client is always right...and the client always needs or wants something and we must listen and follow, do as they say. We deal with this shit everyday, you've seen it, how people treat us like shit, like we're stupid dogs that are trained to protect them, like their own private little police. It comes with the job. It's the nasty part of this job. Now you see, if we would have got that vehicle, now that would have been nice. Then people realise we actually do do something. That we don't just spend our time driving around, being useless all day...that we actually do have a purpose... Ag, next time man, next time.

In this incident, we see how a citizen (i.e. a non-paying client) seeks assistance from a private agent in the public domain because the public agent (i.e. the police) failed to meet his expectations. The citizen also describes the private agent as being 'practically the police'. Although this incident reveals various points of analysis, I will emphasize three points that show the relevance of twilight policing, both descriptively and analytically. The first point concerns how armed response officers enter the public domain by operating in public spaces and mimicking the state police. The second point concerns how armed response officers increasingly serve non-clients, pointing towards the fact that the provision of private security is increasingly a public good in South Africa. The third point concerns how armed response officers individually experience performing such tasks and how these emotions shape such incidents.

Entering the public and mimicking the state

The first point of analysis concerns the habitual policing of public spaces by armed response officers: Gayle conducted this car chase on the open streets. Although the armed response sector emerged in the 1980s with 'one-man shows' that patrolled the streets, armed response has traditionally aimed at policing private spaces. Yet in contemporary South Africa, the power of private security officers in public spaces is similar to their power in private spaces (Berg 2010).

It is thus not uncommon to witness armed response officers engaged in the management of car accidents, parking issues and funeral processions or to see private security companies provide security at public events, such as local fairs, fundraisers and sporting functions. All of the company representatives I interviewed stressed that their companies were engaged in 'more than just response', which was evident in some of their

statements, such as ‘Our company doesn’t just respond, we prevent crime’ and ‘We are a proactive company and we do more than just respond’.

The encroachment of armed response into public spaces began with the expansion of services that were closely related to armed response. The first step was offering an escort service, whereby clients can request a vehicle to escort them on the road when they need extra protection. This entails providing security to clients outside the private domain of their homes. Patrolling has played an even bigger role in pushing private security into public spaces. As armed response officers respond to call-outs in their vehicles, patrolling is a mandatory part of their daily routine. Although there are companies that discourage patrolling (primarily for financial reasons), armed response officers are generally encouraged to make their presence known and to be constantly ‘on the look out for anything suspicious’. Patrolling is seen as a way for companies to increase their visibility and gather crime intelligence. Various companies conduct regular crime analyses and instruct their armed response officers to patrol areas with higher levels of criminal activity. This is especially the case for companies that work closely with the public police, a relationship that is primarily based on social networks between company employees and police officers (Diphooorn and Berg 2014).

Patrolling, chasing and arresting suspects in public spaces are therefore means in which armed response officers increasingly perform ‘statist practices’, i.e. practices that are traditionally assigned to the state police. In first instance, one might interpret the car chase as an indication of state failure or absence, as the man was originally looking for the state police. However, I argue that in this car chase, and numerous other incidents witnessed during my fieldwork, statist practices were produced, making the state present, albeit only symbolically. Referring back to my conceptualization of the state that includes ideas and representations, I argue that armed response officers perform statist practices and reinforce certain ideas of what the state is.

Thus, the performance of ‘unstately stateliness’ (Lund 2006: 677) by non-state actors also constitutes what the state is; the meaning of the state is also reliant on the meaning of the non-state, and vice versa. Non-state policing practices are thus mechanisms through which ideas and representations of the state are discursively fabricated. Similarly, when citizens resort to non-state actors for security, they display a lack of confidence in the state police and define themselves vis-à-vis the state. When citizens demand that private policing agents act like the state—such as by patrolling public spaces and arresting suspects—they are in effect expressing what they envision, demand or expect from the state. With the car chase, the citizen demanded that Gayle assist him under the supposition that he was entitled to such assistance. The citizen regarded Gayle’s help as a public service available to all; he was interpreting it as a statist performance and assigned Gayle with the responsibility to ‘catch criminals’. During my fieldwork, South Africans repeatedly expressed how they regarded private security, particularly the armed response sector, as similar, or even identical, to the state police.

In his work on security and violence in the barrios of Bolivia, Goldstein (2012) describes the state as a phantom, one that is ‘simultaneously here and not there’ (81); not always physically present through state institutions and representatives, but nevertheless extant in (re)producing violence and insecurity. In the course of my research, I identified many cases where the state police was not physically present, but where the idea of the ‘state’ was. In the case of the car chase, the police may have been physically absent, yet the participants felt their presence. Like Goldstein (2012), I argue that the

physical absence of a state does not mean that it is absent from one's experiences and perceptions. With the car chase, the citizen was initially seeking the police, but he found us instead. The police thus clearly influenced the performance. This further highlights how labelling the state as absent or malfunctioning elides its role in non-state policing, violence and (in)security. I therefore argue that non-state actors may undermine the authority of the state and function as an alternative, but they simultaneously reproduce particular ideas of what the state should be. Concepts such as 'hybridity' (Jaffe 2013; Albrecht and Moe 2014) also encapsulate this simultaneity by examining how the various entanglements between multiple actors produce something 'hybrid'. Yet these concepts also neglect the precarious and localized ways in which these entanglements occur and the uncertainty and obscurity this produces, for both the performer and beneficiary of these practices.

'The client is always right'

The second point that the car chase shows is how citizens pull armed response officers into the public domain. The increasing engagement of armed response officers in public spaces has entailed their increase of contact and assistance to non-clients. All of the companies I researched interacted with non-clients and assisted them if they could. One small company had the statement 'We will render assistance to anyone that calls us for help' on the front page of its promotional pamphlet and website. Engagement with non-clients tends to occur more among community-based companies, as they have closer ties with the citizens of a given region. Yet assisting non-clients is not restricted to community companies. Larger companies may receive fewer calls from non-clients, but they are not adverse to helping out. Indeed, Gayle works for a large firm.

However, attending to non-clients is not only due to an encroachment into the public domain but also concerns the saturated nature of the industry. Armed response is not a luxury good reserved for the elite. Rather, in South Africa, it is a service provided in middle-class neighborhoods and increasingly also in former townships. Competition among companies is fierce and many of my interlocutors described the industry as 'cut-throat'. And as armed response remains to be a paid-for-service, companies operate with a market-based mentality that 'the client is always right'. Clients therefore possess a great deal of purchasing and steering power and due to the abundance of companies, clients can easily pick and choose between them. Clients are aware of this and readily exercise this power, demanding armed response officers to perform tasks beyond their mandate, and sometimes threatening to switch to another company if their demands are not met. Throughout my fieldwork, I frequently heard clients making threats, such as 'If you [the company] don't do what I want, I'll switch over to another company'. Companies therefore invest heavily in marketing strategies to win over new clients and assisting non-clients is one of the various techniques. In fact, the man that Gayle assisted was not a client, but after the car chase, he mentioned considering switching over to the company Gayle worked for. Regardless of whether he did or not, it shows how such forms of assistance are used as marketing strategies.

Adhering to clients' demands and assisting non-clients has also increased due to the growth of 'collective clients', which refers to (in)formal schemes whereby citizens 'club' together to benefit collectively from armed response. The establishment of collective

clients is a growing trend in the private security industry in South Africa. For these companies, such clients are highly lucrative and regarded as the most efficient means of procuring new clients. For clients, they provide a sense of ownership and are regarded as more efficient. The result is that armed response officers are mandated to police the entire collective, including the public spaces between the different members of the collective. This not only pushes armed response officers into the public domain but also exacerbates social divisions and the construction of both physical and socially imagined borders. Armed response officers are employed to act as the ‘gatekeepers’ of these borders and partake in the social construction of who belongs to the community, i.e. define the ‘outsiders’ versus the ‘insiders’. This inherently implies keeping the ‘outsiders’ out, which results in a wide range of exclusionary practices. Clients, and citizens at large, therefore play a key role in shaping what armed response officers do, as is clear in the car chase where the citizen steered much of Gayle’s actions. This emphasizes the importance of a bottom–up perspective that includes ad hoc interactions.

Protector or threat?

The saturation of the market and increasing assistance to non-clients has shaped public perceptions of private security officers. The car chase highlights the contradictory public attitudes and expectations towards armed response officers. On the one hand, they are regarded with a certain degree of public authority and sometimes even equated with the public police. On the other hand, as armed response officers do not possess the same powers and tools as the police, these expectations can never be met. This impacts how armed response officers experience their line of work, which is the third point of analysis.

Similar to security officers worldwide, armed response officers do not possess powers beyond those of ordinary citizens. In South Africa, the Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977 compels individuals in the security industry to operate within the parameters of state law. This entails that security officers may only utilize powers granted to ‘private persons’, which empowers them to ‘arrest, without a warrant, anyone seen to be engaged in an affray and anyone “reasonably” believed to have committed any offence. Private security may also, without a warrant, arrest and pursue any person who commits, attempts to commit, or is reasonable suspected of committing any Schedule 1 offence’ (Singh 2008: 54). During the car chase, the citizen expected Gayle to run red lights, and he swore at Gayle profusely throughout the entire episode. I wonder what he would have demanded from Gayle if we had succeeded in apprehending the suspects. Although the actual use of violence was absent in this incident, Gayle’s ability to do so (through the use of his firearm) is also, and perhaps even, equally, as important. Furthermore, I regularly witnessed how clients demanded armed response officers to conduct illegal behavior, primarily through the use of (excessive) violence (Diphoorn 2013).

Studies on private policing elsewhere have shown how working as a private security officer is ‘a (not so) rewarding job’ (Loyens 2009: 466) due to poor wages, labour conditions and long working hours (Rigakos 2002; Button 2007). Besides a range of occupational hazards, armed response officers’ main complaint about their work concerned their inability to please clients, the constant feeling of ‘gambling’ in their interactions

with clients and police officers and the sense of never being ‘good enough’. Their work is marked by a conflicting combination of high expectations and contempt. Another armed response officer once described it as a constant balancing act: ‘Some clients want A, others want B; you never know until you get there. People pull and push, thinking that we can do everything, but we can’t.’⁷ Clients’ feelings of entitlement and consumer power are crucial in understanding how armed response officers are treated. Contrary to popular belief, assaults, abuse and verbal threats against security officers are common and regarded as a large part of the job (Rigakos 2002; Loyens 2009). For armed response officers, verbal assault and ill treatment are seen as something that come with the territory, as Gayle clearly expressed after the car chase with the quote, ‘people treat us like shit, like we’re stupid dogs that are trained to protect them’.

Such feelings are exacerbated by the fact that security officers are the first to be suspected and blamed if a crime occurs. For armed response officers, this is emotionally grueling, especially if they have been stationed in a particular area for a while and have established personal relationships with some of their clients, something that is not rare in their line of work. A good example is Keith who was stationed in an area for a long time, and explained the following to me:

I like this area, and know the people well, but they don’t really trust me. They act nice, and like they trust me, but at the end of the day, if the shit really happens, they will suspect me first, and look funny at *me*. And even when I prove I didn’t do it, they will always look at me with that look. And so I start all over again.⁸

This places armed response officers in an ambiguous position: they are paid to act as clients’ protectors of potential threats, i.e. the dangerous ‘Other’, yet they are simultaneously suspected of colliding with the dangerous ‘Other’. This association between security officers and criminals is, in South Africa, related to race.⁹ Despite social transformations since 1994, the dangerous ‘Other’ remains the young, black male, and as most armed response officers are not white (either black or Indian), both the criminal and the ‘protector’ are seen to originate from the same area.

I coin this conflicting phenomenon as the ‘Bravo Mike Syndrome’, which refers to the framing of the criminal as the immoral and dangerous black male and to the consequent policing practices of armed response officers in protecting citizens from this socially constructed threat. Similar to armed forces elsewhere, armed response companies use the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) phonetic alphabet code for communication. Bravo thus stands for B and Mike for M, and armed response officers use ‘Bravo Mike’ to refer to a ‘Black Male’. On almost a daily basis, I witnessed how armed offices officers were called upon to ‘deal with’ suspicious ‘Bravo Mikes’, which primarily meant ‘evicting’ them from the area in question. However, as armed response officers are ‘Bravo Mikes’ themselves, conducting these rounds and approaching suspicious ‘Bravo Mikes’ is an emotional and conflict-ridden affliction that many of them despite, but feel they are ‘obliged’ to do as an inherent part of their work.

This ambiguous role assigned to armed response officers and the suspicion directed at them revolves around questions over their power and authority to react to ‘moral

⁷ Interview: 22 November 2008.

⁸ Interview: 2 December 2008.

⁹ Due to the scope of this paper, I will not delve further into the role of race in the policing practices of armed response officers.

transgressions perceived to threaten the community' (Jensen 2007: 49). There is an ongoing negotiation about whether they belong to the moral community, which further reveals the shifting boundaries between being the 'protector' or the potential threat. Twilight policing incorporates this personal experience of performing, an element that is generally overlooked or underreported in the policing literature. Twilight policing is defined by insecurity and unpredictability, reflecting an understanding of 'twilight' itself as a state of uncertainty and obscurity. I argue that these personal experiences, of being the 'performer', are imperative to incorporate as they influence how armed response officers conduct their work. The fact that Gayle was a victim of racist remarks and that he feels like he and his colleagues are 'stupid dogs that are trained to protect them', influences his interactions with citizens and clients and shapes his own motivations for this occupation and perceptions of security. I thus argue that we can only fully understand the nature and impact of policing practices by looking also at how the performers experience their actions. This reaffirms the need for ethnographic fieldwork that allows us to analyse emotions, perceptions and multiple forms of meaning-making among our research participants.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have presented a new framework—twilight policing—that emerged from an ethnographic approach to daily security practices of armed response officers in Durban, South Africa. Twilight policing refers to performances of punitive, disciplinary and exclusionary policing practices that emerge through the interactions between state and non-state and thereby simultaneously undermine and support the authority of the state. Twilight policing does therefore not only refer to a private agent operating in the public domain but also concerns the appropriation of activities and behavior associated with the state police. The car chase—which I analyse as a performance of twilight policing—is an example of how armed response officers perform practices that simultaneously mimic and undermine the state police and emerge from a range of networks and relationships that can be studied in a nodal framework or through security networks and assemblages. These performances are claims to sovereign power that materialize from a range of competitive and complementary actions with other actors.

As a framework, twilight building draws from many of the building blocks of the security network, security assemblage and nodal framework approach, in that it incorporates the various interactions between different security providers. However, through an ethnographic approach and defining policing as the performance of sovereign power, I extend the analysis and provide a bottom-up and agency-based focus on everyday security practices. These practices are imbricated and 'twilight', are continuously in flux and highly dependent on the contextual environment. Therefore, rather than solely analysing how policing bodies compete or support one another in a network or assemblage, twilight policing assumes that both are taking place simultaneously and analyses the practices that materialize from this myriad of relationships. And rather than solely examining the product of various forms of interactions with the concept of hybridity, twilight policing assumes that the ontological nature of the performers also inherently changes. Armed response officers are not necessarily 'private' actors, nor 'public', nor 'hybrid'. Rather, they habitually perform twilight policing practices, and

in doing so, continuously rearrange their own configuration within the security spectrum, and those of others.

I developed ‘twilight policing’ out of a need to conceptually analyse the data that I collected during my intensive ethnographic fieldwork in Durban, South Africa, as I felt that existing concepts, such as plural policing and hybridity could not adequately theorize my empirical data. Twilight policing is thus grounded in the South African context. However, I do propose that it can serve as an analytical framework to examine how interconnections between different security providers in other contexts engender policing practices that are neither one nor the other, but something combined and in between, something ‘twilight’. This would entail an ethnographic study on the daily policing practices of a security provider and include the personal experiences of the actual performers.

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