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Police socialisation in France and in England: How do they stand towards the community policing model?

**[La socialisation policière en France et en Angleterre.
Quels enseignements en termes de police de proximité ?]**

Damien CASSAN
Chercheur associé au CLERSE
damiencassan@gmail.com

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Université de Lille 1
Faculté des sciences
économiques et sociales
59655 Villeneuve d'Ascq cedex
03 20 43 66 40
Fax 03 20 43 66 35
clerse-direction@univ-lille1.fr
www.univ-lille1.fr/clerse

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2 rue des Canonnières,
59800 Lille



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Police socialisation in France and in England: How do they stand towards the community policing model?

Damien CASSAN

Abstract: *This paper deals with an international comparison of the police patrollers' socialisation in France and in England. We will first state some common features of the police socialisation process between France and England, and we will then highlight significant differences based on the findings of an intensive qualitative fieldwork. The French police recruit is notably socialised through a perception of a dangerous job, the crime fighting dogma, and he learns to deal with an unfriendly environment and a mistrust relationship with people. Whereas his English counterpart's socialisation process emphasizes empathy for victims, communication as a core source and force as the very last resource. Taking from this insightful knowledge of police socialisation (and thus of police culture in England and in France), we finally discuss the English and French police stands towards the community policing model, especially showing how problematic this model is when relating to French police culture.*

Keywords: police, occupational culture, international comparison, police culture, community policing, ethnographic fieldwork.

Résumé : Cet article porte sur une comparaison internationale de la socialisation du policier de patrouille entre la France et l'Angleterre. À partir d'une enquête de type ethnographique, nous présentons d'abord des éléments communs du processus de socialisation policière en France et en Angleterre, et nous insistons ensuite sur quelques différences significatives. La recrue française est socialisée à travers une perception d'un métier dangereux, le dogme de la lutte contre le crime et il apprend à gérer un environnement peu accueillant et une relation de défiance avec le public. Du côté anglais, le processus de socialisation de la recrue policière insiste sur l'empathie envers les victimes, la communication comme ressource centrale et l'utilisation de la force comme dernier recours absolu. Partant de cette analyse de la socialisation policière (et par conséquent de la culture policière), nous terminons par une discussion du positionnement respectif de ces cultures policières face au modèle de police de proximité, en montrant particulièrement les problèmes de compatibilité avec la culture policière française.

Mots clés : police, socialisation professionnelle, comparaison internationale, culture policière, police de proximité, enquête ethnographique.

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1. Introduction

This paper deals with an international comparison of police socialisation in France and England and is based on intensive qualitative fieldwork. I believe police culture can be best analysed through a study of the occupational socialisation process of new recruits that I understand as “a process through which a novice learns the skills, knowledge, and values necessary to become a competent member of an organisation or occupation” (Chan, Devery & Doran, 2003, p. 3¹). As a lengthy process, one can consider several steps, notably initial training within police school, followed by crucial on the job training with experienced peers² and progressive socialisation to the occupational culture of the police force.

After presenting our research scheme and methodology, first we will state some common features of the police socialisation process between France and England, and we will then highlight significant differences. Finally we will conclude how French and English policing models differ from one another, notably their position towards community policing.

1.1 Research specifics

We have focused on the French national civil police force (*police nationale*) which is under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior (as opposed to national military police force -*gendarmerie nationale*- or municipal police forces). Furthermore, we have researched four of the forty-three police forces in England and Wales³.

Moreover, we concentrate on grass-roots police officers, i.e. those police officers patrolling the local community either by car or on foot. Patrollers respond both to emergency and routine calls from the local community -typically 17 calls in France and 999 calls in England and Wales. They are constantly interacting with the public, while on beat. In this study we focus exclusively on patrol officers, consequently for the purpose of this article we will not consider subjects such as police hierarchy and specialised police departments (e.g. investigation units or public order squads)⁴.

1.2 Police socialisation and police culture

Our key interest is to analyse the socialisation process particular to patrol officers and, as a direct consequence to gain a better knowledge and understanding of police culture in France and England. Our research deals with numerous questions including: what must the recruit learn to become a competent police officer? The broader learning process includes the socialisation to the “patroller occupational culture”, which is of considerable importance to the process of becoming a “competent” police officer (especially in the eyes of their peers). The patroller culture is transferred from experienced officers to recruits, ensuring occupational culture and ethos are preserved from generation to generation. This occupational culture has been well documented and discussed in policing literature⁵. This paper aims to present the most common features of the police patroller occupational

¹ They actually use Van Maanen & Schein’s definition (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

² We can also consider an “anticipated socialisation” step prior to joining (Van Maanen, 1993).

³ Additional data were obtained from police recruits from various police forces of England and Wales at Ryton-on-Dunsmore regional police training centre.

⁴ One can distinguish “three police within the police”: “urban” or “community” police (that we focus on), public order police and judicial/investigation police (Monjardet, 1996).

⁵ The police occupational culture is known as the *rank and file occupational culture* (predominantly in Britain) or the *police cop culture* (mostly in USA). For an overview, see Foster (Foster, 2003).

socialisation as well the specificities observed within the French and the English police and to finally discuss these cultural characteristics through the lenses of the community policing model.

1.3 *Fieldwork and methodology*

Research methods consist of direct observation in police schools as well as in police stations and police patrol cars and recorded in-depth interviews. In an occupation sometimes characterised by secrecy and reluctance towards non-police persons, we have favoured ethnographic style research including long stay within forces⁶, in-depth informal discussions and close bonds with numerous police officers, as an effective tool for gaining more accurate information. This research method has allowed us to gather very rich and comprehensive qualitative data both on the interactions between the recruits and more experienced officers and on the interactions between the police and the public in France and in England. However, it has to be noted that the research is missing quantitative data which could have made the international comparison more systematic and insightful.

Our research uses original ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in the French *police nationale* and in four English police forces. Fieldwork on the French police took place in two *Directions départementales de la sécurité publique* (DDSP), department of *Nord* (departmental capital city: Lille), and department of *Bouches du Rhône* (departmental capital city: Marseille). In total, I performed approximately seventy full days of *in situ* observations and more than fifty recorded interviews. Moreover, I served for ten month as *policier auxiliaire* (PA) in the *police nationale* through the mandatory national service (trained at *Oissel* police school in department of *Seine-Maritime* and served at the Ministry of the Interior in Paris).

Fieldwork on the English police took place within West-Midlands Police, Thames Valley Police, Bedfordshire police and Kent County Constabulary, as well as in Ryton-on-Dunsmore regional training centre. In total, I undertook approximately fifty full days of *in situ* observation (in police schools, police stations and patrol cars) and performed thirty recorded interviews. Data were gathered during a sociology doctorate work undertaken between 2000 and 2005 (Cassan, 2005).

This intensive fieldwork generated close to 2,000 pages of data (transcripts of recorded interviews, informal discussions and observation notepads) and has brought us a better understanding of police socialization and culture in France and England. This paper cites some original data transcripts of interviews and *in situ* observations.

2. Commonalities in police socialisation and police culture

Police socialisation obviously involves the learning of laws, rules, regulations and procedures as well as techniques of law enforcement and order maintenance, including the use of firearms in France. These various aspects are without question necessary and of utmost importance in order to perform the police job correctly. For the most part, these elements are taught during the initial training in police schools, and they are essential requirements necessary in order to graduate from the police academy. Moreover, a police rookie will not make it to the streets if he fails to integrate them effectively.

Beyond those inputs from the official police's curriculum, the recruit must also acquire a whole range of occupational skills, attitudes, and assumptions that are compatible with those of other members of the occupation (Chan, 2003, p. 3). The evaluation of these competencies is strongly dependent on the immediate peer group evaluation rather than

⁶ We were accommodated within Marseille and Oissel police schools in France, and in Ryton-on-Dunsmore, Reading (Thames Valley Police) and Maidstone (Kent County Constabulary) in England.

one from the hierarchy or the organisation. Thus, features of that occupational competence are rather different from the official police policy, and one can argue that they are mostly driven and initiated by the police patroller culture.

We will now develop two important aspects of police socialization. First, we will explain in more detail the “social drama of policing” that will become progressively familiar to the police new comer. Second we will present and comment on a number of behavioural codes and norms of the police patroller job that are transmitted informally, but with certainty, from experienced officers to newcomers.

2.1 Learning the social drama of policing

Using the theatre play as an analogy, the social context of patrol policing can be considered to have its stages, actors, language, and accessories. The stage encompasses the police station, the “canteen” and the patrol cars, each with slightly different codes and norms⁷, as well as external stages such as affluent or rough neighborhoods, red light districts, dangerous parks at night, and so on. The recruit is also introduced to actors. Again some are internal actors as first line supervisors, hierarchy and colleagues from the peer patrollers’ group, and some are external actors such as the usual perpetrators that are arrested regularly, informants, shop keepers or community workers. There is an interesting labeling process within the peer group, and almost every one is labeled with good or bad features (reliable, lazy or clumsy fellow officer, and trustworthy or “asshole” members of the public for example). And the police world has its own occupational jargon, either for naming different categories of people or classifying certain situations/contexts. This jargon is not understood by and not even shared with external people, it is a daily and steady feature that gives life to the occupational patroller culture.

Finally, the central actors of this social drama use numerous accessories that are for the most part distinctive to their occupation: police uniforms, patrol cars, sirens, radio, CS spray, truncheons, handcuffs, and so on. I have observed police probationers rather confused while discovering police car equipment such as a central radio with many command buttons: for sirens, blue lights, etc.

The following extract from my fieldwork notepad on an English recruit early days of police work with her tutor exemplifies the socialization to different aspects of the aforementioned social drama of patrol policing.

« 9.30 am, we have tea. I spend the day with T (tutor) and P (probationer). In the elevator we meet colleagues then T talks about them to P. Apparently he does not really like them. He continues to comment on other people from the police station and applies a label onto each of them. (...) We leave in a Peugeot 406 patrol car ; P asks many questions, « What is this neighborhood? » T answers : “Shit!”. T stops to talk to the garbage collectors. We drive through Postley Road, then Armstrong Road. T tells us about a teenager aged 15 « involved in so many crimes » in the neighborhood. He then shows P a small hidden path. Waiting, listening to the radio, T explains that there are two different radio frequencies : « Maidstone » and « Kent Channel » (...) We are in Hollingworth Road, T talks about the RTA (« Road Traffic Accident »), he then notices a parked car without « tax », and encourages P to use the radio for a « vehicle check ». He dictates to her exactly what to say. T waits for the discussion to end. He then dictates to her again « repeat the registration ! ». T explains that he « knows » the owner who has previously been arrested. He shows P his house and comments on him « he’s a huge drug supplier ». Then, P talks to me : « You know, Damien, there are also some nice places, but we don’t really hang out there » [observation Notepad, Thames Valley Police, England]

⁷ Waddington, for instance, distinguishes a police “canteen culture” and a police “operational culture” in the streets (Waddington, 1999, p. 290).

2.2 Solidarity and loyalty

Another challenge facing new police recruits is the integration of numerous informal codes and norms. Such unwritten rules include but are not limited to⁸ solidarity and loyalty to the peer group, as well as the resulting internal sorting process, and are common to both English and French police.

First, police recruits quickly learn the importance of being in solidarity with fellow patrollers. Police officers have to “fight together against a common enemy” (Westley, 1970, p. 5), or in other words the “us *versus* them” dichotomy.

Due to the potentially dangerous nature of the job, police officers need to be assured that colleagues will be loyal to one another⁹. Thus, calls for back up are responded to immediately and without hesitation, the assumption being that you don’t give up another officer because you know he won’t give up on you. This is exemplified in the following extract from an interview conducted with a Thames Valley Police tutor.

“I suppose to be honest yeah you do have that in the back of your mind a little bit, because I suppose when you’re with regular officers that have served a few years, we’ve all been involved in violent situations, unexpected situations and to some extent we know how each will react and I guess you develop trust. I know that they’ll know how to react to an incident 9 times out of 10 and you just take it for granted that they will and you just deal with the job. But I suppose when you go out with a probationer then you don’t know how they work because you’ve not worked with them for very long, they don’t know how you work, and they haven’t experienced things yet you know. The probationer I am with at the moment hasn’t experienced a violent situation, a violent arrest or a violent offence towards a police officer. So I mean we can get a call now on the way down to a violent incident and I don’t know how she’ll react (...) so it’s difficult. I think the issue is how they would react. You just don’t know. Everyone is different, aren’t they?” [English police tutor, Thames Valley police]

Loyalty also includes keeping information within the peer group, notably when fellow officers behave in a deviant manner, the rule of thumb would be to “never denounce a fellow patroller to the hierarchy”. Consequently, as in the following interview extract with a French probationer, the police newcomer will be ‘tested’ by experienced officers in order to make sure they can be trusted.

“Well of course if on the first night, well let’s say we’re going to... I’ll just pick randomly, so we’ll stop by to a friend’s place because he needs to borrow his drill and we need to go tonight cause he can’t tomorrow! We go and... well let’s say we’ll have a drink, it’s 8pm and we’ll have a quick drink. We go and the following day let’s say I am going to talk about that to the section supervisor, I will say “well last night they had a drink, it’s not supposed to happen, blabla” then obviously you should not expect to get their confidence. So when they see that after 2 weeks everything goes fine, that’s ok then they will trust you! (...) But for sure if you betray them, they will ask that you don’t go out on patrol with them! It’s as simple as that! And that makes sense really!” [French probationer, Roubaix]

The initial “assessment” of a new officer, however incomplete or brief, will circulate rapidly within the peer group, whether the result of this informal evaluation is good or bad. Knowing a patroller’s strengths and weaknesses, and whether he is reliable in case of violent or dangerous situations are considered to be of high value to the group essentially

⁸ Ianni and Reuss-Ianni have presented a comprehensive account of “shared understandings” that rule the social organisation of street policing (Ianni and Reuss Ianni, 1983). They have researched intensively within the NYPD during the mid Seventies, they have described two conflicting police cultures: and the Management Cop Culture (MCC), and the Street Cop Culture (SCC) exemplified by a “cop’s code”.

⁹ Danger is one of the two principal variables that make up for Skolnick’s famous “working personality” of the police officer. The second is authority, and both “should be interpreted in the light of a constant pressure to appear efficient” (Skolnick, 2005).

in terms of safety issues¹⁰.

Loyalty to the peer group includes to keeping their distance from the hierarchy, not to give them too much information, especially on other peer officers, nor to give them too much activity. The assumption is that working hard will not be rewarded by the organisation. Doing so which is considered to be “making waves” encompasses a higher risk of making mistakes, and may increase the hierarchy’s attention towards and expectations of the whole group. There’s also the feeling that compared with a few decades ago, under increasing media and political pressures, the hierarchy may not be willing to defend patrollers in order to protect their career (See also Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, p. 309-310).

2.3 Perceived characteristics of police culture shared by French and English polices

To conclude with the points in common regarding patroller’s culture and socialisation, we will first briefly stress several characteristics of police culture, then to mention those often regarded as negative aspects. Finally, we will somehow shortly put them in perspective.

A number of aspects of occupational attitudes can be regarded as being common to any police force. Patrollers have a “sense of mission”, to defend the weak against predators, the conviction of being the « thin blue line » between the good and bad (also “the rough and the respectable”).

They put an emphasis on action and the thirst for it, the variety of every day patrol work (“you never know what to expect”). They see their work as challenging, exciting and full of adrenaline¹¹.

Furthermore, police culture encompasses a tendency to conservatism -partly due to the nature of the job, to social isolation -the “us *versus* them” dichotomy, shift work, to suspicion -looking for potential signs of trouble- and finally to cynicism as they deal constantly with the more negative sides of society, poverty, and so on¹².

It is important to note that there are additional occupational attitudes which may be seen as more negative or problematic. There is a tendency to categorise people negatively (prejudices, stereotyping), especially minorities: ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and so on. This can easily lead to sexism and racism¹³. Furthermore, the police patroller can be seen as authoritarian and sometimes as a source of potential violence towards citizens.

Finally, these attitudes require further explanation. Waddington proposes to look beyond the normative condemnation of these negative occupational features (Waddington, 1999). For him, these aspects have to be analysed through the lenses of the structural contingencies of policing. Here are a few examples: The cult of masculinity is a response to a core aspect of the police role: the capacity to use (legitimate) force. Moreover, the “sense of mission” to fight crime provides an ideological justification of the authority used towards citizens. And finally, stereotyping is a necessary tool of the suspicion required by the police patrol (Reiner, 2000, p. 91).

Moreover, he shows that these occupational aspects are mostly molded in the canteen arena, which has its own social context (“*It is a rhetoric that gives meaning to experience and sustains occupational self-esteem*”), and it is different from the “operational culture” which

¹⁰ See the sorting process described by Ianni and Reuss-Ianni (Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, 1983).

¹¹ It is interesting to note that Police patrol work is actually quite mundane, but there is a call from patrollers for the opposite.

¹² Reiner has detailed those aforementioned occupational attitudes (Reiner, 2000).

¹³ Holdaway has written intensively on the issue of ethnic minorities and the police both internally and externally (Holdaway, 1997).

guides action on the street.

3. French Characteristics

Beyond the commonalities previously identified in this paper, our fieldwork has shown significant differences between French and English police forces which can be viewed as strong variations in police patrolman's culture. It must be noted that the following points in sections 4 and 5 have emerged from our original observations: they are specifics of French police culture compared to English police forces (section 4) and *vice versa* (section 5). Having said that, it doesn't mean for instance that a point stressed as a French characteristic does not exist in the English forces. It means that we have observed a significant difference on that point throughout our fieldwork. The same is true the other way round.

3.1 *The perception of a dangerous job*

Skolnick showed that facing danger is part of the "policeman's working personality". Having said that, we found a more palpable sense of danger within the French police. A French officer does not feel welcomed or appreciated by citizens, consequently he is concerned with his own safety. In that regard, the French patroller's connection to his firearm is interesting: He considers it as absolutely essential although the vast majority admit that they have never used it¹⁴. We can see in the following extract from a French probationer that a firearm is necessary to help cope with perceptions of a dangerous job.

"It is absolutely necessary to carry one because when we go to a situation where there are people carrying guns, if we need to come back to the police station to get a firearm and then go back again, there's no point ! In some cases, yes, we don't need one, but in others we do. Personally I believe a police officer must be armed. He needs a firearm. (...) Even the assistant [ADS –Adjoint De Sécurité] needs to carry one as well. As soon as we put on a uniform, even municipal police, I don't understand why they're not all armed ! A uniform is... well... not good, definitely not good. So, we're likely to face anything, and we need firearms once we're out there. Look at the Deputy Mayor of B. yesterday, he was shot ! Why ? Because the guy saw the siren on the car so he thought he was a cop... and 'Boom' ! He wanted to kill cops ! So if they're not armed, how do they deal with it ?" [French probationer, Marseille]

Unlike his English counterpart, the French police probationer has to learn to live with his firearm, to get used to it, with the amount of pressure and stress associated with it. Moreover, the perception of a dangerous job places emphasis on developing certain police skills. First, to learn "to better observe" has been stressed as essential to police work to a significantly larger degree than in England. Asking a veteran sergeant [*brigadier chef*] in Marseille what are the most important skills a police newcomer has to learn on the job, he insists on the ability to "observe better".

"Well, I would say, first of all, he has to observe and learn to observe. There are many newcomers who don't have an analytical eye. There're too many lazy minds. Even young officers, you have to spell everything out for. Me, I have always said... how can I put it ? Work by preparing. Work by analysing... And that practice makes perfect, doesn't it ? The more you analyse the more you will have a sense of how to analyse. Let's say that people need to observe better." [French Veteran brigadier -sergeant, Marseille]

¹⁴ We remind the reader that regular English police officers do not carry guns.

3.2 *The crime-fighting dogma*

French patrollers have an inflexible perception of the police as being largely controlling, and believe in the need for a “tougher” force. Police work is more focused on the glorification of “action” and on the ultimate goal of catching criminals (see extract from a French probationer¹⁵). As a result, the preventive dimension of the job is to a large extent, downplayed.

“Well, yeah, overall we need more training on arrest techniques because that’s what the job is all about. That’s the police job. What is a cop ? It’s a guy that drives around in his car waiting for something to happen –a robbery, an aggressive act, something that turns into a disturbance, a traffic accident- that’s what the patrol job is all about to me.

— And on prevention ?

Well... prevention ? [looks confused] Yeah... the definition of the police job is prevention and control. Control is to fight... and prevention... well... hell, yeah, you have to do some, I suppose... (...) But you shouldn’t always be a saint, I think. You can’t always be Mr. Nice Guy..., you have to be able to punish. The proof is that there are no awards for people who respect the law, but there are consequences for those who don’t. So, for those guys who don’t respect it, it’s better to be tough when it happens. We don’t make people respect us by being nice. We have to be tough, to show that we’re the law. The police should not let anything (unlawful) go without punishment » [French probationer, Marseille]

3.3 *Learning to deal with an unfriendly environment*

In order to perform his dangerous job and fight crime, the French police newcomer has to learn to deal with an unfriendly environment. In preparation, veteran patrollers will teach probationers numerous safety tips. Interestingly, the concern is to first ensure his safety, and only then, the public’s safety. In the following extract, a veteran officer [*brigadier*] from Marseille expands upon how to act when arriving at a disturbance.

“Well here’s an example. A police officer who has, I’d say, a certain amount of experience... when he gets to a ‘domestic’, he knocks on the door, but he doesn’t stand behind the door. He stays off to the side. Why ? Because if there’s a psycho on the other side... ‘boum !’. That’s it in a nutshell, I’d say. I don’t know whether they learn that in school but these are little survival tips that you need to know” [French veteran brigadier-sergent, Marseille]

The typical example of a safety tip passed on from veteran officers to probationers has to do with necessary vigilance in rough neighbourhoods [*cités de banlieues*], as in the following quote from a regular police officer from Marseille.

“(...) And that’s when you learn, for instance, that when you go to the bad part of town, when you arrive at the disturbance –well, these are minor details- straight away, you keep the car ready to go. If we’re in trouble, you don’t want to waste time opening it. You don’t park the car right by the building, so you don’t get a washing machine dropped on you. You park a little farther away... little details like that (...) I can remember the time we had to go to a bad neighbourhood [quote], and a TV lands a few meters from me ! It must have been thrown out the window from the 10th floor, and it landed a few meters from me ! My veteran partner who was with me then tells me how to avoid being thrown stuff at you in tough neighbourhoods. So what’s the secret ? You move really quickly and always stay under shelter when you can. At the very least when you need to cross the street, do it very quickly to avoid getting something dropped on your head.” [French police officer, Marseille]

¹⁵ Those assumptions are found mostly in probationers, and tend to decline with experience (while cynicism increases).

It is interesting to note that these tips are born out of a specific dimension of the police job – the “intervention” or “security” perception- as well as a certain aspect of police/public relationships, the “policing against people” stand.

3.4 Social isolation, mistrust of people and lack of service

We argue that French police officers have a greater sense of isolation than their English counterparts. This is due to the fact that there is more mistrust and suspicion towards people (and *vice versa*), which create more distant relations with the public. French officers don't feel part of the community and don't genuinely feel that they are there to serve the community. This extract from our observation notepad shows the extent of the indifference towards the public, including victims. This is, without a doubt, one of the most dramatic contrasts between English and French police forces. Police officers become upset when receiving requests from the public. This task is seen as a waste of time - time taken away from 'their' main task: fighting crime.

Police station front desk. A probationer answers a phone call. He doesn't really know the answer. A female regular officer next to him says sarcastically : 'We're not an information center'. The probationer ends the call by saying he doesn't have the answer. The female officer seems annoyed by that type of call. She tells him that when she was in Paris and somebody would call for information, her answer was curt : 'So call the 12 !' [public service for general information, not related to the police], and she would hang up. [French police officer, Marseille]

The patrol car provides another vivid example of how seldom French police respond to the public's pleas¹⁶. During our observation in Marseille, an elderly man hails a patrol car to ask for help because somebody is parked in front of his garage and he cannot drive his car out. The patrol car slows down, an officer opens his window and listens to the elderly man briefly without getting out of the car. The car drives slowly to the end of the street. They seem to be looking for clues. The elderly man walks after the patrol car, a few words are exchanged, and with little hesitation, the patrolmen ignore him eventually and go. The elderly man stays speechless. In the car, one of the officers says “Go to hell!” The patrol then goes to the regional administrative headquarters of the police [SGAP] just to see if they can do firearm training. They cannot so they decide to clean the car instead. It is interesting to note that the police patrol has not left for a more urgent call. Thus, it is quite obvious that they don't consider themselves as entitled to a mission of public service.

Sometimes, it regrettably goes beyond indifference, and becomes impoliteness or disrespect. A probationer in Roubaix tells about the police/public relationships he observed throughout his first experiences on the job. He names them as “non existent” or “aggressive”

*“And you, during your probation period, how did you find the relationship with the public ?
— Non existent !... Well I mean (...) veteran officers like to laugh at. Yes, they like that. Apart from that, I have not seen much ! The only 'contact with people' I experienced was in « proximity » [at that time there were « proximity police » department], it used to take us 20 minutes, we went into a shop « How are you Sir ? No problem ?.. Oh well, we are nearly done for today, I'm going to see your next door colleague ! » Next !...*

— When you say they were laughing at people, how did you feel about that ?

— Oh well... Pff it's disgusting ! Me, I don't like it ! It makes me feel uncomfortable ! Somehow when people call on us, it means they expect something from us. It means there's a problem, there's something to do. Sometimes, they can be in distress, or really affected. Sometimes we come to them and we start laughing at

¹⁶ We would like to stress that we have noticed differences within the French national police force. Those aspects seem to be even more obvious in the south of France than in the north.

them or make disparaging remarks. For example, we respond to a call from a big woman. The officer arrives and says « What's going on with you fat lady ? Well... whaou ! If she already doesn't feel good, well... not a good start ! It will ruin everything and then we'll have to catch up to control the situation! (...) Or situations that go wrong, we'll give a ticket for instance for a traffic violation. It's our work to give tickets but we don't need to make things worse. We'll have to do it correctly ; it's not necessary to make things worse by insulting people...If we're aggressive, straight away that will worsen things. It's like a mirror ! We'll get it back in our face straight away ! And then dealing with the situation after that .. it's over. It's ruined. We don't know how to talk to people ! Police officers are making a mess out of nothing. We get into a confrontation right away, and then it escalades !"¹⁷ [French probationer, Roubaix]

More surprisingly, even victims are not always well taken care of by the police. I can recall a night shift in central Roubaix where the patrol was going to go back to the police station to take a break. Suddenly, the patrol is required to take a victim of domestic violence to the hospital. No officer wants to go and one of them leaves the team to stay at the police station. The trip to the hospital with the victim passes in silence. Then just before they reach the hospital, an officer asks her when it happened, where does she live and what is her partner's name. The patrol car then drops her at the hospital entrance with an insignificant 'good bye'. There was absolutely no concern about how the victim felt, no supportive words whatsoever. The feelings of victims are not considered by French police officers; it is some sort of a 'taboo'. Inquiries by the police are only centred on the perpetrator; consequently the victim seems even more 'invisible'. Actually, French police officers do not feel it is part of their job to care or show any compassion for the victim. Taking a victim to the hospital is not part of 'real police work'. It is uninteresting and of little value. The 'social' part of their job is looked upon with contempt and is very often denied although it is very present in their job.

To conclude with the relationship between the police and the victims we will quote a veteran officer in Roubaix who is critical towards the approach of many of his colleagues towards people in general, and towards victims more precisely.

"(...) Many policemen are not from the area. They don't really care about the public. The area is very poor ; I am from l'Epeule, a neighbourhood in Roubaix. If people live in Roubaix, it is because they cannot afford to live somewhere else. How can I put it ? You will for instance arrest a thief, you will see him as an adversary. On the contrary, if you're called for a 'domestic' or an argument between neighbours, I have already been through that. Police probationers see the person who has called us as an adversary as well ! For me it seems weird but they don't differentiate between the types of calls. The first call comes from a victim of a theft, the second call comes from a person who needs assistance. In both cases, we deal with a victim who calls for help ! People who have experienced a problem are usually in shock, and young officers see them as adversaries ?" [French veteran police officer, Roubaix]

4. English characteristics

4.1 *Empathy for victims*

The English officer's attitude towards victims is completely different compared to his French counterpart. The contrast is striking. English officers are clearly more welcoming with victims. During an observation at Thames Valley Police training centre in Sulhamstead, I can recall a trainer who stressed the importance of supporting victims of domestic violence. As these female victims are usually reluctant to press charges, they

¹⁷ We have met notable exceptions of French police officers dedicated to serving the community, see observation notepads and interview transcript from Marseille 10th district in our PhD appendix (Cassan, 2005).

would find it even harder to come to the police station by themselves. The trainer taught probationers that it is their job to make these victims feel comfortable, to encourage them to come to the police station telling her she will be welcomed with a cup of tea and will be listened to with care.

This emphasis on emotionally assisting victims has been observed throughout our drive with English patrol cars. Actually, it was not long (first hour of our first ride along in Biggleswade) before a significant scene of empathy caught our eyes. The scene involved a traffic accident at a roundabout between a car and a bike. The support the probationer showed the victim of the accident was just unimaginable compared to France where emotional distance from victims is what matters (see following extracts from our notepad).

J. (probationer) tries hard to support the cyclist who is in real shock, crying. She feels guilty "I am sorry... ". She says that she cycles that route every day to go to work and that it is the first time she sees a car coming right at her. Apparently she couldn't break in time to enter the roundabout. J is very nice to her, she (a female officer) tries to reassure her, asks her where it hurts. She makes her comfortable in her seat at the back of the police car and she even hugs her when she cries. She cares for her as a Mum would do. [observation notepad, Bedfordshire police, England]

4.2 Communication as a core resource

From the previous point on police officers' empathy towards victims, we can relate to a more global issue: communication. The extent and the nature of the communication between police officers and the public are very different in France and in England. It is interesting to note the importance of communication as a core police skill for English police officers. A police probationer from Milton Keynes describes in the following interview extract how important talking is to calm people down.

"I've seen the way my tutor speaks to people, and I've learnt a lot from that. I've seen the way a lot of people talk to people (...) It's the sort of things you talked to people about : if you got somebody who's very upset, and you need to calm him down, the last thing you want to do is to talk to them about something that will upset them. And I made mistake doing that one, so it's just learning things like that, that you avoid subjects that might upset them, that might be a bit emotive, that... really you talked about nothing, and you don't care what they're telling you as long as they telling you something, and you get them talking, and you get them calm down, and then you're taking from there really" [English probationer, Thames Valley police]

The efficiency of talking was confirmed when we asked English police officers what are the main qualities to be a good police officer. Communication skills including listening came without question as the number one quality, as in this extract from an interview with a Thames Valley Police tutor¹⁸.

« What would you say are the main qualities of a policeman?
— Euh, I'd say... honesty, good communication skills, I think the whole bit of police work is that you have to be able to talk to people regardless of whether they're 80 years old, 2 years old, whether they're millionaires or whether they're people on benefits. You have to be able to talk to everybody, to talk to them professionally and you know in a nice manner. And I think if you can do that, and get your head around the paperwork, then I think you'll make a good police officer » [English tutor, Thames Valley police]

¹⁸ By contrast, French police officers most often cite being motivated, professional, honest, being in solidarity, being able to adapt to every situation, or keeping a cool head. But there is no mention of communication whatsoever.

4.3 Force as the (very) last resource

This paragraph relates directly to the previous one. Communication is key to connecting with the public. We want to stress the extent to which the English police patrol will use communication rather than force to resolve a problematic situation. On the evidence of our intensive ethnographic fieldwork in both countries, we can state that the English police officer will resort to force much later than his French counterpart. I can recall an observation where the patrol I was with, together with a male tutor and a female probationer was called to an incident. A perturbed woman refused to be taken to a psychiatric hospital. Several patrols had been already on the scene, together with doctors and ambulance staff, some of them for hours, trying to resolve the situation by convincing her to go through dialogue. Several police officers tried consecutively to convince her, without any success. Our patrol was called in order to try with a female probationer to see if that could make a difference. We were amazed how many police officers -six actually- and for how long - about three hours altogether! tried that hard to resolve the matter without taking the perturbed woman by force. The female probationer, with much care, patience and sympathy eventually resolved the issue. We then discussed the matter with that female probationer during a recorded interview.

“I think a part of it was that the other officers were there ; they were very tolerant with her, and they certainly listened to her, and she won them over slightly I think, I think that’s what she thought, what she was doing. Gain the trust, and she packed her bags, and had packed already while they were there, and was refusing to go. When the ambulance arrived, I think she realised she had to go, she had no choice, she would be taken. When I went in there I introduced myself to her and I was very sympathetic with her to start with, and just asked whether there is anything I can do to help you pack, you need to pack your clothes, and by the end, I found myself speaking to her a bit like a child, so ‘right, we go in there and that’s it, you packed, you’re not taking anymore things, there’s nothing else you can take, everything else has to stay, it will all be here when you get back, it’s time to leave’, and... I don’t know if they could have done it without upsetting her because they’ve been there for so long and chatting with her for so long, I think they just needed another voice to come in really” [English probationer, Thames Valley Police]

5. Conclusion: French and English stances towards community policing

5.1 Police culture and policing models

In the two previous parts we have stressed a number of aspects that differentiate strongly French and English police culture. French police officers favour respectively distrust and anonymity in their relationships with citizens, and distance and relative indifference towards victims. In contrast English police officers have a greater sense of serving the community and supporting victims. In terms of essential tools regarding the police officer’s relationship with the public, one can contrast the “French firearm” *versus* the “English tongue”.

The core nature of the police mandate is also exemplified in the amount of force the police use. As we have showed in the last paragraph, avoiding the use of force is an absolute sacred rule for English police officers. If asked about it, French police officers would obviously also stress that rule, but it is not as sacred as it is in England.

Our findings on the French and English patroller occupational culture actually reiterate the pregnancy of distinct policing models. The England and Wales policing model can be portrayed as a service rather than a force. It “inherited a broad mandate to provide a service to the public that was wider than an exclusive emphasis on crime control and public

order maintenance” (Mawby, 2003, p. 17). In order to provide a good service to “consumers-citizens”, you do not use much force but rather listening, understanding and empathy. On the contrary, the French policing model, which can be considered as the ideal type country of the “continental model” of policing, is characterised by a centralised, militaristic (i.e. carrying firearms) and largely unaccountable police (closely tied to central government), carrying out a wide range of high policing and administrative tasks (Mawby, 2003, p. 18).

5.2 *Police accountability*

The accountability of the police is an interesting issue. In terms of global police accountability in England, there is a balance between central and local government with the tripartite structure: chief constables, central government, and police authorities who allow more room for local citizens. In France, one can stress a lack of public accountability, the national police being directly responsible to the head of state. Furthermore, there is a vivid contrast concerning individual accountability of police officers. Each English police officer can be clearly identified by any citizens with a unique number on their shoulder pad. In striking contrast, French police officers cannot be identified whatsoever. I can recall an amazing scene in the underground in Tourcoing. The foot patrol I was with (two veteran and two probationers) controlled the identity of two young men from a well-off background. Out of nothing, the interaction turn sour and the young men are searched. Unfortunately for them, a small quantity of cannabis is found on them. The leading veteran demonstrates much authority towards them, which tend to worsen interactions. At some point, one of the young man asks the leading veteran’s name or administrative identification [he may want to complain or report the incident to a powerful relative who has connection in the police?]. The veteran officer does not take him seriously and answers “I am superman!”

5.3 *Merging policing models: Community policing in France?*

Our fieldwork within the French national police coincided with the implementation of the reform of community policing in France [*“réforme de la police de proximité”*] at the time presented as a “major reform” by the French Ministry of the Interior¹⁹. This is a particularly interesting experience in the light of our research. We can to some extent consider this reform as an attempt to bring some measure of the English policing model into France. Actually this reform was the subject of much internal debate within patrols and police stations, consequently it was also part of the content of our interviews.

The philosophy of the reform can be summarised in the following points:

1. The police have a sound knowledge and a good understanding of the community they police. Thus, they need to make sure they are permanently connected to the population through dialogue and listening (communication is viewed as a new resource). This is made possible by increasing the number of small police posts in local neighbourhoods.
2. The police must be able to anticipate and prevent difficulties. One expects the police to become involved with the community through partnerships with associations, schools, community centres, public transport companies, and so on.
3. The police have to better meet the public’s expectations, improving the quality of their service, notably the reception desk, and responding to any public’s demand.

¹⁹ The implementation of this reform started in 1999, which was supposed to be a progressive process implemented throughout France. This was abandoned by Nicolas Sarkozy when he took over as French Minister of the Interior in 2002.

On paper, this reform is presented as a way to increase the policeman's adaptability, responsibility and capacity to take initiative (*Guide pratique de la police de proximité*, 2000).

5.4 *Why the reform failed?*

In short, our focus is how did the French police culture receive this reform of community policing? We argue that there was a strong cultural resistance from police patrolmen since the reform philosophy took the opposite stand of the French patrolmen culture (Cassan, 2004). Section 3 of this paper on French characteristics ascertains this discrepancy with the values of community policing. Thus, French policing model is more based on the priority given to public order and the crime-fighting dogma rather than a "vague social work" (Gorgeon, 1998)²⁰.

Regardless of the fact the government gave up on the reform in 2002 following a change of party in power, it is important to understand that the reform failed because of strong cultural resistance from patrolmen. Monjardet named "*l'inversion hiérarchique*" ('hierarchical reversal') the process through which patrolmen are actually very autonomous and dictate real policies (Monjardet, (1996). They are those gathering information ('police food') and control to a great extent the quantity and quality of the information they want to transfer up the grades. As a veteran patrolman from Marseille stated "The police commissioner is the king in his office, me I am the king in the street!". The more an occupation is autonomous, the more likely it will replace the "decreed goals", of the government, the hierarchy or the goals coming from the citizens. Monjardet calls this phenomenon "*mécanisme d'involution des buts*" ('involution mechanism of goals'). The following quote from an interview with a Marseille veteran officer says it all on the gap between the reform and the French police officers's attitude.

"I find this notion of "proximity" sad [the French term of community policing is "police de proximité"] What people ask for is a reactive police. For me, as a professional, if I call the "17" [phone number to call the police if in France], the police must arrive in 2-3 minutes... The "firemen of proximity", doesn't exist! You call them, and they come! It must be the same for the police. The "proximity", it is not place it is time. Personally I imagine police stations as big units with many people, we call on them and they are there in a few minutes. One creates specialities that aren't, police officers in plain clothes, police officers on moped, police officers on foot patrol, etc. No, for me the real police is « police secours »! (emergency car patrol)" [French veteran officer, Marseille]

Newly created services of community policing were devalued from the very start and the *police nationale* struggled to fill those positions, despite such incentives as a steady day shift and so on. Moreover, resistance or at least a lack of conviction, was found within the police hierarchy as well. This is partly because the evaluation of police activities within the framework of the "police of proximity" was an unclear and unresolved issue. For instance, the implementation of foot patrols and local police posts in poor neighbourhoods could likely result in an increase of complaints from the public. This increase is opposite to what is politically considered as 'good results' from the police. Thus, police activities in terms of communication, public relations and public partnerships go largely unnoticed in police statistics.

Finally, the *police nationale* never adapted both the hiring process and initial police training to this new policy. Our global research includes an analysis of hiring and initial training in police schools. We state that French police hiring processes ignore to a great extent communication skills, maturity and life experience, which are essential in a

²⁰ Mawby considers France as the country where the relationships between the police and the population are the least developed in a comparison between ten countries (Mawby, 1990).

community policing perspective. French police recruits are trained in a rather more in a more “by the book” and disciplined atmosphere, concentrating on the stance of law, rules and regulations, firearm training and arrest techniques. Once on patrol, as we have stated previously, they will be taught by experienced peers to be constantly careful and suspicious towards citizens, in other words, to keep a certain distance with the public, and to think about their own safety first.

By contrast, English police forces are looking to hire mature people with life experience and communication skills. During police training, listening and communication skills will be further developed since their tongue will be the most important tool to sort out all sorts of conflicts. Trainers will also look to enhance their ability to individual reflexivity and sensible discretion (to gain autonomy and be prepared for independent patrol²¹). Thus, trainees will get a better knowledge and understanding of the community they will “serve” (rather than “control”).

Overall, it appears with some force that the socio-historical construct of policing in England and the resulting actual English police forces fit much convincingly (and intrinsically) with the philosophy of community policing than the French socio-historical construct of policing and notably the French *police nationale*.

²¹ French police officers never patrol on their own.

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