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Leaving 'home'? Belonging, break-up, and becoming in the police family

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Abstract

This article considers the impact of police merger processes on officers and staff. The Railway Policing (Scotland) Act 2017 legislated that the Scottish functions and personnel of the British Transport Police (BTP) would be integrated into Scotland's national police force. The journey towards this destination, however, has been protracted, problematic, and now appears to be indefinitely postponed. Demonstrating the limits of the 'police family' our research provides important policy insights, demonstrating how a failure to account for distinct organisational cultures and occupational identities can damage the legitimacy of police mergers. Using data from a survey of BTP officers and staff in Scotland we present our findings across three themes: belonging; break-up; and becoming. We refract these findings through Bourdieusian theory.

Overview

Drawing on the rhetorical device of the 'police family', this paper explores the proposed merger of the Scottish division of the British Transport Police (BTP) into Scotland's national police force, Police Scotland. The paper examines the impact of the merger process upon the cultures, dispositions, identities and outlooks of BTP Scotland officers and staff and discusses the policy implications. The analysis is based on data from an online survey of BTP Scotland officers and staff undertaken in early 2018, at which point the Scottish Government remained committed to full integration of the Scottish division of the BTP into Police Scotland with a deadline of April the following year. The survey examined the impact of the merger—as a policy, legislative commitment, change process and emerging organizational reality—on the Scottish workforce, on the BTP as an organization and on Scottish and British policing more widely. Whilst focussing on Scotland, the evidence and analysis in this paper is also relevant to prospective organizational mergers in other jurisdictions where police and criminal justice reform are part of the political agenda. As Mendel et al. (2017: 12) note, attempts to evaluate police mergers 'tend to be quite pragmatic in character, using conventional tools like cost-benefit analysis, quasi-experiments and bench marking' and 'often overlook the symbolic and rhetorical significance of mergers'. Addressing this lacuna, our research emphasizes the symbolic aspects of the BTP merger and how the process appeared to reinforce the organizational and occupational identities held by frontline officers and staff.

The findings show that most officers and staff felt a strong sense of attachment to the BTP, articulated variously as 'being BTP' and, in terms of belonging to a specialist organization and railway policing family, separate to other policing agencies. Viewed through this lens, officers and staff understood the merger as a threat across multiple levels. At an individual level, the merger represented a direct threat to the 'BTP' identity of officers and staff. At the industry level, respondents raised concerns about the future of a dedicated railway policing specialism in Scotland, predicting that it would be diluted within Police Scotland. Respondents also viewed the merger as a threat to the continued existence of the broader BTP as an organization and exacerbated the long-standing political vulnerability of the force. Looking at the implications for the merger itself, a strong sense of specialist occupational identity among the BTP workforce suggested that successful integration was unlikely, at least in the short to medium term. Instead, an existing 'them and us' culture between the respective

forces, coupled with the disparity in their respective sizes, translated into a sense of loss and apprehension amongst the BTP workforce, alongside significant pessimism and low morale.

To deepen the analysis further, the paper then refracts these findings through a Bourdieusian lens, which, against a backdrop of prolonged and fundamental transformational change, highlights the destabilization of habitus amongst the BTP workforce. With little evidence of willingness to become part of Police Scotland, the analysis also demonstrates the clear boundaries of 'familial' identity in policing and the limitations of the ideological concept of the 'police family' within the broader field of policing. We argue that the reconfiguration in the underlying power relations in the field of policing, as brought about by the proposed merger, created widespread anxiety amongst the BTP workforce and a crisis of identity that can be understood as a form of habitus clivé (Bourdieu 2000). In doing so, we make contributions to the literatures on policing and organizational reform not only in terms of policy insight but also in advancing broader debates on identity, belonging and culture in policing.

Background

The BTP provides specialist police functions to the rail network and various underground, tram and light railway systems in England, Wales and Scotland. Its roots can be traced to the period of Peelian police reform in the early 19th century, although the organization's heritage is more clearly attributable to the formation of the British Transport Commission Police in 1949. The Scottish Parliament was not established until 50 years later, yet it would be an act of that political legislature that signalled the end of the line for the idea of a 'British' Transport Police. The Railway Policing (Scotland) Act 2017 legislated that the Scottish functions and personnel of the BTP would be integrated into Scotland's national police force, Police Scotland, the latter having only been established in 2013 and still undergoing the process and pains of reform.

The intention of the Scottish Government to legislate in this area should not have come as a surprise to interested observers. The devolution of further powers to Scotland following the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence included that the functions of the BTP would become a devolved matter (Smith Commission 2014: 21), and the policing of railways and railway property was subsequently included in the Scotland Act 2016. Recognizing and respecting the Smith Commission recommendations and the subsequent 2016 Act, the BTP and the BTP Authority (BTPA), the latter of which oversees the BTP, outlined three options for future devolution of transport policing in Scotland. Only one of these recommendations, known as 'full integration', was progressed by the Scottish Government, namely 'breaking up BTP and absorbing its Scottish operations into Police Scotland' (British Transport Police 2015: 5), a policy option that became enshrined in the Railway Policing (Scotland) Act 2017.

In the run up to and following the passage of the 2017 Act, the complex and largely unanticipated challenges encountered in delivering this option, compounded by an ambitious timescale, prompted expressions of caution from practitioners, as well as strong criticism from politicians and other stakeholders (see BBC News 2018; HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland 2017; House of Lords Hansard 2018; Scottish Parliament 2018). Initially, the Scottish Government commitment to the wholesale extraction of the Scottish functions, property and personnel of the BTP and their insertion into Police Scotland resisted derailment. However, against a backdrop of increasing costs and operational difficulties, ongoing calls for a rethink gained traction following a mid-2018 Scottish Government cabinet reshuffle that included a change in the minister responsible for delivering the policy. This tentative change in political appetite was galvanized by the intervention of Police

Scotland's new chief constable, who warned of the complexity of the project and of risks to public safety. In September 2018, newly appointed Justice Minister Humza Yousaf announced that full integration would be paused and alternative options considered. In July 2019, such an alternative option was tentatively implemented as the Scottish Government announced the establishment of the Scottish Railways Policing Committee. Existing as a sub-committee of the BTPA under the existing UK-wide Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003, the Scottish Railways Policing Committee aimed to improve accountability and facilitate a stronger role for the Scottish Police Authority in relation to railway policing in Scotland while retaining transport policing functions within the BTP. At the time of writing, this new arrangement is subject to a bedding-in period and will be reviewed to assess the extent to which the arrangement delivers upon and secures the devolution of railway policing in Scotland in lieu, at least currently, of full integration.

The aftermath of the 2014 referendum through to the current political compromise represented an unprecedented period of uncertainty and instability for the BTP, its officers and staff based in Scotland, along with retired officers, whose pensions could potentially be affected. Whilst the current arrangement provides more stability for the BTP than the previous commitment to full integration, it is not a firm resolution. As noted above, the Scottish Railways Policing Committee is still subject to review, while the 2017 Act remains on the statute book in Scotland, albeit not commenced, with the Scottish Government refusing to definitively rule out full integration at a future point (Murray and Atkinson 2018).

Study and Research Methods

This paper uses data collected via an online cross-sectional survey disseminated to police officers and civilian police staff in BTP 'D' Division (which covers Scotland only) in early 2018, at which point the Scottish Government remained committed to full integration. The research project sought to address a significant data gap in relation to the proposed merger and to inform the unfolding political and public debate. Murray drew on funds from an ESRC Outstanding Early Career Impact award, while Atkinson undertook the study as part of his employment at the University of the West of Scotland. The online survey itself comprised of 35 questions and was structured across four categories: participant background; participant service history and experience at the BTP; participant reflections on their current role and participant views and feelings about the merger. Reflecting the central tenets of non-probability convenience sampling (see Bryman 2016: 187), the survey was distributed via email to BTP Federation members (the staff association for police constables, sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors) based in Scotland and through additional contacts to reach officers in other ranks, members of the special constabulary and civilian police staff. The survey was open for a ten-day period, during which we sent follow-up reminders and prompts to survey intermediaries. Additionally, following the principles of snowball sampling (Bryman 2016: 188) recipients were encouraged to further distribute the link to the survey to colleagues in D Division.

The survey elicited a high response rate (66 per cent), with 182 individual responses from officers and staff in D Division, representing different roles, ranks, length of service and experience. Of those who stated their role and rank (n = 170), 77 per cent were officers, 16.5 per cent staff and 6.5 per cent special constables. Among the officer sample (n = 131), 72.5 per cent were constables, 18 per cent sergeants, 8 per cent inspectors and 1.5 per cent chief inspectors or above. The length of service (n = 172) ranged up to 5 years (36 per cent), 6–10 years (16 per cent), 11–20 years (31 per cent) and 21 years or over (17 per cent). Most respondents were Scottish (85 per cent) and just over one-fifth (21 per cent) had worked in other forces. The survey comprised of closed-ended questions, including both

multiple choice and Likert-scaled questions, as well as open-ended questions that allowed for less structured but more individual and detailed qualitative responses. Applying thematic analysis to the qualitative data, we identified three key themes—belonging, break-up and becoming—that resonated with existing literature on the police family and cultural belonging, as well as themes that were unique to the research context, such as anger and mistrust. Quantitative analysis was undertaken using SPSS and significant results are reported at the 0.05 significance level (meaning the finding has a 95 per cent chance of being true). This paper draws principally, but not exclusively, upon the qualitative responses and presents an analysis of this data across our three key themes that situate the data in the context of the construct of the police family.

Analytical framework

The paper is structured across the three key themes that emerged directly from the research findings, specifically from the spontaneous invocation of ‘police family’ and similar motifs by respondents. Each theme is conceptually rooted in the police studies and relational sociology literatures and their considerations of cultural identity, socialization and social change (see Emirbayer 1997; Bourdieu 1998; Loftus 2009; Charman 2017; Bowling et al. 2019). The concept of the ‘police family’ was initially popularized in the late-1990s in England by Sir Ian Blair in his efforts to firmly locate and define the role of the police service within a rapidly developing and increasingly plural policing landscape (see Blair 2007; 2009). Yet, despite a decade of subsequent use and influence, the term remained ‘surprisingly ambiguous’ (Johnston 2007: 134). Since this appraisal, the concept has transformed further. As a rhetorical device imbued with ideological meaning, the police family, as per its original conception, is still used as a representational device to structure the wider policing landscape beyond the police service. Importantly, however, the ‘police family’ has also been applied within the police service to capture the symbolic violence and masculine domination associated with traditional policing outlooks; e.g. with particular forms of patriarchy (see Atkinson 2017). Less critically, but equally usefully, Brough et al. (2016), in their assessment of the key dimensions of contemporary police organizational culture in an Australian force, view the ‘police family’ as the dominant characteristic of the prevailing police culture:

The concept of the ‘police family’... describes the collective identity that exists between officers as a result of shared experiences that create a common understanding that ‘police are the only people who understand police’. (Brough et al. 2016: 31).

Reframing traditional tropes in the literature on police culture, Brough et al. note that participants in their study discussed the importance of acceptance into this family and how it produced loyalty, cohesion and collective identity in a potentially dangerous working environment. More recently, and also in an Australian context, du Plessis et al. (2020), in their analysis of gender and professional identity construction in police officers, noted how both men and women police officers disclosed kinship and belonging as part of ‘the blue family’, albeit a family characterized by both belonging and dysfunction. Building on these observations, our work further engages with and expands upon the concept of the police family, specifically examining the limits of the concept as a means to understand power, identity and difference in the field of policing. This engagement is enhanced through an engagement with the conceptual toolbox bequeathed by Pierre Bourdieu, and in particular his concept of *habitus clivé*, to help explain the cultural identity crisis and destabilized sense of belonging experienced by BTP officers and staff as a result of the proposed merger.

Belonging

The idea of 'belonging', particularly as related to identity, has been central to sociological inquiry since the early development of the discipline, as well as the focus of more recent empirical inquiry and theoretical analysis (see Savage et al. 2005). 'Belonging' defines both what one has in common with one's own 'in-group' and what differentiates one from 'others' and, thereby, renders the concept a critical element and site of identity politics. Resonating with Bourdieusian attempts to bridge the gap between structure and agency in accounting for political, cultural and social outcomes, Vanessa May (2011) argues that belonging provides a 'person-centred and dynamic approach that avoids reifying social structures', instead depicting structure as 'actively lived':

Belonging is therefore more than just an individual feeling – it is also a hotly contested political issue with collective consequences... Belonging can thus have both an emotional component of 'feeling at home' or 'yearning for a home', and a political element of claim-making for space and for recognition... (May 2011: 369).

Elsewhere, May broadens her analysis to understand how the family, as a widely shared and understood form of relational belonging, brings with it profound notions of one's own identity and place and how there is a tendency amongst people to seek out 'family-like' relationships, including in the broader context of the labour market (May 2013). May's analysis resonates firmly with policing, where the 'police family' is deployed at the macro level to maintain the centrality of the police service as the principal coordinating node in a rapidly reconfiguring and increasingly plural field of policing and at the micro level to foster kinship and belonging between officers (and to a lesser extent civilian police staff).

Belonging is also integral to, although often implicit in, studies of police culture; for instance, in the idea of brotherhood (Skolnick 2008). Literature on policing considers solidarity as a core characteristic of police culture (Bowling et al. 2019) that is produced through the perception of an ever-present danger 'on-the-job' and by creating by-products, defensiveness (Waddington 1999a; ,1999b), secrecy and a blue code of silence (Skolnick 2002; ,2008). Bowling et al. (2019) further elaborated upon how the mutual solidarity that is shared between police officers is created and maintained at a micro level: in the common challenges of shift work, erratic hours, organizational discipline and the need to rely on one another in a tight spot. Crucially, Bowling et al. (2019: 174) also noted the limitations of considering all police officers as participating in the same common culture, highlighting the 'many conflicts inside the police organization'. More recent research has magnified such conflicts, raising questions over the extent to which civilian police staff, as a unique category within the police workforce, participate in or are affected by police culture (Atkinson 2017). Indeed, if one (sensibly) accepts that there are schisms, divisions and differences inside each police organization, then it is perhaps unsurprising that larger cleavages and variations are apparent in the wider police occupation. As Reiner astutely observed in an earlier edition of *The Politics of the Police*:

The 'them' and 'us' outlook which is a characteristic of police culture makes clear distinctions between types of 'them' (and types of 'us') (Reiner 2010: 122).

Applying these ideas to our survey findings, BTP Scotland officers and staff repeatedly, and at times emotively, articulated the idea of 'belonging to' or 'being' BTP, evoking a distinct organization with its own history, traditions, symbols, language, values, norms, practices and goals. Resonating with Reiner's 'types of "us"', respondents conveyed a sense of belonging to a distinctive railway policing

family: to a unique community, with a particular position in the policing landscape, defined as 'other' to policing organizations and agencies beyond the BTP and, in particular, to Police Scotland.

Belonging to a specialist police force was articulated in terms of organizational pride and identity. As one respondent succinctly reflected upon the merger, 'We do not want to lose our identity' (Participant 61, police staff, 21–25 years' service). For others:

We are a well-run force. I am proud to belong to British Transport Police and have been for over 30 years or I would not have stayed. (Participant 167, police staff, 31 years' service or more)

I love being a police officer and despite stating flaws within BTP I take pride in being an officer for this organisation that I chose to join ahead of Police Scotland. I think if I wanted to be Police Scotland I might have already done something about [it] in my 10 years' service. I haven't, and I am being forced into this because of my passion for police work and the fact that working down south is not a viable option for me. (Participant 6, police officer, 6 to 10 years' service)

Strikingly, Participant 6 framed their hostility towards the merger in terms of not wishing to 'be' Police Scotland, a subtle indication of how the job is intimately intertwined with a specific force identity. Such feelings of pride, solidarity and mutual support also disclosed a tension between a particular and specific organizational commitment to the BTP compared to the wider police occupational culture. This is reflected in the following responses:

We will no longer be a part of BTP and so far I have enjoyed working in a tight knit organisation. (Participant 92, police officer, 5 or fewer years' service)

I will essentially not be in the job I applied to join post-merger through no fault of my own. (Participant 88, police officer, 5 or fewer years' service)

A series of closed questions on respondent's experiences of working for the BTP further supported the rich qualitative responses (the extensive length and detail of which can also be read as a proxy for the emotions felt by officers and staff). Over three-quarters (77 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that their work gave them a sense of personal achievement, 84 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the people in their team worked well together and 82 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they were proud to work for the BTP.

Belonging to a specialist police force with a distinctive policing ethos gave purpose, motivation, meaning and direction to BTP officers and staff and also translated into direct opposition or antipathy towards the merger. Tapping into inter-organizational boundaries and occupational differences between the two forces, one respondent stated that they 'take pride' in being a BTP police officer and 'truly enjoy coming to work' but 'do not want to be part of' Police Scotland, particularly given their perception of low morale and financial constraints within Police Scotland (Participant 103, police officer, five or fewer years' service). Respondents also referred to occupational bonds within the BTP and invoked familial themes to convey their antagonism towards, and anxieties about, the prospect of integration with Police Scotland:

I have worked in many different places over the years and this is by far the best bunch of people I have ever worked with. Being such a small force means that everyone either knows you or knows your

name. Everyone is very supportive and we all help one another out. I just know that that feeling – almost like being part of an extensive family – will be lost. (Participant 95, police staff, 5 or fewer years' service)

My line manager and colleagues have a great team spirit we all support each other and other colleagues in the BTP, we have a well-run department and our hard work has achieved this status. I enjoy my work immensely and it is going to be taken from us. (Participant 167, police staff, 31 years' service or more)

As we are a relatively small force in Scotland, a lot of my colleagues know each other and are not just a number. Morale has been dented over the last year or so due to the uncertainty of this merger, and colleagues have come together to support each other in this difficult time. Team working has been important and the thought of breaking up as a force and losing this expertise, knowledge, community spirit so to speak, would be scandalous to the members of the public, train companies [and] rail staff as well. (Participant 68, police officer, 11 to 15 years' service)

Respondents also articulated belonging in terms of an affinity with the rail environment that contrasted with territorial or mainstream policing. In this respect, the feeling of being specialists in a unique, challenging and often exceptionally dangerous environment provided particular meaning and purpose:

We understand the environment within which we police, we understand our railway community, we are experienced in this environment and we are a professional, dedicated, well-equipped, police force. (Participant 143, special constabulary officer, 5 or fewer years' service)

We all choose to join BTP for a reason – we are all proud to serve the rail network. We may not cry out from the roofs what we are doing but we are a strong unit with experience that is not understood outwith the industry. (Participant 130, police officer, 16 to 20 years' service)

For some, the occupational insecurity prompted by the merger process, coupled with threat to closely held identities, prompted significant life and career choices, perhaps most notably individual decisions to relocate to other BTP divisions elsewhere or to retire from the force altogether.

We will discuss the concept of Bourdieu's *habitus clivé* in more depth in our discussion section; however, it is worth signposting here the importance of *habitus*, and its cleft form in particular, in understanding and explaining the impact of this prospective merger process on the identities of BTP officers and staff in Scotland. In her overview of Bourdieusian *habitus*, Diane Reay (2004) understands *habitus* as a complex interplay between the past and the present. Our argument is that the coalescing conditions around the merger process destabilized the *habitus* of those officers and staff, a *habitus* rooted in the occupational history of each individual and their ongoing socialization within the BTP 'family'. As a result, several officers and staff considered the merger a threat to their own 'BTP' identity within any future 'merged' organization. This anxiety was compounded by concern for the very existence of a dedicated railway policing specialism in Scotland and beyond, with the strong expectation that this specialism would be diluted and lost within Police Scotland and, as discussed next, that the wider BTP organization would eventually be dismantled.

Break-up

The proposed break-up of the BTP in Scotland both confirmed and exacerbated the long-standing political vulnerability of the BTP. Earlier attempts to incorporate BTP functions into regional forces included the Metropolitan Police Service in 2004 and a proposal by Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive to replace BTP with Merseyside Police. A succession of reviews from the 2000s onwards also considered whether railway policing functions should be undertaken by regional forces or at a national level. While the fact of the respective reviews underscored the susceptibility of the force to a takeover, in each case, key stakeholders expressed their support for a specialist, separate railway policing force.

In 2001, the UK Government stated it considered 'the national railway network is best protected by a unified police force providing a dedicated, specialist service and able to give proper priority to the policing of the railways' (Department for Transport 2002: 8). In 2004, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) stated that integration with one or more forces '...would unquestioningly lead to a dilution of the specialist service given to the rail industry and its public users and, most probably, would lead to a significant reduction in the number of police officers and police staff left to police the network' (HMIC 2004: 4.11). In the same year, a Department for Transport review concluded that BTP should not be merged with Home Office forces and should continue as a specialist railway force, stating that 'The British Transport Police is not a Home Office Force, and nothing we have heard suggests that it should become one. The railways are a specialized environment, with specialized needs, and need a specialized Force...' (Department for Transport 2004: 7.2). This was echoed in a subsequent House of Commons Transport Committee (2006) review on the Metropolitan Police Service takeover proposal, which found no evidence of detailed plans for assuming the BTP's function, no evidence of local consultation, no shortcomings in the current arrangements and no evidence to support the assertion that amalgamation would lead to cost savings and that the Metropolitan Police Authority had not considered the impact on the remaining BTP. In 2006, the BTP proactively published a paper outlining the case against integration with one or more of the Home Office forces. Furthermore, in 2011, an independent study detailed a range of risks associated with the transfer of BTP functions to one or more Home Office forces, including degradation of service, loss of access to senior police officers via the BTP command structure, a loss of 'proactivity, commercial and operational knowledge and overall responsiveness' and dilution of railway policing priorities (AECOM 2011).

That a wide body of evidence and expert opinion supported the retention of the BTP as a British-wide force (Hamelin and Spenlehauer 2014) was not lost on BTP Scotland officers and staff, many of whom, in the absence of a business case for full integration, considered the merger to be motivated principally by the politics and ideology of the governing Scottish National Party (SNP). Also, pertaining to the relatively narrow politics of policing, some respondents viewed the merger in terms of wider constitutional politics as part of a move towards solidifying a unique Scottish political identity to the detriment of its British counterpart:

This merger is motivated by political nationalism and a desire by [Scottish] Government to have centralised control of all aspects of public service in Scotland. At no time has Scottish Government, or anyone else for that matter, provided any sound evidence that there is any business case for the merger to take place. (Participant 1, police officer, 26 years' or more service)

The stress levels put upon officers involved in this merger are unbelievable and should never have been allowed to happen. The lack of information from all sources is unacceptable and I believe that

the only reason for this merger is a political ideology of the SNP due to the word British [in the force name]. (Participant 75, police officer, 11 to 15 years' service)

In short, I don't think full integration is the way forward. It's nothing more than politicians becoming involved in issues they know nothing about. It's a nationalist agenda from [the] SNP and is purely politically motivated to strip British identity from Scotland, and it doesn't make sense nor is it fair on the public and taxpayer. (Participant 180, police officer, 3 to 5 years' service)

While framed in terms of politics of national identity, the detailed arguments and comments underpinning such concerns nonetheless coincided with those raised in with earlier reviews of the BTP. In particular, several participants viewed the merger as an existential threat to the remainder of the force, leaving it vulnerable to further disintegration by dint of further amalgamations with other territorial forces:

This will be used as a test case for possible integration down south and it is my fear that a proud force such as BTP will cease to exist. It is not lost on me that we have been involved in [policing] 2 of the 3 biggest terror attacks Britain has ever seen. In which officers from D division played a crucial role in [policing]. I fear that in a few years my colleagues down south will go through similar stresses and strains [as] we currently are. (Participant 84, police officer, 11 to 15 years' service)

I think the merger would in all likelihood spell the potential end for BTP as an organisation as it may open up the flood gates for possible integration by other forces throughout the UK. (Participant 177, police officer, 6 to 10 years' service)

There are no advantages to this ill-informed, totalitarian disintegration of the BTP. The disadvantage is that it will ultimately lead to the demise of the BTP and BTPA. (Participant 164, police officer, 21 to 25 years' service)

Broadening these pessimistic perceptions of BTP policing practitioners beyond the policing field, they resonate with Deering and Feilzer's (2015) survey of probation practitioner's attitudes towards changes introduced under the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda on the probation service and the destructive impact on the 'probation ideal'.¹

In reference to immediate operational implications, most respondents believed that breaking up the single jurisdiction would create new risks for routine policing on both sides of the border, given that the existing arrangements hinged on seamless and effective communication systems and established operating practices and priorities across Great Britain:

I think the loss of BTP Scotland as an 'end location' will have a detrimental effect on rail industry/customer confidence and that BTP England may suffer as a result. I believe Police Scotland priorities are different to BTP priorities. (Participant 60, police staff, 26 years' or more service)

If/When the merger goes ahead I think this will result in the BTP being affected down south. The seamless way in which the BTP operates at as a whole will be ripped apart and destroyed. I think it is going to cause confusion for train operating companies and the public. (Participant 11, police officer, 5 or fewer years' service)

If and when this occurs BTP will be a memory in a few years and railway policing will be of far less quality than the current model. (Participant 131, police officer, 11 to 15 years' service)

Relatedly, respondents highlighted the risks associated with the transfer of railway policing responsibilities to a territorial force with no knowledge of this specialism and concomitant loss of effective working relationships and skills. One respondent stated that integration would signal the 'loss of work colleagues who you have built up good working relationships throughout the years' (Participant 96, police staff, five or fewer years' service), while another lamented the prospective loss of 'a lot of skilled officers due to merger' (Participant 159, police officer, five or fewer years' service). As other participants reflected:

This is a qualification that you need to be using on a daily/weekly basis or else you forget the basics to keep you and others safe. It is a very dangerous working environment and not one that can be learned on a two or three day course. It took me years to fully understand and [I] am proud of the work I have done. (Participant 130, police officer, 16 to 20 years' service)

[Police Scotland] will no doubt want to bring their own unique style of management to the running of any railway division or whatever they decide to call it. This of course will be a disadvantage; they have no knowledge of policing the railway and the difficulties of a moving crime scene or the importance of trying to keep the network moving. (Participant 20, police officer, 11 to 15 years' service)

Respondents also commented on how the merger would impact on special constables and civilian staff. Noting the distinctive BTP rank structure for special constables—which unlike other territorial forces, extends to the rank of Special Chief Officer—several respondents suggested that the merger was likely to adversely affect their role, status, function and deployment. One special constable stated that they expected to be 'treated as another number' under a merged force, that their unique skills would not be recognized and that they would 'no longer being solely responsible for policing the railways a role which I love' (Participant 143, special constabulary officer, five or fewer years' service). The impact of the merger process on special constables and civilian staff was widely recognized:

Civilian staff will be lost, whether it [is] immediate or over time. It may be exclusively BTP civilian staff, or they [Police Scotland] will use the BTP staff to fill roles of their own natural wastage. (Participant 111, police officer, 16 to 20 years' service)

BTP will lose a lot of Special Constables. No one knows if Special Constables will be automatically taken over. [We have] Not been told anything although the questions I am sure have been asked. BTP is a family and a team and all work together... (Participant 149, special constabulary officer, 5 or fewer years' service)

I transferred over to BTP from Police Scotland in 2016 and it was the best move for a number of reasons. I don't want to go back the way but it is what it is. If it happens so be it. Just got to accept it and get on with it. I did not feel appreciated as a Special in Police Scotland like I did in [Scottish police force prior to Police Scotland] and as I do now in BTP. Very much seen as part of the team [here] and no[t] just a Special. (Participant 149, special constabulary officer, 5 or fewer years' service)

For many respondents, the unsettling prospect of a merger spanned several years. Nearly a third stated that they were aware of the Scottish Government's intentions to integrate BTP Scotland as

early as 2013, while 81 per cent were aware by 2015. Infrequent and uninformative communications across the fields of politics and policing further exacerbated the uncertainty:

The communication throughout has been woefully lacking. Two years of talks I am unsure what, if anything, has actually taking place. (Participant 70, police officer, 16 to 20 years' service)

The vacuum of information is filled with rumour and hyperbole which tends to affect morale. (Participant 31, police officer, 21 to 25 years' service)

It took until June 2018—nearly a decade after the Scottish Government raised the potential for integration of the BTP in Scotland with the UK Government and more than two years after work on the integration programme began—for Scottish Government officials to meet face-to-face with BTP officers and staff and listen to, let alone begin to satisfactorily address, their long-standing concerns. Moreover, without meaningful reassurances that terms and conditions would be maintained in the long term and no sense of commonality or parity between the two forces, as the next section explains, the likelihood of BTP officers and staff identifying with or 'becoming' Police Scotland following the merger seemed remote.

Becoming?

In 2001 Janet Chan noted the paucity of systematic studies of the processes of police socialization, particularly compared to similar literatures in other fields of practice (Chan 2001: 114). Building on the existing trajectory of studies on police socialization, from Van Maanen to Fielding, and drawing on both theory and empirical data, Chan established the 'making' of police officers as a subject of inquiry. Using a Bourdieusian framework, she argued that the complexity, contingency and diversity of the socialization process in her Australian study was due to changes in the wider field of policing, reflecting the active nature of the individual as nested within a wider field of social relations, with its own particular pressures and conditions that shape the individual and is reciprocally shaped (Chan 2001: 130–31). Chan's focus on police officer recruits has continued to be of interest to researchers. In her recent book-length study, based on a four-year longitudinal study of police officer recruits in an English police force, Sarah Charman (2017) analysed the socialization of new officers into police culture and identity, a process of 'becoming blue' within which the idea of police family is considered integral to understanding bonding, teamwork, solidarity and comradeship. The BTP merger provided a unique opportunity to apply and further develop the literature in this area.

The challenges of sustaining organizational identity through a merger process are addressed in management studies literature. Rolf van Dick et al. (2006) observe that job insecurity alone cannot account for the negative effects of mergers on well-being and work attitudes. Instead, they argue that one must consider how the threat to organizational identity posed by a merger also impacts upon the individual and the collective identities of employees, whose own motivations, self-esteem and commitment may be bound up in the work they do, as well as the overall strategic orientation of their organization:

Theoretically, it can be expected that mergers per se should alter an employee's identification because a merger essentially redraws or dissolves the category boundaries of two distinct groups within the newly created merger entity. Thus, mergers inherently threaten the distinctiveness of the pre-merger group identity and, consequently, sub-group identification should increase at the expense of identification with the post-merger entity... (van Dick et al. 2006: S71–S72)

Crucially, the impact of post-merger identification is politicized, insofar as there is an unequal distribution of power and, concomitantly, a lack of collective belonging. In practice, the negative effects of any merger are likely to be stronger for the members of the organization of 'lesser vitality': in this instance, BTP Scotland, which, given the disparity in size and direction of change, was unlikely to influence the dominant post-merger identity. Van Dick et al. continue:

Conversely, the dominant merger partner should be able to secure greater continuity of identity-defining characteristics in the course of merger integration, thus increasing the chances that its members will identify with the post-merger entity compared to members of the dominated partner' (van Dick et al. 2006: 572).

Echoing these dynamics, respondents in our study articulated a 'them and us' tension between the two forces, recognizing that the Police Scotland identity would dominate in the post-merger landscape. One respondent expressed a fear of 'becoming lost as one of 17000 as opposed to one of 250' (Participant 170, police officer, 16 to 20 years' service). Others referred to the 'feeling of not being valued' (Participant 30, police officer, 16 to 20 years' service) under the new integrated arrangements and concerns were raised that 'we may be looked upon as being underqualified' despite receiving the same initial training (Participant 180, police officer, three to five years' service). Respondents expressed apprehension in relation to promotion prospects and the risk of being 'further down the pecking order for progression than Police Scotland officers' (Participant 66, police officer, 6 to 10 years' service). Participants were also reticent and negative about practical issues, such as training and development, linked to deeper issues of identity and belonging:

Feel as though I'll be overlooked for any future training in favour of other [Police Scotland] officers. (Participant 114, police officer, 21 to 25 years' service)

We will be swallowed up... and probably forced to remain working on the railway as 'Transport Police Scotland', 'Police Scotland Transport Division', 'Scottish Railway Police', 'Station Cops', who knows what other names. (Participant 27, police officer, 16 to 20 years' service)

There is still a loss of identity and a feeling that we will be treated as 2nd class within Police Scotland. (Participant 76, police officer, 26 years' or more service)

Low workforce morale, prompted by the prospect of the merger, also reduced the likelihood of successful organizational change or 'becoming' a properly integrated Police Scotland officer or staff member. As one officer commented, Police Scotland 'will have 200 cops working for them who don't want to work for them' (Participant 17, police officer, 6 to 10 years' service). For others:

Over the last two months I have seen morale in BTP taking a dramatic dip. This has occurred since [the Scottish Police Authority] announced that full integration would not be possible by April 2019. Since then nobody seems to have any answers relating to pensions terms and conditions, railway policing agreements, IT systems etc. Further, no one can tell officers how operational integration may look. Quite frankly it's an utter mess. (Participant 120, police officer, 26 years' or more service)

Police Scotland will be inheriting disgruntled, unhappy officers with morale as low as can be due to being forced into a merger that the majority of officers do not want and are happy being part of the

British Transport Police D Division (I can see many resigning or having to move elsewhere in the UK). (Participant 83, police officer, 11 to 15 years' service)

They will be inheriting a work force who do not want to be part of them, who are proud BTP officers and wanted to remain as such. (Participant 84, police officer, 11 to 15 years' service)

The most visceral rejection of identity change was, however, expressed in the outright refusal to transfer, with 64 per cent of respondents having given serious consideration to leaving because of the merger. For some, this meant leaving policing altogether, while, for others, it meant staying part of the BTP 'family' but in another geographic area:

I decided to leave, but long service, conscience and pride in what we have achieved so far means I will stay until last day. Leaving best crime and justice legacy of BTP Scotland is important to me. My name will be on it at handover. (Participant 53, police staff, 25 years' or more service)

If I had wanted to join Police Scotland or a Home Office force I would have done that 15 years ago. I value my current employment and I am well aware of how well treated I am as an employee so therefore have no intentions of merging into Police Scotland. I would sooner resign. (Participant 174, police officer, 11 to 15 years' service)

In my role I have a strong sense of loyalty to BTP as an organisation and the role I carry out within it. Having been previously with Police Scotland the organisation is too large and politically driven which would cause me to consider my future within policing as the values I attached to policing in Scotland no longer exists within the structure of that organisation. (Participant 72, police staff, 5 or fewer years' service)

Police forces in Scotland, just as elsewhere, have historically constructed their own identity in comparison to other police forces. In Scotland the strength of such identities can be traced to the strong historical roots of policing in local communities and resistance at local levels to the creeping amalgamation and reform that reduced the number of police forces from 89 in 1859, to a 'single service' in 2013 (Davidson et al. 2016). Police Scotland is not, of course, the only police force in Scotland, with the BTP, Ministry of Defence Police and Civil Nuclear Constabulary also operational as part of wider UK policing organizations. Nonetheless, Police Scotland was understandably perceived to represent, to the BTP in Scotland in particular, an organizational threat due to the inexorable amalgamation that has been manifest across centuries. This cumulative threat is compounded by politics both in terms of party politics, with Police Scotland perceived by some survey respondents as an organizational expression of Scottish nationalist identity, and in terms of policing politics, given that Police Scotland was perceived by many within Scottish policing to represent the projection of one Scottish police force—Strathclyde Police, the largest of the precursor forces—across the entire Scottish policing landscape (see Terpstra and Fyfe 2015).

Discussion

The preceding data and analysis ultimately demonstrate the boundaries of 'familial' identity in policing, as well as the limitations of the ideological concept of the 'police family' within the broader field of policing. Drawing on these observations, this section draws on Bourdieu's underused concept of habitus *clivé* to understand the crisis of identity prompted by the merger and to signpost lessons for prospective police mergers.

To properly understand *habitus clivé*, the concept needs to be located in the context of the more well-known relationship between field and habitus. Bourdieu dryly defines a 'field' as a network or configuration of objective relations between the positions of agents (Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 96). The allegorical device used to illustrate the concept of field is the metaphor of a game or a space of conflict and competition (Wacquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 17). Here, a field is a competitive arena, or social network of co-operation and conflict, in which agents manoeuvre to preserve their resources and improve their position in relation to others in the same space. Crucially for Bourdieu, the field is not a neutral stage or benign space that is acted upon; instead, it is an active force that shapes the outcomes of the game itself. Loïc Wacquant refers to the active force of the field as a 'specific gravity' (Wacquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 16–17), an invisible force that acts upon those within its sphere of influence. The concept of habitus is, thus, both a social process of becoming and of being—put another way, of identity formation and sustaining an identity—within a specific field. For Bourdieu, habitus can be understood as a 'feel for the game':

Having the feel for the game is having the game under the skin; it is to master in a practical way the future of the game; it is to have a sense of the history of the game. While the bad player is always off tempo, always too early or too late, the good player is the one who anticipates, who is ahead of the game. Why can she get ahead of the flow of the game? Because she has the immanent tendencies of the game in her body, in an incorporated state: she embodies the game. (Bourdieu 1998: 80–81)

As a social process, habitus is intimately linked to history and the development of cultural narratives. Habitus is history naturalized to become a form of cultural trajectory or an ideology that is shared and communicated between groups or classes. In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu sketched his vision of a cleft or 'tormented' habitus, *habitus clivé*, where he rejected criticisms of habitus as monolithic or unchanging:

I have many times pointed to the existence of cleft, tormented habitus bearing in the form of tensions and contradictions the mark of the contradictory conditions of which they are the product... (Bourdieu 2000: 64)

Elsewhere in *Pascalian Meditations* (Bourdieu 2000: 160), Bourdieu argues that, when a person's habitus shifts towards new, 'contradictory' conditions, the transition can effectively destabilize one's habitus, the consequences of which can include distress and a failure to successfully navigate the field or 'play the game'.

Viewed through a Bourdieusian lens, the political move by the Scottish Government to integrate the BTP into Police Scotland, the nation's still nascent single police service, can be understood as an attempt to significantly reconfigure the field of Scottish policing. Reflecting the deep-rooted sense of belonging and organizational identity held by BTP officers and staff—an identity shaped, respectively, by how they saw themselves (as a specialist national railway policing force) and how they did not see themselves (as Police Scotland officers and staff)—the impending break-up of the BTP caused anxiety and distress. In this way, the imminent reconfiguration in underlying power relations within the policing field resulted in a form of nascent *habitus clivé*, a destabilization caused by the early stages of unwanted change, as variously expressed in concerns about a two-tiered workforce and loss of identity. As one officer framed this:

I have spent almost a quarter of a century being a motivated and highly productive member of a highly professional and customer focussed organisation. Being dragged into the chaotic organisation that is Police Service of Scotland, with its many highly publicised controversies fills me with trepidation. (Participant 31, police officer, 21 to 25 years' service)

Appreciating the dispositions of BTP officers and staff from a Bourdieusian perspective—as an indication of an *habitus clivé* that emerged as the workforce was unrooted from the organizational and occupational foundations that anchored both meaning and belonging—the notion of family again comes to the fore, particularly when one considers the role of cultural capital.

Bourdieu contended that cultural capital is most easily, and diffusely, transmitted within the 'family' and is not to be easily converted into other forms of capital that accrue value in different fields (Bourdieu 1997: 54–55). Bourdieu was clear that cultural capital is best measured by the amount of time taken to acquire it, which itself speaks to the importance in policing afforded to experiential knowledge (see Atkinson 2017). In this respect, the anxieties of officers and staff also reflected concerns that the distinctive embodied and, to a lesser extent, institutionalized forms of cultural capital that BTP officers and staff had accrued would lose their currency under new arrangements. In particular, officers and staff anticipated a lack of appreciation in any new arrangements for the specialist skills and attributes of the BTP, as well as a loss of opportunities. As Workman-Stark (2017: 53) observed, threats to organizational identity within policing can come in different forms, including changing mandates and are 'often perceived as a loss rather than an opportunity'. It can be challenging to convert forms of capital or to deploy cultural capital from one field to another. Nevertheless, it is theoretically possible to draw upon cultural resources—cultural capital—acquired in one field in an attempt to exert influence or effect change in another (Hillier and Rooksby 2016: 395). In principle, therefore, this suggests that the BTP workforce could have become active agents of change in the reconfiguring field of Scottish policing, shaping the circumstances to favour their own *habitus* and forms of capital. Yet, in practice, the possibility of such field transformation understandably seemed remote to the existing BTP workforce—particularly given the aforementioned size and power disparity between the BTP in Scotland and Police Scotland—and failed to assuage their very real concerns for their futures, at least in the short and medium term.

Concluding Remarks

The BTP currently spans three nations and two legal systems. Policing 10,000 miles of track, at its broadest it is defined by the railway policing infrastructure and is rooted in a distinctive specialist policing ethos. Underpinned by a strong commercial imperative (Hamelin and Spencehauer 2014), BTP is also an unusual example of a wholly privately funded policing organization that has nonetheless maintained and strengthened its 'publicness' and public interest ethos (Hamelin and Spencehauer 2014: 433). As such, it is difficult to reconcile full integration into a territorial force with the fundamental operational principles of railway policing. Geographical borders do not sit easily with infrastructure policing and as former BTP Chief Constable Ian Johnston argues: 'the rail environment is not a series of discrete geographical locations. It is a complex network that must be policed as such'. (British Transport Police 2006: 3).

It is this unique arrangement that underpins the distinctive identity of railway policing and helps to explain, at least in part, the deep-rooted opposition of BTP officers and staff towards full integration. Respondents did not, as then SNP Member of the Scottish Parliament John Finnie maintained when the possibility of integration surfaced in 2011, see themselves as 'part of the Scottish policing family',

nor did their outlook resonate with Finnie's assertion that any merger would be viewed favourably by BTP officers (Adams 2011). Instead, the interplay of occupational and organizational identities that delineated the distinctiveness of railway policing within the wider field of policing prompted survey responses that invoked emotive familial themes about belonging, identity and apprehension as to their future roles.

At the time of writing, the long-term future prospects for the BTP in Scotland remain unclear. While the likelihood of full integration being resurrected appears remote, it cannot be ruled out, particularly given the ongoing potential for a second referendum on Scottish independence. It follows that to provide proper certainty for BTP officers, staff and retired personnel, and to secure the current policing jurisdiction, will require the underpinning legislation, which remains uncommenced, to be repealed (Murray and Atkinson 2019). Applied prospectively, while it is clear that the Scottish Government underestimated both the financial costs and operational challenges associated with the BTP merger, our analysis highlights how a failure to consider strongly felt organizational identities and bonds, as well as the value of cultural capital accrued over many years, alienated those whose experiential knowledge and skills successful integration depended upon. These are not abstract arguments: looking at police restructuring in Denmark, Holmberg (2010: 15) shows how reform 'led to a serious loss of competence on almost all levels' in part due to officers and staff being unwilling to relocate and in part due to those who did relocate lacking local knowledge. The analysis also provides a cautionary lesson on mergers undertaken for political reasons, in this case, to support ideas of nationhood, coupled with an erroneous and untested assumption that officers and staff saw themselves as part of the 'Scottish policing family'. Instead, the analysis underscores how the 'police family', like many families, experiences significant internal cleavages just as much as it provides an outward appearance of stability, cohesion and control.

Footnotes

1

Elsewhere, Deering and Feilzer (2019) explain the ‘lack of resistance’ to Transforming Rehabilitation via any extensive and unified effort to dissuade the government from its policy. While our survey research recorded the views and voices of the BTP workforce, our wider engagement with this matter—as a high-profile Scottish Government policy—highlighted to us the nuanced yet coordinated way multiple stakeholders coalesced to place pressure on the Scottish Government to reconsider this policy.

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