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Expanding the horizons of the criminological imagination

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Weather, Light and Darkness in Remote Island Policing: Expanding the Horizons of the Criminological Imagination

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The conceptual development of criminological scholarship has been inextricable with the city. This is particularly apparent in relation to policing, where foundational ideas about police work and culture are derived almost exclusively from research in cities. But how has the ubiquity of the urban context limited our criminological imagination? Drawing on a major ethnography of policing in two remote Scottish archipelagos, this paper explores how the remote island context brings new phenomena within the scope of criminological inquiry, illuminating the selectivity of its dominant preoccupations. It explores the centrality of (1) the weather, light and darkness and (2) immersion in the physical environment in the way island officers perceive the places, people and problems they encounter, and the implications for how they exercise state power.

KEY WORDS: policing, remoteness, islands, environment, weather, darkness

The history and identity of criminological scholarship has been closely connected to the city. Reflecting the association between the development of sociological theory and industrialisation (e.g. Farrugia 2014), the 'crime-city nexus' (Hayward 2004: 1) has dominated theoretical development. Following the influence of the Chicago School in particular, the city and city life have been at the centre of criminological inquiry, whether as, for example, a lens for exploring social life (e.g. Park *et al.* 1925), a site and cause of social problems (e.g. Burgess 1925; Shaw and McKay 1942), a place of transgression (e.g. Presdee 2000; Hayward 2004), or more generally as the normalised context for the identities and experiences captured in criminological research (for a conceptual review see Hayward 2004; 2012; Bottoms 2007). Consequently, thinking about crime and its control has been consistently underpinned by the urban context.

The omnipresence of the city is particularly apparent in relation to police research. The inceptions of sociological interest in policing were concerned almost exclusively with policing

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in urban areas[1]. Consequently, foundational ideas about the police role and culture have been derived from observational research on policing in large Anglo-American cities (see e.g. Banton 1964; Skolnick 1966; Bittner 1967; 1970; Westley 1970; Rubinstein 1973; Manning 1977; Van Maanen 1978; Holdaway 1981). The conceptual development of police scholarship has therefore been inextricable with its urban setting. But how has the ubiquity of the city context shaped what we think about when we think about policing? How has it limited our criminological imagination?

This paper explores these questions through a major study of policing in remote, small islands. In this approach, this research aligns with an understanding of islands as sites of 'innovative conceptualisations' (Baldacchino 2006: 166), illuminating the limitations of mainstream ideas and allowing for new insights (see e.g. Malinowski 1922; Mead 1928). In part, the longstanding attraction of islands as 'laboratories' for new ideas derives from their representation in western culture as isolated, bounded and singular entities. While this conception is now challenged by alternative understandings of the contingent relationship between land and sea (e.g. Hau'ofa 1993; Edmond and Smith 2003, and see below), the peripherality, landscapes and structures of social life in remote islands present a valuable contrast to the social and geographical context that dominates contemporary criminological thinking.

The aim of this research therefore is not to investigate island policing through the lens of the dominant traditions of police scholarship, but to explore the phenomena the island context brings within the scope of criminological inquiry. In this approach it departs from an important body of work which has recently drawn attention to the significance of the rural/remote setting for established themes of police research, including, for example, the logistical challenges it presents for operational policing (e.g. Rantatalo *et al.* 2020; Ruddell and Jones 2020); the distinctiveness of rural crime and community organisation (e.g. Jobes 2003; Donnermeyer 2015) and the modes of policing and police/community relationships that result (e.g. Jobes *et al.* 2004; Mawby and Yarwood 2011; Wooff 2017; Dwyer *et al.* 2021; see Souhami 2022 for a systematic review). This paper asks instead: if foundational police research had been conducted in remote islands rather than cities, what would we notice that we currently do not see?

In this paper, I explore this question in relation to the physical environment of remote island police work. As I will show, the elemental landscapes and extremes of climate in the island setting illuminate two previously unnoticed aspects of police experience.

First, it draws attention to the importance of the light, darkness and weather in understanding crime control in small islands. As I will show, these phenomena shape how officers understand the islands they inhabit, the risks they encounter, the relationships with local communities, and consequently structure what officers do. The claim of this paper is not that these phenomena are necessarily equally salient in all policing contexts or all criminological research more widely. Instead they illuminate the selective nature of phenomena that have captured criminological attention, and suggest how dominant modes of thinking have inhibited its imagination.

Second, attention to these phenomena bring into focus the importance of the physical environment more broadly in shaping the way officers think, and thus what they do. This suggests that attention to the surroundings in which policing is situated is important to our understanding of police work.

The interest of this paper therefore is not the more familiar criminological concepts of 'space' as an undifferentiated surface (Ingold 1993), or 'place' as a product of cultural meanings, identity and power relations (e.g. Girling *et al.* 2000, see Hayward 2012 for a conceptual review). Instead, following Ingold (e.g. 1993, 2011*a*) its focus is 'environment': a term intended to capture an immersive relationship between people and their surroundings. Attention to the

1 An exception to this early focus is the work of Maureen Cain (1973), whose seminal study of the differential power to define the police role compared a 'county' and urban police area. However, her focus was a comparison of pre-identified features of community structures and police organisation that could be compared across settings rather than a study of the rural context per se.

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environment in which policing takes place is curiously absent in police research, despite its relevance to core criminological concerns.

ENVIRONMENTS OF POLICING

From the inception of sociological interest in policing, researchers have explored how police officers 'develop distinctive ways of perceiving and responding to their environment' (Skolnick 1966: 39). A rich tradition of ethnographic research has shown how the pressures of police work encourage a 'patterned set of understandings' (Reiner 2010: 118) that help police officers manage the risks and uncertainties that they encounter in their work (for an overview, see Loftus 2009; Reiner 2010). To this end, research has shown how officers develop cognitive 'maps' (Holdaway 1981; Reiner 2010) of their social world, delineating those behaviours, places and people which they perceive to warrant police attention, and those which they do not (e.g. Bittner 1970; Van Maanen 1978; Shearing 1981). These forms of cultural ordering are particularly important given the significance of discretionary practice in frontline policing (Wilson 1968). Where officers choose to direct their attention, and what they choose to ignore, has important consequences for the exercise of state power and for those subject to it.

Throughout this research there are glimpses of the way officers' physical context shapes their perceptions of their social world. So, for example, the categorisation of people and groups as troubling incorporates expectations of the normative standards of behaviour appropriate to particular areas (e.g. Bittner 1967; Rubinstein 1973; Holdaway 1981; Herbert 1996). Further, particular areas may become the focus of disproportionate police attention, with officers concentrating in the 'mumpholes' (Holdaway 1981), 'skid-row like districts' (Bittner 1967) or, in a more recent formulation, 'hotspots' (e.g. O'Neill 2019) where people deemed to be problematic are clustered. However, the significance of the physical surroundings in shaping officers' perceptions remain implicit.

Instead, an early concern of police research to locate these patterns of responses in unique elements of police work—the 'outstanding elements in the milieu' which 'generate distinctive cognitive and behavioral responses' (Skolnick 1966: 39) – focused interest away from the physical environment of policing towards the people within it. In particular, research has illuminated how their capacity for the legitimate use of force confronts the police with an unpredictable form of danger deriving from encounters with people (e.g. Bittner 1970; Skolnick 1966). Consequently attention focused on these uncertain pressures rather than the 'more calculable risks of physical or environmental hazards' (Reiner 2010: 119) which are also experienced in other professions. As a result, the significance of the environment has been overlooked in police scholarship: officers' cognitive 'maps' have been extracted from their physical context. Even where the physical setting is ostensibly central to analysis of cultural practices, such as in Bittner's (1967) influential study of policing on 'skid row', it remains simply a backdrop to the structure of social life within it: we see little of skid row itself, or what it is that signals to officers that the responses required within it are 'completely different' (1967: 704) to other urban areas.

However, the experiences of officers as they navigate remote islands reveal with particular clarity that officers' perceptions of their social world cannot be separated from their surroundings. Instead, the way officers 'map' their environment and the social world it contains is shaped by their immersion within it.

PERCEIVING THE ENVIRONMENT

In its approach, this paper aligns with phenomenological perspectives on landscape which have recently received renewed attention in disciplines including anthropology (e.g. Ingold 2005;

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2008; 2011*a*), cultural geography (e.g. Wylie 2002, 2005; Rose 2006), interpretative archaeology (e.g. Tilley 2004) and visual arts (e.g. Morris 2011). While this approach incorporates a range of theoretical perspectives, in essence it aims to describe the world as it is experienced. Rooted in particular in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (1962), it has two central themes. First, it understands the body as the conduit of knowledge, experience and perception. By this understanding, human subjectivity cannot be separated from its embodiment[2]: as Tilley puts it, 'the body is not an object outside of consciousness but the only way of being present in the world and being conscious of it' (2004: 3). And second, as the lived body is always and inescapably immersed in the world, the self is 'intwined' (Merleau-Ponty 1962) or 'entangled' (Ingold 2008) in its environment. It is from this position of entanglement that people make sense of their world.

Four insights from this perspective are particularly useful here. First, it shows how the environment becomes meaningful through our physical immersion and engagement with it. As Ingold puts it, the landscape is

> …not a totality that you or anyone else can look at, it is rather the world in which we stand in taking up a point of view on our surroundings. And it is within the context of this attentive involvement in the landscape that the human imagination gets to work in fashioning ideas about it (1993, p171)

Second, it illuminates how the environment shapes how people think and feel as they move through it (Morris 2011). This concern connects with the concept of 'atmosphere' which has started to receive criminological attention (Fraser and Matthews 2019; Young 2019). This work shows how certain assemblages of spaces, people, objects and practices may generate a 'quality of environmental immersion' (McCormack 2008: 413) or 'spatialised feeling' (Fraser and Matthews 2019: 2): affective experiences which may appear 'ephemeral, loose and floating' (Shaw 2014: 89) may in fact be firmly grounded in place. Through their focus on affectivity rather than subjectivity (Wylie 2013: 135) these accounts emphasise the transpersonal, collective and contingent nature of atmosphere: they are 'autonomous from the bodies that they emerge from, enable and perish with' (Anderson 2009: 80); they are a 'propensity' (Bissell 2010: 273) with a 'potential to be felt' (Shaw 2014: 89). However, atmospheres have the potential to bring about profound affective connection and change in those moving within them. In the context of criminal justice, e.g., Young (2019) shows how affective atmospheres can be mobilised to exert power, creating 'environments that choreograph a range of spatial, affective and aesthetic attachments for citizens' (2019: 777).

My concern here is in the ways the environment is inextricable with and generative of our sense of self: it becomes part of the 'entwined materialities and sensibilities *with which* we act and sense' (Wylie 2005: 245, emphasis in original). In other words, it is by the physical experience of being immersed in their environment that people—including police officers—make sense of it and of themselves.

Third, the understanding of the environment as encountered through the body draws attention to the significance of sensory experience as a way of knowing about the world: a theme that has recently become applied to criminological contexts to illuminate important and previously unseen facets of crime and control (e.g. McClanahan and South 2020; Herrity *et al.* 2021; for anthropological perspectives see e.g. Pink 2015; Howes 2007; and see note two for a conceptual distinction with the phenomenological approach). While criminological attention has primarily focused on the built environment, work in the sociology of sport in particular has indicated the

2 This is a different understanding of 'embodiment' or 'emplacement' to that used elsewhere in sociology or anthropology, in which the sensations registered on the body become information to be cognitively constructed and interpreted (e.g. Howes 2007). Instead, in the phenomenological approach, 'consciousness is corporeal' (Tilley 2004: 3). For a discussion of this distinction, see Ingold 2011*b*.

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potency of the elemental world as a field of sensory immersion (e.g. Evers 2009; Humberstone 2011; Throsby 2013). This paper explores the importance of the sensory experience of the open world for the practice of policing.

Fourth, while the focus of the phenomenological approach discussed here is on landscape, it suggests a more expansive view of what constitutes an environment. By highlighting the centrality of immersion in physical surroundings, it draws attention to the importance of the weather, light and darkness. With few exceptions (e.g. Ingold 2005; 2008; 2011*a*) these phenomena have received little attention in social science. Yet as Ingold argues, our engagement with the environment is to a great extent an engagement with these phenomena. Rather than a static surface, the land is a zone of 'movement and flux, stirred up by wind and weather, and infused with light, sound and feeling' (2011*a*: 132). It is within this 'world in formation' (Ingold 2008) that life is lived. Consequently, weather is core to our lived experience: a transformative experience of sound, touch and sight in which we are immersed. Further, phenomena of the sky are not simply objects of our perception, but constitute the medium through which we perceive. So, for example, the sky itself enters visual awareness not as a 'scenic panorama' (Ingold 2005: 97), but as an experience of light through which we see. Feeling, hearing and seeing in the weather therefore is an 'experience of being – of a body that is open and alive to the world' (2005: 100).

In short, the weather, light and darkness are not simply scenery to the world of policing. Instead, as I will show, it is from their position of immersion within them that officers make sense of both their physical and social worlds.[3]

The following pages explore the effects of the weather, light and darkness on officers as they navigate the remote island environment, and their significance for officers' perceptions of the islands, communities and the risks they encounter. First, I set out the context for the research and the methodology through which it was produced.

CONTEXT: ISLANDS, ISLAND CRIME, ISLAND POLICING

The principal site for this research was Shetland, the most peripheral archipelago in the United Kingdom, located approximately 200 miles north of the United Kingdom mainland. Shetland is connected to the United Kingdom by a 12-hour ferry route to the North East of Scotland, over notoriously rough seas which can double the length of the journey. It is also reached by small propeller planes from mainland Scottish airports. Shetland has a population of approximately 23,000 people, the majority of whom live in the largest island, 'Mainland', with a third of the total population in the main town, Lerwick. It has four relatively large inhabited islands in the North of the archipelago (the 'North Isles') with populations between 60 and 1,000 which are joined to the Shetland Mainland by small ferries, and a number of scattered peripheral islands with populations as small as 20 which are reached by boat journeys of several hours, or by tiny four-seater planes.

Scottish islands differ significantly in demography, heritage, culture and geography. Further, due to the complex dynamics fostered by simultaneous subordination to and separation from a mainland, small islands frequently develop strong local identities (e.g. Grydehøj 2013). To explore the distinctiveness of island experience, research was also conducted in the Western Isles (also known as the Outer Hebrides or Na h-Eileanan an Iar). Located approximately 50 miles from the North West coast of Scotland, the Western Isles have a similar population size to Shetland, with 26,000 people living in 15 inhabited islands arranged in a chain approximately 180 miles long. Most of the population (approx. 21,000) live in the northmost, largest isle,

3 It is notable that the importance of the physical environment is suggested in other forms of cultural imaginings of policing, including media such as film and TV (including, e.g., the BBC police procedural series 'Shetland'). While these representations are often problematic, nevertheless by contrast they reveal the absence of such considerations in academic research.

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Lewis, with a third of the total population in the main town, Stornoway. Compared to Shetland, the Western Isles are relatively accessible to the UK mainland, which is connected by three commercial airports and several ferry routes along the island chain. The inhabited smaller isles are comparatively close to the population centres and accessible by causeways or by regular passenger ferries.

Crime rates in both island groups are very low, with the three remote Northern archipelagos (including the Orkney Islands) reporting the lowest recorded crime per capita in Scotland (offences per 10,000 population in 2019–20: Western Isles, 155; Orkney Islands, 159; Shetland, 212 (Scottish Government 2020)). Island crime is distinguished by its diversity, with issues ranging from antisocial behaviour and domestic abuse, to wildlife and marine crime, and drug trafficking by organised gangs. There is also significant potential for serious incidents: both archipelagos contain high profile, vulnerable sites, including commercial and industrial airports, ferry terminals, in the Western Isles a Ministry of Defence (MOD) Range, and, in Shetland, the largest oil and gas terminal in Europe.

At the time of the research there were between 35 and 40 police officers in each archipelago. In both island groups almost all police officers were based in the main town. This reflected broader processes of centralisation, with the closure of smaller police stations, medical services and schools in small isles and villages reflecting and propelling a population shift towards the centre. This was particularly pronounced in Shetland where only one officer was based outside Lerwick, responsible for all four North Isles. In both archipelagos the only specialist unit was a small CID (detective) team, including Child Protection and Offender Management (sexual offence) officers. All other specialist teams and services were based on the Scottish mainland and were imported into the islands when required. Like other remote and rural police services (e.g. Weisheit *et al.* 2005; Ruddell and Jones 2020) all other island officers were generalists, dealing with each incident from start to finish.

While most Western Isles officers were locals, in Shetland where there was no tradition of islanders joining the police service, all but two officers were transferees from the Scottish mainland, most of whom had previously worked in large cities. Much of the data in this paper explores the experiences of these officers as they encountered the island environment.

The research

The bulk of the fieldwork was conducted in Shetland from December 2016 to September 2017, with further periods of research in 2018 and 2019. Ten weeks' fieldwork was also conducted in the Western Isles during this period. Research involved two key strands. First, it explored policing in action through approximately 570 h of observation (approx. 400 in Shetland; 170 in the Western Isles) across all police roles and shifts, in all island locations, and across seasons. Observations were supplemented by formal, depth interviews with acting and former officers at all roles and ranks (approx. 40 h) and numerous informal interviews.

Second, research explored the experiences of island communities of both policing and of island life. This work was conducted in Shetland: specific activities included interviews with community members, local councillors and key workers; and focus groups with Community Councils (statutory voluntary groups, run by residents to act on behalf of their local area). More generally it involved living in the islands and participating in community activities, festivals and networks throughout the research period.

There was significant overlap with the two research strands: all officers were inhabitants of the islands and held dual positions as officer and community member, some with extended local families and histories. As such, their practical and perceptual engagement with their environment as officers were inextricable with their lived experience of the islands.

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As will be evident, I have not concealed the identities of the archipelagos in this paper. As I will show, the interaction between location and physical environment is central to island experience. Meaningful place anonymisation is both impossible and, for the purposes of this paper, undesirable: it acts as a technique of detachment which artificially extracts participants' experience from their surroundings (Szklut and Reed 1991; Nespor 2000). However, I have protected the identity of islanders and island officers by removing any characteristics which might identity them, including the names of small isles within the archipelagos, and have not differentiated between the two archipelagos unless it is relevant to the discussion.

This paper uses the terminology used in the islands: community members are described as 'islander' or 'local', and I have differentiated between both the archipelagos and the 'UK mainland' and the main islands in each archipelago and their 'small isles', peripheral islands which are both smaller in size and politically and culturally subordinate to the archipelagic centres.

The following pages are divided into two parts. The first explores the effects of the weather on officers' perceptions of the islands, communities and the risks they encounter. As I will show, these were frequently expressed in terms of the physicality of the weather and associated risks of danger, isolation and confinement. The second part moves beyond the seemingly physical impact of the weather to explore the less tangible effects of the light and darkness that underpin it.

First, I explore how the experience of remoteness that underpins all aspects of island life was itself structured by the weather.

EXPERIENCING REMOTE ISLANDS: THE WEATHER

While the archipelagos in this paper are officially classified as 'very remote' (Scottish Government 2016), within the islands the experience of remoteness was contested. In terms of physical distance from larger landmasses, remoteness was experienced as a relative concept. Compared to Shetland, officers in both island groups denied that Western Isles were remote at all: they were not only relatively close to and accessible to the UK mainland and other Scottish islands, but these could be seen from points of the archipelago which engendered a sense of proximity and connection. As one Western Isles officer put it, 'it is remote, but it's a nice remote, I can be at my Mum's [on the mainland] in the afternoon'. However, 200 miles and a 12 hour boat journey away, there was apparently nothing more isolated than Shetland: Western Isles officers felt it 'too remote': 'I couldn't do it, it's too far'.

In addition, the Shetland landscape makes visible its isolation. Due to centuries of deforestation the archipelago is almost entirely devoid of trees, and the bare, low-lying hills reveal vast expanses of seemingly unpopulated land: as a newly arrived officer put it, 'it's like the Wild West, there's no one there'. The landscape is abruptly truncated by steep cliffs, with the sea ahead empty of other visible landforms. Within the islands the sea dominates the landscape, intertwined with the land through 'voes' (inlets) that fringe the coastline. It can be seen, heard and smelled from every part of the archipelago, with the wind blowing the spray onto houses, land and people: a continual multisensory reminder that, in a common island phrase, islanders were 'stuck on a rock'.

Yet within Shetland the experience of remoteness was complex. The UK mainland loomed in the background as 'da Sooth' (the South), a detached and contested political entity (for further discussion of Shetland identity see e.g. Cohen 1987; Brown 1998). However due to its distance it retreated as a point of reference in the daily life of the islands (also Gibson *et al.* 2010). Instead, Shetland has its own 'Mainland', the largest isle and the political and cultural centre of the archipelago. Officers and islanders alike described Shetland as their 'world', as if they were 'in a bubble', an 'extended family'.

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Nor was the sea straightforwardly a source of separation. Instead, it was a primary mode of transport, connecting the islands within the archipelago and to mainlands.[4] It brought new arrivals, whether people, boats or animals: notable vessels were reported in the local paper, sightings of whales excitedly shared among island Facebook groups. The sea was also central to Shetland's identity and economy. Its situation at a crossroads of the Faroes, Iceland, Norway and Scotland historically resulted in a flow of trade and people to the islands, continuing in modern Shetland with a flourishing fishing industry and the largest oil and gas terminal in Europe bringing full employment and a constant influx of workers.[5] Rather than the insularity associated with remoteness therefore, islanders frequently described Shetland as 'cosmopolitan' and 'multicultural'. The sea was therefore a fundamental part of the archipelago, extending its boundaries to incorporate relationships beyond the islands (also Hau'ofa 1993).

Moreover, both officers and islanders pointed out that the wider world was easily within reach. If they wished to travel, the daily ferry and flights made the UK mainland accessible; satellite internet connections provided access to people and things. As a newly arrived, former mainland officer explained:

> It genuinely doesn't feel remote... See, with the technology, Facebook, internet and that, you can stick on Facebook and see what your friends are doing... everything you order on the internet, it'll be here in three days. The longest I've had to wait is a week.

There was therefore a duality in the experience of remote island life. Islands had the potential to feel small, distant and isolated, but also inextricable with the land and sea around them: in Hau'ofa's (1993) terms, they could appear both 'islands in the far sea', and 'a sea of islands'. The central factor to which perspective prevailed was the weather.

Remote island weather

Intense weather systems dominated life in remote Northern islands. As one Shetlander put it, 'Everyone in Shetland speaks about the weather. It's what we speak about'. Severe winds battered the islands, frequently reaching over 70 miles per hour: in the Western Isles winds sweeping over the Atlantic could reach 100 miles per hour. Any objects that were not secured—sheds, bins, roofs of houses—were blown away. People were lifted bodily by the winds, cars thrown across roads. The winds were deafening, even inside buildings: a Western Isles officer described how 'you can hear roof tiles like a Mexican wave' as the wind ripped through them. Storms caused damage, injury and, occasionally, fatalities as boats ran into difficulty and cars were swept into the sea. In Shetland thick fog was also an important aspect of island life throughout the year: in both summer and winter it descended suddenly, reducing visibility to a few feet.

Weather was integral to the experience of island life. The sudden onset of storms caused the cancellation of ferries and flights, roads became unpassable. Consequently, travel within or from the islands was always uncertain. In Shetland the boat to the UK mainland could take over 36 hours instead of 12; the (then) local flight operator, Flybe, was known locally as 'Fly Maybe'. Supplies, food and any visitors—including police support—could not be relied upon. Storms brought other forms of disconnection: winds brought down power lines, mobile and radio signal became sporadic, satellite internet connections cut out.

The openness of the landscape exacerbated the physicality of the weather, making officers continually aware of their bodily immersion within it. One Western Isles transferee from a

4 As well as the UK mainland, ferry services had until recently connected Shetland to the Faroes, Norway and Denmark.

5 Flows of workers to Shetland have recently renewed: in 2020 construction began on a large-scale wind farm, and the recent announcement of the planned development of a spaceport in the North of the archipelago is likely to bring further employment.

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mainland city said, 'If it's windy in the city I wouldn't notice it, going from building to building. But here, there's nothing, so you're feeling it, hearing it in your bed'.

Weather was therefore integral to officers' perceptual experience of the islands. As one put it, 'It could be the best place to live or the worst place to live. The one thing that separates it is the weather'. Consequently, the weather was also inextricable with the way officers understood their physical and social surroundings, and their own sense of vulnerability within them.

Weather and isolation

In adverse weather, remote islands became places of vulnerability. Severe weather systems and the uncertainty of their onset presented significant hazards for officers. Sudden changes in weather systems left officers at risk of being marooned, without means of communication. For example, during the research in Shetland an officer was stranded in small isle in a severe storm, with no radio or mobile signal. In the heavy rain his van became stuck in the mud and he had to walk in the dark for over three miles to the nearest house for support. As he described it: "I was spinning around in the wind. I walked, walked and walked. I couldn't breathe cos of the wind'. Officers feared being cut off from their colleagues, without support. One officer explained that in the large mainland city from where he had transferred, 'you always knew you could press the red button and give a shout, they would be there in two minutes max. Here, you have to rely on yourself.'

Beyond the immediate risks to officers however, in severe weather remoteness became both troubling and strongly felt. The sea was no longer seen as a source of connection, but of isolation. Officers' became acutely aware of their distance from the UK mainland. Shetland officers said, 'When the ferries are cancelled for two days, there are no aeroplanes coming for two days, it's all of a sudden, you are remote'; 'there's the physical remoteness, you're stuck out on the North Sea'. Rather than existing in a self-contained 'bubble', officers became aware of their separation from mainland police colleagues. Shetland officers frequently noted how, should a major incident occur, specialist support from the mainland could not be guaranteed. One officer said "We don't have that support. If something happens, it's just us. We don't have 6, 7, 8 police cars that just show up. We're stuck and remote'. Moreover, adverse weather brought into focus not just officers' physical distance from their colleagues, but their experiential separation. In both archipelagos, officers frequently said senior officers in Police Scotland did not understand the challenges of the remote climate: 'they don't have a clue. We can't get around, boats stop'; 'the [mainland] duty Inspector does not understand how important the weather is for us'. This contributed to a general feeling of isolation and abandonment by Police Scotland: 'You do feel you're ignored up here'; 'they don't think about us'.

Officers' experience of the remote environment was therefore strongly shaped by their immersion in the weather. Their perceptions of vulnerability shaped their categorisation of the island landscape. Peripheral settlements and small isles became places where officers could be trapped, and were avoided. Police stations and population centres became places of safety, warmth and familiarity and officers orbited around them.

Weather and confinement

As islands became seen as places of isolation, they also became experienced as places of confinement. The unpredictable onset of severe weather made the possibility of getting 'off island' uncertain. This was acutely felt by officers: as one put it, 'you feel like a prisoner'. Another explained:

> The problem you always have with Shetland is you're stuck here. See on your days off I can't just jump in a car and disappear to anywhere else for a while, this is it... you never get away.

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Yet the perception of confinement also made officers aware of their proximity with island communities. In other words, officers were not simply 'stuck on a rock', but were stuck on a rock together with the people they policed.

The dynamics of island police/community relationships are complex, and structured by cultural, political and socio-economic issues which are beyond the scope of this paper.[6] However, officers' perception of islands as places of shared confinement had two important effects on how they experienced their relationships with local communities.

First, the community became a source of vulnerability and risk. For lone officers in small isles, the potential for being stranded brought into focus the risk of being isolated with hostile people. In response, officers attempted to mitigate potential risks by fostering relationships with islanders, including those groups they deemed troubling. For example, one small isle officer explained: 'People crazy, people bigger than me, I want to keep them on side at every possible opportunity'. Another explained, 'you rely on the community to like you so they're not going to do anything to you'.

However, the perceived risks presented by the community were most commonly understood in terms of officers' social relationships. In small, isolated communities, officers and their families used the same shop, school and pubs as islanders, including those they had arrested. As one officer put it, 'up here, it's island life, the chances are you'll see that person again, they'll be seeing you in Tesco [supermarket]'. While similar role conflicts have been noted in policing small communities elsewhere (e.g. Cain 1973), in small islands these were exacerbated by the perception of physical confinement. Officers felt there was literally no escape from the people they policed. As one explained:

> This is it, the furthest you can go to is [small island] and even then somebody'll know you, guarantee there'll be somebody working in [the garage] or whatever it is that you went to school with or something like that.

Because of their shared isolation, behaviour that did not meet the expectations of islanders could therefore have social effects that were intensely felt. Officers and islanders alike feared being 'frozen out' by the withdrawal of social interaction: a sanction particularly powerful in isolated island communities. For example, an islander in a small isle said, 'If they (islanders) don't like you, they won't talk to you. Even in the shop, they won't talk to you. I've seen people being treated like that, and it's [sucks in breath]'. Consequently, officers were continually aware of the potential impact of their actions. A former city officer explained:

> On the [UK] mainland you could be short with a member of the public, you could get away with it. Here… you only do that once, and it's 'he was rude to me'....It makes you conscious of how you deal with everything, it makes you very conscious your reputation's on the line.

Second, at the same time, the perception of shared confinement appeared to bring with it a sense not only of shared space, but shared experience. As one officer put it, 'we live alongside the community'. While this understanding was undoubtedly connected to the interdependency of small island life more widely (e.g. Conkling 2007), it was reinforced by the sense of being isolated together. As a Shetland islander explained, the sense of being cut off from the rest of the world brought with it a feeling of being tied together.

6 The complexity of island police/community relationships and their interactions with island life and identity will be explored in forthcoming papers.

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> It's almost like we've got this invisible waa [wall] like a Perspex waa around wis [us] I think it's remoteness...It can be really wild and it can be really hard to get off.. you can get a hideous flight in or out if they're going and the boats are hideous in the winter too so it leads to a kind of... it's like a kind of a funny kind of glue.

As a result, officers could not easily distance themselves from island communities cognitively as well as physically. Instead officers' sense of shared experience deriving from mutual confinement appeared to encourage an understanding of the complexity of islanders' lives and experiences beyond their offence. So, e.g., a young man who assaulted officers while on drugs was 'a really nice lad', 'I see him with his girlfriend, he looks healthy'; serious drug users were described as 'spot on', 'an absolutely first-class guy, and excellent fiddle player'. More generally, the shared experience of island life appeared to generate a sense of shared humanity. For example, appalled at the poor quality of food given to those in police station cells, officers clubbed together to buy a prisoner a sausage supper.[7] As one officer put it, 'You just have to think, everyone could be your Mum, your Dad, your auntie, your brother'.

In this way, officers' perception of shared confinement with those they policed appeared to disrupt the way island police 'mapped' their social territory (e.g. Van Maanen 1978; Shearing 1981). First, the principal risks presented from islanders derived not from their perceived dangerousness, but from the effects of officers' own actions. Second, even where isolated officers perceived potential threats, they responded not by reinforcing the stigmatisation of these groups but by co-opting locals into closer relationships. And third, due to their shared experiences, even islanders in normally stigmatised groups could not simply be categorised as 'police property' (Reiner 2010).

The way officers experienced and managed their relationships with island communities therefore cannot be separated from the sense of vulnerability and interdependency engendered by their physical environment. And in turn, officers' experience of their environment is inextricable with their immersion in the weather.

EXPERIENCING REMOTE ISLANDS: THE LIGHT AND THE DARK

As I have shown, the weather profoundly shaped officers' perceptual experience of the islands, and in particular their sense of risk and vulnerability. In relation to the weather these were expressed primarily in terms of physical challenges: of danger, isolation and confinement. Yet phenomena of the sky shaped officers' perception of their environment and their vulnerability within it beyond these practical effects. The following pages explore these issues through officers' encounters with the light and the dark.

Indeed, weather is transformative of the landscape in large part because it is an experience of light (Ingold 2005). In storms, thick clouds and fog cover the sun and moon, power cuts remove any artificial light. Light and darkness are central to experience of Northern islands more broadly. Islands experience dramatic changes of light with almost continual light in midsummer (the Shetland phrase 'simmer dim' expresses the brief dip in the light at the summer solstice) and only a few hours of watery grey daylight in winter. Yet light and dark are not straightforwardly connected to the time of day. Storm fronts bring darkness during the day, and in clear nights, skies are illuminated by stars and auroras: the full moon acts as a floodlight, making it possible to drive without headlights. Moreover, the lack of light and other pollution in the islands give the light and darkness an intensity unlike that on the UK Mainland. The Shetland phrase 'black dark' expresses a depth of darkness in which light is entirely absent, and the land,

7 A Scottish term for battered sausage and chips, bought from a fish and chip shop.

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sky and sea are undistinguishable. As an officer put it, 'you can't let your dog off the lead as you'll never find her again'.

The light and the dark were a central part of officers' experience both of the islands and their work. First, it was profoundly disorientating. In the dark officers reported getting lost, or not being able to tell which direction they were driving in. One returned from an unsuccessful inquiry explaining: 'There are no street lights. It's pitch black. It's the darkest place I've ever been. I couldn't find the bastard house.' Some complained of barely seeing daylight, and the exhaustion and vivid dreams that resulted. In the summer officers told stories of insomnia and confusion: several officers reported waking up thinking they had missed their shift due to the bright daylight, only to realise it was the middle of the night.

But second, the way officers perceived the islands significantly changed with the light and dark.

Light and dark islands

In the light, the vulnerability associated with the remote island landscape retreated. Instead, remoteness became a source of pleasure and exploration. Rather than avoiding peripheral places while on shift, officers sought them out. On clear nights, officers drove to the remotest parts of the islands to see shooting stars, red moons and auroras: all officers knew where to find the best skies. In daylight they drove to wild beaches, cliffs with beautiful views, and remote coastlines to spot orcas and otters. The starkness of the remote landscape became exciting: there were 'dramatic views', 'everywhere's got a cliff'. Officers talked frequently about how colour appeared in the light, transforming the archipelagos beyond recognition. For example, a Shetland officer said 'in winter the colour of the skies and the stars are just incredible'; driving past a bay in the Western Isles an officer said 'In the summer this is really beautiful, white sand and the turquoise sea'. More generally, islands opened up in the light. Officers described feeling connected to the people and the land around them. As one officer explained, 'There's a different feel to the island … it feels like you're part of something bigger'.

By contrast, in darkness islands became places of vulnerability. In contrast to the connectedness and pleasure of islands in the light, in the dark islands were barren: 'desolate', 'pretty bleak', 'shit', 'depressing', 'it's constantly dark'. In both archipelagos, officers described driving through a landscape leached of colour: 'The majority of the time, it's grey drizzle. It depresses you'; 'If you like grey it's nice, cos the only colour you see is grey, with an occasional bit of brown. Oh, I hate this drive, man'. Dark islands were lonely, empty places. As a Shetland officer put it, 'People who haven't lived here don't understand real darkness. Here, there is nothing'.

However, dark islands were not simply barren, but hostile. One officer newly arrived in the Western Isles described driving through his island:

> [There were] single track roads with not a single light on anywhere and it was bleak. I don't know if it was the darkness but I actually felt like the sheep were being aggressive. I was like, 'give us a fucking break'.

Moreover, while it may have been described in its absence by officers—as 'nothing' – darkness was not simply hostile in its emptiness. Instead, darkness was experienced as both active and intensely visceral. In light, vision holds objects at a distance, acting as a 'protective field' which delineates the self from the world (Shaw 2015: 586). But in darkness, these boundaries between the body and environment are eroded (see Morris 2011; Edensor 2013 on perception in darkness). Officers described darkness as penetrating: as 'claustrophobic' and 'oppressive'; of 'sinking' into the dark. As one officer put it, 'I felt I was being swallowed up by the island'.

The intense discomfort generated by the dark meant officers avoided dark places and instead circulated around those areas with the safety of illuminated light. As one officer put it, when cloud cover at night meant there was no light at all, 'that's when you return to the station'. In this

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way, islands became mapped through the light and the dark, structuring where officers went and what they did.

Light and darkness beyond islands

However, light and darkness also appeared to shape the way officers made sense of police work beyond the islands.

The following fieldnote extract describes a moment after leaving an inquiry with an officer in a small isle in the far north of Shetland, when the sun began to set. The sky rarely dominates the landscape in daylight (Ingold 2008; Shaw 2015), instead illuminating objects within it. In sunsets, however, light itself becomes the focus of attention and its effects are thus particularly clear. This was a freezing cold day, and the light around us was refracted pink in a hazy, frozen mist. The officer suggested we climbed up to a hill to get a good view, and we drove up to the top of a cliff at the Northmost point of the island where the British Isles end. We got out of the van in the biting cold:

> At the top, the sunset is incredible. We see down over the sea, the land and the sky. We stand and stare. Everywhere South of us is hazy with a mist, and the colours leach through it. Directly ahead is deep red, gold, orange, pink and black. It constantly changes. … The talk becomes wistful and reflective. [Officer] says 'whatever happens next and wherever I go this is the pinnacle of my police career'. He tells me the story of sitting in a hospital room in [city] with a 'Ned' [pejorative word for working class youth] and a couple of officers, with it all smelling horrible, thinking it was going to be an awful night, and watching the sunset out the window, and the four of them just chatting for hours. He talks about how lucky he is and how brilliant it is. It's an extraordinary moment and very moving.

The smell and feel of the cold, the height of the cliff and the starkness of the land and sea below generated a sense of visceral immersion in light, inspiring an emotional reflection on the officer's life and his work. Connections with previous sunsets became a structure through which he retold the story of his working life and the relationships with the people he encountered: they therefore became part of the patterned ways of thinking with which he made sense of police work.

Ingold (2005; 2008) suggests why the experience of light should have such resonance. He argues that 'for sighted persons, light is the experience of inhabiting the world of the visible' (2005: p101). Feeling, hearing and seeing in the light therefore is an 'experience of being – of a body that is open and alive to the world' (2005: 100). Light is therefore so profoundly affective because it is an experience of being alive. As such it is perhaps unsurprising that officers were drawn to light places and avoided the dark; nor that the light and dark become part of officers' cognitive maps: of the islands, of their social world and of their own experience.

EXPANDING THE HORIZONS OF THE CRIMINOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

This paper has explored how the remote island context illuminates the limitations of the criminological imagination. Shifting the focus of inquiry to an environment which is starkly different to the ubiquitous urban context of criminological research and thinking allows for new insights to emerge.

First, the remote island context brings new phenomena into the scope of criminological inquiry. The experience of officers as they navigate remote Northern islands reveals the importance of the weather, light and darkness in island police work. These phenomena structured

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all aspects of police experience. As I have shown, the weather in particular presents significant physical challenges for officers: it affects whether communication is possible, whether they can travel, whether supplies arrive in shops, whether support is available. But beyond these pressures, their encounters with the light, darkness and weather are integral to officers' perceptions of where they are, and the people, places and risks they encounter. In particular, they shape officers' experiences of the islands, transforming them into places of isolation, confinement and vulnerability. In short, the weather, light and darkness are not simply scenery to the world of policing. Instead, they are core to the ways officers move through, think and feel in and about the places where they work.

In this way, these phenomena illuminate core concerns of police scholarship. In particular they contribute to an understanding of how officers form the 'maps' (e.g. Van Maanen 1978; Holdaway 1981) which place order on their social world and shape discretionary action. First, most simply, they structured where officers went. The physical island landscape became mapped through light and darkness, risk and isolation. In the light and calm, islands were open for exploration. But the vulnerability engendered by adverse weather and the intolerable discomfort of the darkness transformed dark, empty, isolated areas of the islands into places of precarity to be avoided: officers gravitated towards the light and safety of populated areas. Weather, light and darkness therefore had significant implications for the exercise of state power: they structured who came to police attention and who did not. Second, the sense of shared confinement and shared experience they engendered disrupted the cultural categorisation of social groups which has been observed in urban police research (e.g. Van Maanen 1978; Shearing 1981; Reiner 2010). Officers could not easily distance themselves from those they policed either physically or cognitively. And third, the profound effects of the light and darkness appeared to affect the way officers made sense of their police experience beyond the islands, forming a structure through which they re-told the stories of police work.

Second, these phenomena draw attention to the way that the environment is inextricable with the way officers perceive their physical and social worlds. It is from their position of physical immersion within their surroundings that officers make sense of where they are and the people and problems they encounter. This suggests that attention to the surroundings in which policing is situated is important to our understanding of police work.

Further, these experiences indicate the value of conceiving of the physical context of social action beyond more familiar criminological concepts of 'space' and 'place', to think additionally of the 'environment': the immersive, bodily relationship between people and their surroundings through which both those surroundings and human action becomes meaningful (e.g. Tilley 2004; Ingold 2011*a*). In addition, officers' experiences suggest that an understanding of the environment cannot separate landscapes, buildings or other surfaces from the weather, light and darkness in which they are suffused.

Given their significance to criminological concerns, the lack of attention to the light, darkness and weather in criminological inquiry and the neglect of the environmental context of police work needs explanation. Of course, the phenomena explored here are inescapable in the remote island context. I do not suggest, e.g., that the light, darkness and weather are equally salient in all policing contexts, or in all criminological research more widely. However, they illustrate how the phenomena that have captured criminological attention are selective. In particular, they suggest how the urban focus of criminological research has constrained our thinking. The extensive and sophisticated consideration paid to aspects of the urban context such as the 'street' and the built environment (e.g. Park *et al.* 1925; Hayward 2004; Campbell 2013; Young 2019) is not reflected in other elements of the environment of crime and its control. Further, the example of police scholarship suggests that because of the ubiquity of the city context, its significance as an environment in which crime and its control are immersed may retreat altogether. In short, there is more to criminology than our preoccupations suggest. To expand the horizons

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of criminological imagination, therefore, we need to be aware of our own entanglements in the environments in which we research, write and think.

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