

Preface

This book is the result of seven years' work and is hopefully, a more digestible version of my PhD thesis 'Fear of Crime, governance and vested interests: a case study of motorcyclists'. In June 2006, I submitted my thesis to the University of Warwick and was privileged to have as my examiners, Prof. Robert Fine, Chair of the Department of Sociology at Warwick and Prof. Jason Ditton from the School of Law, University of Sheffield. I thank them both for their kind words and encouragement. On December 13th 2006 I was awarded my degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.

From the mid 1990s, I worked as an automotive data analyst and produced annual reports on Car Distribution in East and West Europe for an Automotive Research organisation based in the West Midlands. As an automotive researcher it was my job to analyze the movement or distribution of both new and used vehicles (predominantly cars) throughout Eastern and Western Europe to write reports on the subject. I became interested in vehicle crime through my analysis of the movement of cars from and to Eastern European countries. I found that there were significant differences between datasets for the importation of cars (Customs) and registrations (Registration Authorities). I later found that these differences were not necessarily due to volumes of stolen vehicles crossing borders, but rather due to the complexities of the different organisations that gather these data. Perhaps more relevant was the discovery that historical and cultural factors influenced methodologies which were reflected in the presentation of data.

In 1997, I was asked by the United Nations Commission for Criminal Justice and the Prevention of Crime in Vienna, to write a report on Vehicle Theft in Europe. Following the publication of my report, I was regularly invited to attend Interpol conferences on vehicle crime. I had also written a report about the Theft of Goods and Good Vehicles for the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) which is a subsidiary of the OECD.

During my investigation, I had not considered the relationship between crime statistics, 'fear of crime' and vested interests, until I attended a conference in Frankfurt in 1998 to which I had been invited to give a presentation of my research on vehicle theft. The organisers of this conference were from an Italian security company and during this conference I witnessed the presentation of statistics on vehicle theft in Great Britain which were different from the data I had been given by the Home Office, the previous day.

This experience was illuminating and from that moment I reconsidered the application of vehicle crime statistics, their purpose and the use that was made of them by vested interests. Because of the nature of my work I became increasingly involved in the research and analysis of vehicle crime data and as previously mentioned, I attended meetings and conferences on these topics. I also developed relationships of trust and collaboration with other researchers, authorities and the police in this country and in other countries throughout Europe. I believe that these relationships of trust and collaboration have been essential in enabling me to understand the perspectives of the actors in the vehicle crime arena.

I considered a variety of options to carry out my field research and finally decided on the Motorcycle Action Group (MAG UK). I had previously been involved in a project for the Industry Association (MCIA) the purpose of which was to evaluate motorcycle security. This experience gave me an insight into the problems of insurance and motorcycles. Other reasons were due to the 'risk' element (of motorcycling) and a certain stigma attached to motorcyclists¹ in this country which I found quite different from the imagery of motorcycling

in Italy where I had lived for 19 years. In Italy scooters and motorcycles are a common and cheap form of transport. Motorcycles are viewed as the glamorous element of two wheeled transport, while in Britain, my impression was that motorcycling was tolerated and motorcycles seemed to be perceived as 'dangerous'. In consideration of all these elements, I felt that an organisation with a radical image like MAG UK would meet all the criteria for my field research.

In July 2002, I approached MAG UK, and it was decided to allow me to carry out the necessary research which would provide me with the data I needed to complete my book. I became a member of MAG UK and spent the next three years going to meetings, attending rallies and I eventually became involved in the organisation. I bought a motorbike which was not too difficult as I lived in Italy for many years where I rode a scooter, so had the basic skills and more important, the licence to ride a bike. In May 2003 I found a Turquoise Yamaha 'Virago' 535 and bought a helmet (something I had never worn or felt the need to, in Italy).

Due to the nature of my research, I found myself in a privileged position which enabled me to discuss and debate issues of vehicle crime freely with the various actors involved in the dissemination of information about vehicle crime. During 2003, I interviewed those people, mostly who I had known for quite a few years and who I had dealt with through my research, who are active in crime reduction and prevention in their daily work or lives including police officers, criminological statisticians and motorcyclists. The motorcyclists I interviewed were influential within the motorcycling community and gave me valuable insight into the importance of pressure groups and how these groups have reacted to the 'moral panic' of motorcycle theft and how they have been able to influence the motorcycling community. These interviews which were all recorded, aim to support my findings in the surveys and also to add to the ethnographic aspect of my research in order to strengthen the quality of the debates and issues discussed in my book.

To enrich my background knowledge of motorcycle insurance in Great Britain, I interviewed an insurance broker, an underwriter from an insurance company and I corresponded with representatives of the insurance industry and government officials. I have not quoted these interviewees in the document, but have utilized the information that they gave me to support my theoretical and substantive discussion.

The criminological statisticians I interviewed had considerable experience and knowledge of government criminological statistics and surveys, both nationally and internationally. The policemen I interviewed were all very experienced in their field of work as vehicle crime experts.

This book is a documentation of vested interests but also about actors who are involved in the implementation of legislation and the divulgence of information to protect 'communities' from the implications of crime. May points out that "ethical decisions are not (...) defined in terms of what is advantageous to the researcher or the project upon which they are working. They are concerned with what is right or just, in the interests of not only the project (...) but also others who are the participants in the research" (1999:54). This includes the researcher, research participants and those who control access to the information needed (gatekeepers). Thus May argues that the relationship between ethics and social research is complicated (ibid). He commented that "these relationships which include ethical decisions are clearly difficult issues" (ibid: 60).

¹ I alternate between the terms 'riders' and/or 'bikers' throughout this book. The term 'riders' would be an equivalent to the term 'motorists' used for car drivers. Whereas the term 'bikers' refers to a lifestyle.

In this context, as far as my involvement with the Motorcycle Action Group is concerned, the social relationship I built up with members of this organization allowed me to observe the internal working of a voluntary pressure group and experience the dynamics of the group. I had to make decisions which may have alienated me from the group. Such as identifying that the group had effectively been lead to believe that the problem of theft was the reason for higher insurance rates and the need for concern. In agreement with the gatekeeper, I discussed the outcome of my research and requested guidance from him to ensure what I had written was a fair and honest account of the group itself. While I have omitted names of the actors within the organization, I have endeavoured to interpret their comments faithfully to highlight the sincerity of their views and opinions.

With regards to the remaining interviewees, I requested permission from all the interviewees to quote from their interviews. On completion of writing the chapters, I sent the documents to the various interviewees and received mixed reactions. I then send a final draft of my book to the police and civil servant interviewees, but none of them refused permission to use their comments. May (1999) discusses the doctrine of informed consent and that this may assume to encompass the consequences that may follow publication in the public domain. In this respect I have taken all possible steps to protect the identity of these people to prevent harm or offence. I have not however, anonymized insurance and security companies because the identification of these companies is relevant to the discussion. The data from these companies were in the public domain when I carried out my investigative research.

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