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# Customer is king: promoting port policing, supporting hypercommercialism

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**ABSTRACT**

This ethnography of everyday policing realities in the European ports of Rotterdam and Hamburg presents an understanding of policing spaces where protecting and supporting global commerce dominate (Eski 2016a). In undertaking this research, I participated in the daily activities of 85 participants in Rotterdam (N = 52) and Hamburg (N = 33), consisting of 30 operational port police officers, 31 security officers, 10 customs officers and 14 others involved in port security-related matters (e.g. shipping agents, port authorities, boatmen and maritime engineers). These participants were collectively responsible for protecting the vulnerability of the just-in-time logistics by becoming the intervention, through which they become the very local threat to global commerce itself. In their policing struggles with management, colleagues and multiagency partners, as well as with the maritime business community and dangerous others (Hudson 2009), they are fighting a (silent) fight against having to appear to police *for* commercialism. However, they merely promote port policing without feeling they actually support the flow of global commerce. Frontline staff that deals with profile-raising port policing and what kind of (resistant) attitudes results from it, may deliver a new (method of studying ethnographically) hope against neoliberal policing, from within.

## Introduction

The maritime shipping industry is responsible for moving 90% of global consumables (George 2013). Europe's single biggest and most active port is Rotterdam, followed jointly by Hamburg and Antwerp, underlying their global significance (Eski 2016a). In these and other sites, port police have an important role in ensuring logistical flows of goods remain free from criminal and terrorist interruptions. In its endeavour to set a strong EU counter-terrorism, port security plays a crucial role in EU border policing (Malcolm 2016). As such, the ports of Rotterdam, Hamburg and Antwerp are crucial to these plans. This article elaborates on an ethnographic study done on frontline port policing and security in the first two of these ports of these ports, Rotterdam and Hamburg, undertaken from 2010 to 2016 (Eski 2011, 2012, 2016a, 2016b, 2018). It argues, based on findings on their policing struggles with management, colleagues and multiagency partners, as well as with the maritime business community and dangerous others (Hudson 2009), that they are fighting a (silent) fight against having to appear to police *for* commercialism. They are, however, they merely promoting port policing without feeling they actually support the flow of global commerce, reflecting *hyper*commercial policing.

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A research lacuna exists in (critical) criminological understandings of port security (Zaitch 2002; Eski 2011; Brewer 2014). This gap is surprising given the manifest importance of ports in understanding EU border policing, and the fact that '[t]hroughout history, the structural growth of commercial maritime sites had boosted unique port security issues and the creation of various forms of public and private "dock policing" bodies' (Leloup 2015, p. 131). The surprising criminological oversight in understanding port security echoes a wider social scientific indifference toward (trans)port security and policing (Cowen 2014). The lack of ethnographic understanding of policing flows of global commerce further underscores these points (Eski 2012).

In 2002, the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code introduced archetypical post 9/11 regulations and security roles[2] by putting different policing actors together in multi-agency partnerships to serve 'port security' (Brewer 2017). Policing these crucial transnational spaces is unique due to highly dense public-private collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the port business communities that 'struggle to allay concerns over organised crime, smuggling, trafficking, pillage and, more recently, threats such as terrorism' (Brewer 2017, p. 715). It is particularly unique because port policing is almost entirely dependent on 'virtually every private actor with a stake in waterfront logistical operations' (Brewer 2017).

Safety, and widely shared perceptions of safety, underpin local maritime (shipping) commercial levels. Those companies 'may welcome, take comfort in and actively or unconsciously seek out, [port] environments they consider to be safe, thereby rewarding organizations for the care taken in securing them on their behalf' (Goold et al. 2010, p. 15). The ports are physically closed-off, corporate domains where one small disruption, also *caused* by port policing, impacts significantly on the 24/7 business taking place. Still, policing must happen to remain (appearing) safe and attractive as a port for that 24/7 business.

The covert nature of many port policing practices presents challenges for ethnographic research (Nøkleberg 2017), perhaps somewhat explaining the dearth of research in this important area (cf. Côté-Boucher 2016; Eski 2016b). Such ethnographies would offer potential to deliver rich, empirical insights into multi-agency policing, and explore how port community members might be subjected to personally intrusive policing methods with respect to screenings of 'spouses, parents, and spouses' parents' to 'credit history, criminal history', even 'skin colour' and 'travel history' (Cowen 2007, p. 33).

The port police, customs and security officers involved in the study of this article, carried out such ID and background checks for which they have received intrusive authorities. They are expected to treat employees as 'security risks' rather than 'employees', making them 'secondary to the logistical concerns of the ports', turning their non-compliance 'with the demands of security and of economy […] into something like a criminal act' (Van Oenen 2010, p. 89). The prioritisation of commercial and transport logistics pushes frontline port policing staff to treat anyone as a threat to the flows of commerce, including themselves, which makes port policing additionally exceptional compared to other policing areas.

Accordingly, I answer to specific research questions in this article[1]. First, how do frontline port policing staff deal with work-related pressures in the transnational spaces of the port? Second, how are port policing staff's attitudes and interactions shaped by the logistical operations they adhere to? Ethnographic research is key to answering these questions because through it we start to 'understand how people create and experience their worlds through processes such as place making, inhabiting social spaces, forging local and transnational networks, and representing and decolonizing spatial imaginaries' (Watson and Till 2010, pp. 121–122). By delivering detailed ethnographic knowledges of everyday frontline port policing in Rotterdam and Hamburg, I explore important social spaces, networks, cultures, practices and imaginaries in the context of everyday frontline port policing. The next section will elaborate on the field, the people and its characteristics I was confronted with during the ethnographic fieldwork.

## An ethnographic unpacking of the port securityscape

[A security manager and a security officer] suggested to have a cigarette downstairs. We walked to the smoking room, which smelt, obviously, of smoke. Fortunately, a door was open. [The security manager] asked [the security

officer] for a cigarette, and I called him a 'bietser', which is Dutch for 'beggar'. They had to laugh. 'This is where it all takes place!' [the security manager] said, referring to the dockworkers that passed us by. As [the security manager] and I did not wear any security outfit, nor any dockworker outfits, and because we never came there before, I think, therefore, that the dockworkers looked at us oddly. There was noise of the [container] carriers and workers. I felt for the first time to be in an actual port environment: the noise, the smell, the sight, the people, the language. (Fieldnotes)

Undertaken from 2010 until 2016 (Eski 2016a) in two out of Europe's three most important ports, I entered the fields of the Port of Rotterdam and the Port of Hamburg. Being the busiest port in world until 2004, and still the biggest port in Europe, the Port of Rotterdam covers 10,500 hectares of industrial sites and is 42 kilometres long with 65 kilometres of quayside. The most important port facilities are petrochemical sites, cargo handling sites and dry bulk storage (e.g. sand). The Rotterdam port is 24/7 accessible for ships where they usually have their first and/or last port of call, making it one of the most important regions for the Dutch economy, as well as internationally as a multi-modal transport hub where ships, trains, road transport and networked pipelines come together and inter-link (Port of Rotterdam Authority 2014). The Port of Hamburg is almost completely identical to Rotterdam, but covers 7,216 hectares of industrial sites and has 49 kilometres of quays. It has the same variety of facilities with container handling being one of the most important ones, and it is of particular importance to the Baltic region (Hafen Hamburg 2014). Container transport represents half of the global seaborne trade value, for which the world's 20 leading ports handled almost 50% of the world's container throughput in 2012, which is an increase of 3.2% in 2012 compared with 2011 (UNCTAD 2013, p. 88). Europe, therefore, had during the study's fieldwork period from 2011 to 2012 an important role in container transport, of which 20% passed through the ports of Rotterdam, Hamburg and Antwerp (UNCTAD 2013, p. 98).

I participated in the daily activities of 85 participants in Rotterdam (N = 52) and Hamburg (N = 33), consisting of 30 operational port police officers, 31 security officers, 10 customs officers and 14 others who were involved in port security-related matters (e.g. shipping agents, port authorities, boatmen and maritime engineers). Doing fieldwork with the variety of port policing actors involved, in two international ports in two different countries, was a challenging undertaking. Sometimes there were weeks when I was not active in the fields and weeks I visited sites every day. I went to several locations. These were predominantly port facilities and ships, but also police stations, customs offices and security company offices, where I had access to a very wide variety of port policing activities, including but not limited to: port community policing, water and car ('land') patrols; emergency assistance; resolving port community conflicts and disputes; conducting vehicle inspections; informing port facilities about security measures; prevention of environmental wrongdoings, possible criminal activity (e.g. drug transport and theft) and terrorism; border control and immigration checks of ship crews; criminal investigations; intake of criminal offences and misdemeanours (at the waterside); aggression aboard, speeding of boats and fining drunken vessel owners; the ISPS Code's Port State Control (PSC) inspections on deck; securing the port facility perimeters where containers, ferries or mass dry bulk were handled, as well as petrochemical sites; registering employees and visitors; enforcing compliance with security and safety regulations; applying First Aid in case of occupational hazards and emergencies; taxiing ship crews; CCTV monitoring; car patrol and alarm response throughout the entire port area; and sanitary tasks (e.g. cleaning toilets).

By being 'walked through' their everyday occupational lives, and having built-in enough flexibility, I was enabled to move around the different sites. Such necessary flexibility also emerged in how interviews could lead to (participant) observations and vice versa, showing that ethnographies of policing are 'negotiated with subjects of study, invented or reinvented on the spot' (Ferrell 2009, pp. 12–13). It allowed me to retrieve a full and thorough front- and backstage experience of the port securityscape, from where I could experience and understand the imaginaries and (re)configuration of port policing.

During the non-fieldwork weeks, I was predominantly negotiating access, which proved to be very difficult. As said, the port and port policing are closed-off, accommodating a hidden community (Eski 2012). I simply could not walk onto a port facility's territory; most of the time it is fenced, with signs

reading 'CCTV in operation' and 'Secured by Security Company A'. Port police stations and customs locations in both ports were also highly secured. I became an *observed* observer (Bryson 1988). Everywhere, inside and outside, I watched the watchers watching (me). Plus the fact that participants' tasks consisted of mostly enforcing and securing, made me feel like I was being watched continuously. At almost every site, I had to register myself, sometimes show my ID, and sign in and out. I was very aware of (the control of) my presence in the port. At one point, to enrich my field notes, I took pictures of a few port facilities, which is in violation of the ISPS Code, emphasised by 'No photography' warning signs.

> Continuing the observation I started to take pictures. It surprised me I was not pulled over by one of the mobile patrol cars [a port police officer] mentioned in the interview. Maybe, because I was being CCTV-recorded, they could see me taking pictures anyway, which unleashed some anxiety: 'Should I visually record the external port site?' I started to become increasingly aware of my presence in the field, even paranoid. The risk-saturated field started to shape my Self, as I began to think I saw people in cars, going in and out the port area, looking towards me suspiciously. I was suspicious of their suspicion, because I figured I am taking pictures of the security infrastructure. That may appear as if I am mapping the area to find out its weak spots as targets for terrorist attacks, which normally alerts mobile patrols, as [ the port police officer] explained. (Fieldnotes)

Still, shooting photos was sometimes suggested by the participants whereas they were supposed to be the ones to stop me from doing so.

Negotiating access proved to be very complex. Just getting in touch with people was already challenging. Many phone calls, emails and face to face first meetings with PR personnel at police, customs and security organisations often led to no response or follow-up. In case I was invited, I usually had to listen to a promotional talk about port security. As will become clear, it is that 'promotionality' of port policing that the frontline staff unwillingly embody. In sum, much effort was into merely arranging meetings, yet without any certainty fieldwork could be done among frontline port policing staff. It illustrates how closed and secretive the domain of port security (intentionally) remains. If cooperation was negotiated and eventually established, then especially (team) managers had worries:

> If you want to interview [frontline staff], it can be wherever, for all I care, without breaching the client's [interests]. […] When our [frontline staff] gets enthusiastic, they're sometimes capable of saying things, as in 'That's not the smartest thing to say', haha. You know? (Security manager)

That managerial distrust toward frontline policing staff often made it difficult for me, as much as distrust from frontline staff to management complicated fieldwork:

> Look, if what I've told gets exposed … you know what I mean? My manager would say 'That guy doesn't really like it here', or 'What use is that guy, who's only nit-picking' […] It doesn't bother me though. I tell what I want to tell. (Security officer)

Some participants felt that they had to cooperate and were obligated to be interviewed by me:

> Nothing personal! I didn't feel like it at all. I'm an easy going person; I talk with everybody, but a security officer is a private person. […] My mate and I had a discussion, as in 'Who's going to take [Yarin] along, who's going to take him along?' Got a call this afternoon [from management]: 'Yes, you're taking someone with you' and I'm like 'Pffff', you know? (Security officer)

Once the security officer realised I included a critical stance on managerialism in relation to port policing, he became less formal and more critical about port security, and he felt more comfortable. So, Reiner's observations on fundamental divisions between frontline and managerial policing staff (2010, p. 122) is therefore also 'felt' in getting access, building trust and eventually doing policing ethnography. I also tried to negotiate bottom-up access through gatekeepers I approached through snowballing via family, friends and colleagues, meaning, the selected participants group has been 'dependent on the subjective choices of the respondents first accessed' (Atkinson and Flint 2001, p. 2). Meaning, individuals who might have been valuable for the ethnographic insight that I was looking for, could have been missed due to those subjective choices.

## My role in the field

In being highly involved, it is crucial to reflect on how I have managed the personal relationships I established; a reflection '[n]ovice field researchers often neglect', which becomes 'even more salient when researchers place themselves in potentially dangerous situations' (Bachman and Schutt 2013, p. 251). There were a couple of key problematic dimensions in which my gender, education and ethnicity played a role. Out of the 85 participants, only two were female. This gender imbalance reflects the predominantly male port (security) environment (Higate 2012) but equally could may have been explained if female frontline policing staff tended to avoid conversations with me when I tried to engage with them. Consequently, this ethnographic study constitutes therefore a specific masculine gendered appreciation of operational port security.

My role as a researcher also influenced the way participants interacted with me. I had a higher educational background than most of them, resulting in participants thinking my knowledge about operational port security is well-developed, whereas it was not. Some would downplay their educational and professional career, as much as they would hide certain aspects of their career and work to portray themselves in the best possible light (cf. LeCompte and Goetze 1982). Presenting the most socially desirable version of yourself to ethnographers leads to data-gathering distortion. Participants did their very best to help me, policing 'more' than they would usually do:

> *Then Customs Officer (CO) 1 wanted to talk about before, but then he sees a guy going from the normal zone to the [port] zone.*
>
> CO1: What does he have in his bag? And he has a plastic bag and we can check inside it immediately, right? We're gonna give him some more time.
>
> CO2 (on the customs secured radio channel): 60–4 is leaving patrol, XXXX
>
> Operation room: 60-4 …
>
> *CO1 gives gas, speeds, and stops in front of the man on the bike who was about to be halted for a stop and search.*
>
> CO2: Please stay in the car, don't get out with us, okay? [she said to me].
>
> CO1: Yes, seriously, but … it's harmless, right? But he has to realise it's not so easy [to cross the normal, urban zone into and out of the port zone]!

I asked them what was going on with the man and his bag. They told me he went grocery shopping at a supermarket and that he was taking a shortcut into the normal zone through the port zone, which is a tax-free zone, and his groceries could be sold tax-free in the port. It was a trivial event that happens daily, done by many people. The man would have gotten away with it, if I were not to be present in the car; my presence led to staged policing by means of a stop and search that was unnecessary. Such *policing to please* (researchers) has therefore real, and often intrusive consequences for the policed. It happened more often during my fieldwork, despite the fact I always made clear they should consider me as a mere fly on the wall that is not there to interrupt their normal work routines, or wanting to see 'action' as they would often refer to. Perhaps the most difficult issue I had to deal with, affecting me more personally, was how my mixed ethnicity played a role.

> Security manager: Our colleague gets [the meal] for free, it's Mr [Eski] (he said to the cashier)
>
> *The cashier, a Turkish woman, describes the food I have on my plate to type it cash machine. And then she asks where I am from. I tell her I'm from The Netherlands, but I ask her if she wants to know about my name.*
>
> Cashier: From which country?
>
> Me: My name?
>
> Cashier: Yes, your name, [Eski].
>
> Security manager: Country, country, country?

Cashier: Which country?

Me: Turkey

Cashier: Turkey!

*The security manager reacted a little bit shocked. The cashier said she already thought my name came from Turkey, as [Eski] is typically Turkish. I explain to the security manager my father is Turkish and my mother Dutch. The cashier starts to speak Turkish to me, and at that point I am pissed off, because I wanted to let security manager believe I'm fully Dutch, through which he, and others at [a security company] would not be careful in case they wanted to make remarks about (Turkish) migrants, or their frustration about it. Anyway, I told her I don't speak Turkish, and the security manager had to laugh, but it was awkward laughter.*

I felt the need to hide my name from participants, which is, however, difficult, as it is neither a 'typical' Dutch nor typical German name. Whether it was necessary for me to hide my name and mixed ethnicity, was a question that surprised me, because in hindsight, it was my fear of being discriminated against that made me shy about my mixed ethnic background. I add that this disposition may not have been shared by all of the participants and I must reflect that widely held stereotypes of frontline security and policing staff as white angry, masculine men (Higate 2012), might have biased my expectations.

So, in reflecting on my role in the field, my particular presence of being a mixed ethnic white male, with a higher education, influenced the way I thought participants behaved and thus presented themselves to me in a certain way, as much as that I have become aware afterwards of how I behaved and presented myself in a certain way. It reflects how 'ethnographic knowledge [on policing – Eski] is constructed in the field, rather than being a set of "facts" waiting to be discovered' (Prentice 2010, p. 167). It is knowledge based on the fieldworker's constant construction and placing of 'isolated data in relation to one another and study the manner in which they integrate […] "facts" do not exist in sociological any more than in physical reality' (Malinowski 1935, p. 317). Meaning, the ethnographic knowledge on port policing I construed through data-collection and -analysis[3], and that will be discussed in the following section on the study's findings, constitutes 'an inherently imperfect mode of knowledge which produces gaps as it fills them' (Clifford 1986, p. 8).

## Findings

The following will be an exploration of attitudes and practices of port police officers, security officers and customs officers with: (1) managerialism, careerism and authoritarianism; (2) dependency and sympathy in relation to the maritime business community and (3) invisibility, inconsequentiality and (in)humanity of themselves through several often absent risky Others (Hudson 2009). Their imaginaries and constructions of port policing, and their deeper disagreement with the promotional nature of their job that drives the port and its security, will be revealed, and eventually considered in the discussion section afterward.

### *Managerialism, careerism and authoritarianism*

Managers were considered inapt due to a lack of street-level knowledge and operational port policing experience. They were blamed for being very market-orientated and power-hungry, and for corporate perversities, such as inhumane top-down target-based policies. It led to participants experiencing betrayal, increased job anxiety, meaninglessness and routinisation.

You have to make the best out of it, come to work with a smile on your face, and just doing your own thing. Definitely don't let yourself go nuts because of management. […] I experienced things here, with this boss, that I really stressed out. I just couldn't get things done by management. […] I left it behind me entirely. I am completely done with it. (Customs officer (CO) 3)

> We suffer from higher management. […] The whole target figures thing, turning you into some kind of commercial company! As in, 'You have to achieve targets'. […] Some have a certain interest in [target-based managerialism] and we actually suffer from it. You are ordered from above to do certain things and eventually [you do so] for the preservation of your job and stuff. (Port police officer (PO) 1)

> It's being secured by US! It's not being secured by those blokes at the office. […] We are the ones who do it! The cop is the one who does it. Customs at the docks are the ones who do it. Not THEM [management]! But they're the ones who tell us what we have to do! (Security officer (SO) 1)

The frustrations indicate how port policing has been managerialised and corporatised, widening an already existing, 'fundamental division between "street cops" and "management cops"' in which managers 'project an acceptable, legalistic, rational face of [port] policing to the public' (Reiner 2010, p. 122). In condemning their management and managerial rationalities, they are criticising the strong commercialised nature of policing and, indirectly, the neoliberal political economic turn in policing that made their delivery of '[n]eoliberal policing […] rel[y] on an elaborate staging of realities to provide the movement with a rationale and a vision' (Jefferson 2015, p. 100). It is this staging of port policing they are confronted with when being ordered from above to promote it. It makes them realise they have become instrumentalised into mere marketing tools (Andersen and Gray 2008, p. 171) to showcase port policing.

A similar frustration can be observed regarding collegiality. For participants, unity and trust amongst colleagues is the most important feature.

> We're a rather close team, definitely. We all trust each other […] That kind of stuff [distrust amongst colleagues] is something that you cannot have in a team like this. It becomes more a matter of whether we'll help you to get to the right level [to dive] and you feel comfortable underwater and we can trust you. Or, will you admit honestly to yourself [you cannot do it] and you choose to move on, do another type of customs work or leave customs completely. (CO3)

> Collegiality is good over here. We can definitely NOT complain about that, absolutely not. You know can count on each other, who you can and who you cannot trust. […] If you got colleagues who are like 'I got an alarm response, [but] will have a look at it half an hour later', that's not amusing. It happens, right?! It really happens. […] That's the downside of working for such a big organisation, and you don't fix it with each other, or you had a fight in the past, you can only hope that if you got something [e.g. dangerous situation], they'll help you out. (SO2)

Colleagues that are authoritarian and careerist cannot be trusted (Lambert 2008), since it means for the participants such colleagues only want to grow by keeping the façade of port policing in place, and thus by promoting themselves by becoming the best at promoting port policing.

> If you don't pay attention to it [authoritarianism], you become heartless, you know? You're not a human being anymore, but you're someone who simply hands out fines. I said to myself 'Right, I don't want this'. So I took a different approach to my work, and I try to point it out to colleagues […] there were people who were completely heartless. (PO2)

A similar disapproval was to be found with port police officers and customs officers who distrusted the promotional motivations behind security companies and security officers that are taking over traditional port policing tasks more and more.

> We, the port police, WE are in charge of security, okay? I mean, a security officer shouldn't think he's a police officer, to put it bluntly. (PO3)

Even more interesting is that security officers *themselves* disapproved of promoting port policing through increased privatisation of port security:

> Of course it is a danger if you consider the economic interests … If you got 15.000 cops, no, 26.000 from the top of my head, and you cut down on it so that there'll be only 16.000, then I rather want them not to be replaced by a security officer. (SO3)

Along with the anti-management attitude and disapproval of authoritarianism and careerism of other colleagues, it becomes clear frontline port policing professionals want to maintain the image of port security as a locally shared, communal good in support of global commerce. They embody a resistance against, or at least try to resist, far-going commercialisation of policing, making them unconsciously wish to police against neoliberalism (Giroux 2015). The communal good of port policing and security is to support the flows of global trade and commerce instead of about self-promotion through port security. In supporting those flows, they depend heavily on the maritime and port business community.

### Dependency and sympathy

In wanting to serve the flows of global commerce, the participants revealed they sometimes have to have a commercial outlook themselves, in particular when policing with and for the maritime and port business community. That community comprises, for them, port and shipping companies, as well as truckers, dockers and ships crews. In other words, they had a 'customer is king'-attitude:

> We exist by the grace [of transport and tourism in the port]. [...] You often need cooperation of the [port] companies to do these things. If companies are not confident or you don't have a relation with the company, they'll most of the times say 'Well, we're not doing it', you know? 'It'll affect our name' or 'We don't need it'. (PO4)

Whereas port police and customs officers officer rely heavily on companies for their information position and getting access to facilities, security officers rely on companies for continuation of contracts made between those companies and the security companies. They, as has been observed elsewhere (Wakefield 2008), identify more with the port companies and clients they work for than with the security companies they are deployed by:

> [Security Company 1] wants to make money of course [...] I'm more than aware, but I'm not going to spend unnecessary money [of the client]. [...] I know from other [security companies], and I'm not going to give any names, but they're like 'Okay, we got the deal and we'll see about next year. We're going to make as much money as possible during this one year'. (SO4)

Necessary commercial attitudes of participants also emerged in ISPS Code-based policing tasks in the port. In having done a customs control check on deck of a ship, and in compliance with the ISPS Code, CO2 and I had to handback our visitor cards, but we forgot to do so, to which CO2 replied: 'How many times we forgot to return those things. [...] Wouldn't be the first time' (CO2). The ISPS Code is not taken seriously, however, they are frustrated about it. Their frustration lies in how at its inception, the War on Terror inspired ISPS Code led to all types of illogical security practices at the docks that did not support global commerce at a local level, in their views.

> When that ISPS [Code] was designed, it was shoved down the companies' throats! I may conclude that and there were companies that did nothing about security for years and suddenly they had to invest tons [of money] to get their certificates. It cost a lot of money of course for many companies. (PO5)

They considered the ISPS Code merely an (American) geopolitical and economical instrument to control the global maritime industry. An instrumentalisation of maritime policing they feel they have become themselves, and detest.

> The War on Terror [is] in reality not about terrorism but about making money, right? [...] With the ISPS Code I contribute a small part to the defence against terrorism, but this small part is disproportionate to the costs, in my opinion. (SO5)

Here, their frustration with non-genuine port policing comes to the surface, as they are promoting it by having to enforce ISPS Code measures that affect their core task: supporting transport. So, the Code, in the opinion of the participants, serves a geopolitical agenda that destroys commerce itself, and they are indirectly supporting it by staging port policing in Rotterdam or Hamburg. From that point of view, it becomes understandable why, although emphasising they would

enforce the ISPS Code and other regulations if needs be, they sometimes refrain from a strict application of maritime law and order.

> It's not as if the largest oil company is above the law, because that's why there's a [port] police. I'm arguing we can't change the whole world, but fortunately the police is independent and it takes a lot of effort to defend that independence. […] With oil companies, you need to know your place but never lose your independence. (PO6)

In relation to insurance, a similar unwillingness and demotivation can be observed among security officers specifically. They feel they are not port policing but are merely there promoting it for insurance reasons (Eski 2016b).

> Security is basically, that's what was told to me, just a matter of insurances. […] It doesn't mean that, in case something's wrong, I won't act or my dog. [It's not I would] be like 'It's just for insurances' [when I need to act]. Absolutely not. Listen, of course I do this for security. Being there for prevention, even if you think you merely work for insurance. (SO6)

Feeling exploited for adversarial, promotional reasons, reveals how port policing frontline staff are 'not […] excited by increased commercialism – sometimes they are downright critical of the effect on culture – but feel powerless to fight it' (McChesney 2004, p. 143).

Being exploited is second-hand experienced and recognised in the occupational fates of ship crews, truckers and the wider the port worker community. The participants pity that specific segment of the maritime business community because of their often poor working conditions. As a sympathetic reaction, they try to prevent delays due to ISPS Code inspections and keep fines as low as possible for dockers, truckers and ships crews.

> I was standing in the middle of [a strike]. Pensions [of port workers] were being discussed [by the government] […] Young, old, tattoos; they were all there and everyone was worked up. They were treated unfairly of course, let's be real here. It was just robbery [from their pensions]! (PO6)

They explained they fully understand the sometimes grumpy attitudes of dockers, truckers and crews, as participants experienced such circumstances themselves when they worked on deck and/or at the docks:

> You'd have to set sail to sea and then you'll know how bad it is when [you got] two kids, a wife, or whomever at home. [Crew members] can't go ashore here, nothing. Can't set foot on shore. Can't go the cinemas. They need the money. They send everything back home. It's … slaves … modern slaves though. That's why they're not that friendly. You have to look slightly beyond that. (PO7)

> You just know those people [truckers] work for a low income too. They have to pick up so many containers within the hour. They also [just] want to do their job. […] If you show a little understanding, as in 'I know your line of work, I know what you earn, you earn as bad as I do', then you'll get more cooperation. Things go smoother. (SO7)

In making things smoother for frontline shipping and port company personnel, the participants recollect their sense of doing port policing for the right reasons, which is to support their communities, and thus they retake the feeling that work is still about supporting flows of global commerce, and not merely to promote it at the expense of hard-working members of the maritime business community. As a result, the participants are being helpful instead of authoritarian (a personality trait which is despised to begin with). We could speak of laissez-faire policing that seemed to have collapsed (Kelling and Coles 1996) but has remained, or silently revived, in port policing, exactly because of a silent resistance against being mere port policing promotors and mere 'marketing tools' (Andersen and Gray 2008). They resist to consider their audiences as docile community members that lose their critical judgement due to stage-managed policing in ports (Cooper 2005, pp. 117–118). Finally, their fight against promotion-orientated policing is also reflected in their (non-)encounters with anonymised port theft, invisible drug trafficking, lack of terrorism, and dehumanised stowaways.

### Invisibility, insignificance and (in)humanity

> [The security officer] turned his [patrol] car and started to explain more about the surrounding terminals. We then saw another car approaching us from the opposing side, in which four guys were sitting, according to him probably Moroccan. He didn't trust it, but still proceeded his route. He turned his head in the car though to look once more at the car, and he also checked his left rear mirror. I asked what he thought they were doing: 'Well, you see a lot of those guys smoking a joint'. This implied how it was not a very risky situation, according to him. (Fieldnotes)

In their dealings with dangerous, risky Others (Hudson 2009), being perceived as predominantly port thieves (e.g. of products, containers, metal etc.), drug traffickers, terrorists and stowaways, their frustrations with staged and promotional port policing emerge as well. To begin with port thieves.

> All of it has become more mobile. Before, a criminal stayed in his own municipality. 'Well, that's Pete, it's the burglar!' Every cop would know you. But now, you think 'Bus. Foreign license plate. Maybe they're burglars'. [...] Everything became more anonymous, bigger, mobility has increased. (PO3)

> [The] ports [are] not the way they used to be before. They rearranged themselves. The types of goods have changed. There used to be loads of general cargo. Today there's hardly any general cargo! It has changed. Today there are many containers. T1 has almost exclusively containers. With it, the dangers surrounding them are completely different compared to general cargo [dangers]. It also has become completely UNINTERESTING for a random thief to go into one of those [storage] halls here [in the port] to steal something, because everything is closed. (SO5)

> [The] technology they get in as well! Because they already know how to steal cars that have an anti-hijack-system. Today every car will always have, not a key but a chip that is basically impossible to copy. They will stand close to [the car] with a laptop, and through that wavelength they read-out, and they'll just take that car. (SO8)

What becomes clear is that the mass-scaling, digitalisation and professionalisation of the port and port theft have led to feelings of policing an unfamiliar, anonymised other that is obscure and unpredictable, and in their imagination and practice, non-existent. The faceless port thief robs meaningfulness away from their frontline port policing work, as much as their management and careerist, authoritarian colleagues do; they do not get the gratification of catching port thieves. It confronts them once more with, albeit more indirectly, the promotional emptiness of port policing; they really have become mere marketing tools to advertise and promote the port as appearing safe and secure, without even being enabled to keep out unsafe 'elements' and dangerous others.

Similar confrontations with that emptiness can be found in their policing of drug trafficking and terrorism.[4] Participants saw their ports as safe havens for drugs trafficking, however, the frontline port police officers and security officer never apprehended a drug trafficker, which has to do with the fact they considered policing drugs trafficking not their task but the customs agency's task.

> The really big criminals, drugs and stuff, that's customs' business. Customs actually get to the port facilities and check out those ships. We are merely hired to do car patrols on their premises, for prevention. (SO1)

The frontline customs officers that participated were part of specific units. One of those units was a counter-narcotics unit, which was installed in 2005 and had until 2017 (only) 15 seizures of drugs and 50 instances of discovering clues of drug trafficking methods. However, they never saw, let alone apprehended, a drug smuggler. One of the customs officers of that unit explained that may mean that ...

> ... either we do a very good job, or [drug smuggling] is displaced to another port or they have new methods we haven't encountered yet. [...] You do see a decrease in seizures though, probably because you, well, [do] a lot [of inspections]. So, you actually do your job too well. That's frustrating, because, if anything, we like to stand there on the quay with lots of cocaine!'. (CO3)

They seem to stage counter-narcotics policing in the port for merely entertaining purposes:

> In the past we've been on the news and stuff, with [a commercial broadcast network 1] and [a commercial broadcast network 2], and [we] weren't asked nothing at all, just filmed and at night you'd see yourself on the news. [...]

Well … if you said you didn't want to be [filmed], you wouldn't be included though […] So you had that freedom, but we did experience that, yeah, you just … in public, just like that. (CO5)

So although they catch drugs but not any drug traffickers, they still remain marketing tools to promote counter-narcotics policing in their port. They were very much aware of, and actually admitted that they feel they rather *perform* instead of *do* their work:

We worked at [a petrochemical port facility] etc., you know, they came to film, with [a commercial news network], and we saw it on the news and stuff, just like that! […] They used those recordings quite often at a certain point. When they filmed, remember [guys]? We had to act as naturally as possible. (CO6)

In staging counter-narcotics policing, customs officers, as well as other frontline port policing actors, are pushed to reside somewhere in-between overt and covert policing (cf. Loftus et al. 2016); the media attention affects their anonymity and clandestine movements but could also help them in their preventative effect, creating visibility of them as 'crime fighters' (Mawby 2001). That preventative effect, however, is not experienced as such though by the customs officers and they are instead frustrated about being used as movie actors that must act as naturally as possible. In 'sexying up' their work, they are again confronted with the insignificance of their line of port policing work at operational level.

The experience of insignificance is especially strongly experienced in counter-terrorism policing. When participants were asked if they ever caught a terrorist, they laughed, wondering whether I was being serious or not. Some sensed the farcical element and answered sarcastically:

No, we have been looking for Osama Bin Laden, because we wouldn't mind getting that 30 million dollar [bounty], but we didn't find [him] here. Too bad! […] No, [just kidding]. (PO7)

Others expressed they were happy they never encountered a terrorist or would have very much enjoyed the apprehension of a terrorist to claim fame:

Haha, no! Never, never. Fortunately not. I'm happy I never encountered them. […] Otherwise I could not have recited it. (SO9)

I'd be front page material, I think, haha. 'Security officer catches terrorist!' Noooo … If only … . (SO10)

The port lacks a certain terrorist allure (Eski 2016b), or as Greenberg et al. (2006, p. 140) explain:

[S]ome plausible forms of maritime terrorism (e.g. sinking a cargo ship in order to block a strategic lane of communication) actually present relatively low risk, in part because the targeting of such attacks is inconsistent with the primary motivation for most terrorist groups (i.e. achieving maximum public attention through inflicted loss of life).

A terrorist attack in the port or on a ship has a small to no media impact compared to the media impact that attacks in cities have (Guy 2002). One participant had a similar, slightly clearer statement on the lack of terrorist attacks in the port:

Be honest, if you'd be a terrorist, would you attack [this port], in a shit town? While there's a main office [somewhere else]? Central Station? Well, I know what I would do! […] The chance just isn't that big, that over here [something would happen]. (Security intern 1)

The lack of terrorist allure puzzled most of the participants though. They reasoned that the port should be a bigger invitation to terrorism than any other site conceivable:

Look, when [terrorists] figure out [an attack on a port has] economic consequences and what not, then it becomes another matter entirely. Until now though, all terrorist attacks are targeted on making victims. Metros, busy nodes, and this might be me thinking to strongly about it, but [terrorists not realising the impact they could have with an attack on the port] still has been, sort of our salvation. (PO8)

For terrorists […] if you want to do harm to [this port], the perfect way to let a ship sink obviously […] is to let a bomb or mine, or a time-bomb something, if necessary with a cork and a telephone connection attached to it that

floats above water, it really isn't difficult. Here we all think we're safe but, and that's my opinion, if you want to do harm you can bring a ship to the bottom, just like that. (CO3)

Why wouldn't you want to do it at the port? [This country] is famous for its ports. That's why I would do [a terrorist attack]. […] I was thinking about [terrorist scenarios]. It's not such a strange idea. (SO11)

Despite portrayals of ports as sites prone to terrorist attacks, participants do not feel they are fighting at the front of the global 'War on Terror'. Instead, they are slumbering away in a war on occupational meaninglessness in which the only thing that is killed is time by promoting port policing. They are excluded from 'a collective meaning of victimhood' (Garland 2002, p. 12), turning their victimlessness into insignificance (Eski 2016b). The fact their working environment is not 'good enough' for terrorists to attack confronts them once more with how they seem to be merely put in place to promote port security.

Out of the dangerous, unwelcome others, the most inherently problematic one to encounter and deal with, has been the stowaway. It was a tabooed other, and remains to be, because of the fact that stowaways cost shipping companies a great deal of money (Walters 2008), 'including those providing security services ashore' (IMO 2011, p. 4). For the participants, the stowaway was a complicated matter in which they would simultaneously dehumanise stowaways and treat them humanely. They know about the severe situations most of the stowaways had the flee from, but they also had to treat them as a legal liability and financial risk to the maritime and port business community; a human being is reduced to a fine that must be kept as low as possible, using risk-analyses and the very ISPS Code measures they disagree to begin with.

At [a port facility], for example, all the containers put through are checked with dogs to find out if there are any people in them. If they get caught in [another country], [the shipping company] gets a fine of €1300 [roughly] per person found in a trailer. (PO9)

It's fun for no company. […] The disadvantage of having stowaways in a container that enters [another port], is that it'll be taken out by customs there. […] I think the [government at the receiving end] thinks 'Listen up. It's not our issue. You over there need to pay better attention, so spend some more money on inspections so we won't be bothered by [stowaways]. If we do, you'll get fined'. (SO12)

Their real task is therefore, regarding policing stowaways, not to keep the port safe from harm, but from financial trepidation. While having to dehumanise though, there is compassion to be found among participants, reflecting a humane policing:

Unfortunately, I have witnessed [stowaways], coming from a South-American country to here. Four dead in [a container]. Thorough inspections couldn't find out if someone was in there. Only when it really began to smell. I was called in, because fluid escaped from below that didn't match the load, and because I unfortunately saw and smelt dead things before, I knew exactly what it was [blood]. The fact I saw dead people, that's not such a big drama, but the fact that the last thing I saw was diapers coming out of the container … I just had my daughter. I turned around. I received support for it. Still, when I smell coriander, I immediately have flashbacks. There was coriander in that container, haha [smiling uncomfortably]. […] The worst thing about it, I find; those people who were in there … It was a new [airtight] container. After I saw the container from the inside, and what those people … Can you imagine what those people must have tried to get out? Scratches of nails on the inside of the container. Unbelievable. […] Somewhere in Timbuktu there was a gentleman who said: 'Well, you're about to step to a brighter future, get into the container.' You pay for it. Then the container is locked. […] Instead of being loaded aboard a ship that sails out, it is placed in the hot sun. Coincidentally, because it's forgotten. You got coriander in it or whatever, and there are gasses there to kill bugs. There's a little hole in the above. It becomes one big casserole, having no more oxygen and you die. […] I know *everything* about it. You try to get out, and you're standing there in a [container] stack. You can hit as much as you want to, but there's no one who hears you. (SO13)

The horrific incident shared by the participant is not exceptional for frontline port policing staff. Stowaways dying from suffocation in air-tight containers, being starved to death on deck, or simply being thrown overboard happen frequently (cf. Nanda and Bellish 2013).

The velocity of trade 'offers' life-threatening possibilities to people in complete despair who want to escape war-torn areas, yet often suffocate to death, silently, invisibly, in a metal box. In considering

stowaways as 'humanity as cargo' (Von Zharen 2000, p. 607) that is financially risky, the participants develop an internal struggle that on the one hand requires them to be indifferent towards instances as described in the above to cope with trauma and do their job. On the other hand, their empathy is revealed and 'embedded in routine and less visible practices' (Basaran 2015, p. 207). Therefore, in policing stowaways they do not only encounter and attempt to resist the void of promoting port security through dehumanising stowaways into mere financial risks; they additionally encounter atrocities enabled by what they believe should be inherently good, which is supporting the flow of global commerce. Policing stowaways then entails a policing in which they reflect they are 'reproducing and strengthening inequalities associated with […] migration in hyper-commercial settings [that] can hardly be conceived as anything but an instrumental relationship marketing strategy' (Hultman and Cederholm 2010, p. 377), and has devastating, inhumane consequences. The final section will discuss the above findings in relation to that wider context of inequality reproduction and strengthening through port policing in hypercommercial settings.

## Discussion: port policing in spite of hypercommercialism?

The study showed that frontline policing staff in ports are responsible to prevent local security breaches from happening in order to keep global flow of people and goods going. In doing so they may police (against) '[p]oor, working-class and racialized people, the homeless, youth and countless other 'others' [who] may only be welcome as cleaners, landscapers, domestic workers, and in other kinds of disciplined, casualized and precarious employment to service the lives of elites' (Cowen and Bunce 2006, p. 436). Paradoxically, they are part of the very same marginalised group of 'others', being exploited dockers, truckers, lower-ranked seafarers and stowaways, who pose a similar disruption and (criminalised) security threat to the movement of maritime transport (Cowen 2014, p. 126). They are marginalised by global, political-economic processes of (security) market deregulation and post-9/11 maritime legislation – especially the ISPS Code – turned the age-old port culture that used to be open, cosmopolitan, anti-authoritarian, anti-careerist, egalitarian and one of working-class solidarity (Mah 2014, p. 177), into an commodified, empty shell of neoliberal, liquid security (Zedner 2006). Meaning, as they *embody* the interruption of the just-in-time logistical systems themselves, they are the very threat to flows of global commerce and maritime transport, while having to minimise the 'expos[ure of] the vulnerability of the just-in-time production systems and so too the centrality of logistics infrastructure and its protection to the political of our present' (Cowen 2014, p. 116). Port policing can therefore not be truly delivered, as then they would interrupt; however, it can be promoted. Promoting port policing feeds and is fed, as shown, by managerialism and careerism; dependency on and sympathy with the maritime and port business communities; and feelings of insignificance experienced in policing port thieves, drugs trafficking, terrorism and stowaways (Eski 2016a).

The struggles of participants to merely promote port policing at the frontline, can be understood as an effect and structural feature of a deeper, ingrained and invisible *hypercommercial* nature and its corporate power (McChesney 2004, p. 167) affecting (trans)port policing. I would like to argue that, compared to other sites of frontline policing, such hypercommerciality seems to be most apparent in (trans)port policing. It makes their work hypercommercial, because port policing staff are dealing with 'branding', its neoliberal nature, and its consequences for democracy and civil society, which are problematic characteristics of hypercommercialism (McChesney 2004; Cooper 2005; Andersen and Gray 2008; Hultman and Cederholm 2010; Giroux 2015). In such policing through 'commercialism on steroids', which entails the selling of a propagandist problem-solving product or service that encourages intense dissatisfaction (McChesney 2004, p. 142), frontline port policing staff weave advertising and promotion into all elements of a certain sector, in this case port security. So, whereas security consuming is done for security consumption's sake (cf. Bauman 2007; Goold et al. 2010), hypercommercial port policing entails how the promotion of the 'product' port policing

has become the product itself. It would be interesting to discover whether other areas of transport policing are affected by such hypercommercial logic.

Hypercommercial policing then reproduces, if not amplifies, existing inequalities that go behind it, in which the neoliberal discourse celebrates seemingly positive values such as secure maritime environments and smoothly-running transport, yet it neglects fundamental issues revolving around equality, welfare and ethics (Hultman and Cederholm 2010), reflected in policing stowaways' faiths, for example. Thus, in port policing being promoted while its promoters – like the participants – expand and exploit inequalities, a sense of occupational worth is lost, while they sustain inequality, suffering and exploitation. Perhaps even more so and more hidden away from public scrutiny than other sites of policing.

However, they also silently resist hypercommercial policing and its 'advertising in and of itself acts as a significant ideological and cultural force in our society' (McChesney 2004, p. 142). Whereas policing is generally ascribed features of coercive authority, prejudice, suspicion (Waddington 1999), the frontline port policing staff of this study maintain a cosmopolitan, inclusive outlook during their everyday work, consisting of sympathy, which leads to, for example, a laissez-faire policing of certain vulnerable communities in the port. Therefore, the observed (yet silent) resistance of the frontline port policing staff against hypercommercialism, resulting in or strengthening certain policing virtues, gives hope for a democratic critique (Goldsmith and Sheptycki 2007, pp. 256–257), not externally *but from within*, against neoliberal policing and its destructive excesses (Smeets 2017).

As a concluding remark, that hope of resistance against hypercommercialism through virtuous policing was revealed because of a detailed *ethnographic* study done on real people doing real policing work for, with and against other real people. Moving forward toward more of such (policing ethnographies of) hope, in line with a Baumanian sociology of hope (Davis 2010), ethnographies of policing could be(come) a new conceptual methodological language that demands theoretical and epistemological commitment of the ethnographer, like the participants of this study, to be 'constantly pulled between those moments of optimism and pessimism' but who 'always manages to find hope as its final destination' (Davis 2010, p. 1).

## Notes

1. The citations used in this article are retrieved from the raw data set I collected myself. I have used these citations in other publications (see Eski 2016a, 2016b, 2018).
2. For a more detailed description of the ISPS Code's effects on ship and port security regulation, please consider the Eski's earlier work (2016a).
3. Regarding an elaborate consideration of the thematic coding and analysis of the gathered data that was integrated with a theoretical framework on 'othering' (Said 1979), please consider my earlier work (Eski 2018, 2016a, 2016b).
4. Please consider chapter 7, Eski (2016a) and Eski (2016b) (ETHNOGRAPHY journal).

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