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- 1 The illustration on the front cover of Geneviève Pruvost's book – a recruitment notice displayed in French police stations until the 1980s – carries the message that policing is a man's job (*La Police Nationale – un métier d'homme*). Images of three uniformed and decorated male figures, including a 'motorcop', reinforce the association of policing with virility and martial heroism. Pruvost's book is not simply an excellent historical study of the introduction and slow assimilation of women into the institutions of civil policing in France. It is an extremely rigorous study of the significance of gender, including constructions of masculinity as well as femininity, within the logic, ethos, orientation and practice of the police. Thus, her concern is with 'feminisation', not simply in terms of the counting of the number of women employed as police officers, but in terms of the disruption of the gender order on which policing as a 'mission' was for so long constructed (p. 278). Informed by sophisticated engagement with gender studies, including the work of Judith Butler and Joan Scott, as well as theories relating to violence and the modern state (Norbert Elias, Max Weber), Pruvost's book is grounded in extensive archival research. In addition to more conventional sources it makes use of an exhaustive survey of newspapers, periodicals, television broadcasts and film, as well as interviews with 128 former police officers (79 women and 49 men). The implications of her study are far-reaching and deserve to be read by all historians

of policing, not simply those who position their work as women's history or gender history.

- 2 Pruvost outlines and explains the trajectory of women's employment in policing in France. The first two women officers were appointed by the Prefecture of Police in Paris in 1935, under the title of 'police assistants' to undertake duties primarily associated with the protection of women and children. Whilst they had the power of arrest they did not carry batons or firearms. Their work was analogous with that of social workers and, indeed, they were required until 1952 to have a formal social work qualification upon recruitment. Whilst there appears to have been a plan to create a police reserve of up to 200 women to undertake repressive surveillance activities during the Vichy period, the archives are silent as to what extent this was realised. After Vichy there was a clear return to the police assistant function, with a renewed emphasis on child protection as women were incorporated into mixed teams that made up the Parisian *brigades des mineurs* (juvenile squads). Their work mainly involved social enquiries in cases involving girls or very young children, interviews with child victims of crime or abuse, finding accommodation for homeless children, and the tracing of children missing from home. Work with delinquents accused of offences was left to the local police of each *quartier*. During the 1950s-1960s there were repeated but failed attempts by moderate feminist campaigners to extend this gendered model, in which women's policing function was grounded in social maternalism, to the whole of France. In the Prefecture, however, the establishment of women police assistants had grown to 60 by 1960, the year in which they acquired the status and rank of *inspecteur*, gaining nominal equality with their male peers in the *brigade des mineurs* for the first time.
- 3 For most of the twentieth century the exercise of the legitimate use of physical force was associated with masculinity ; biological assumptions about men's superior physical strength excluded women from the army and police. In France, however, the events of 1968, which led to wide denunciation of the police as repressive, were an important factor in opening up the newly constituted National Police to women recruits ; women were finally allowed to bear arms and to receive the same training as men. The rhetoric was one of equality. Yet the broader symbolism of women's integration was grounded in gender difference. Given women's association with non-violent, caring roles, the publicity surrounding their increased presence in policing provided a convenient means through which the image of policing was remodeled as 'service'. Partial 'feminisation' enabled a shift towards a model that emphasized prevention and peaceful persuasion, with the physical force associated with masculinity presented as a tool of vital last resort.
- 4 Moreover, whilst women were nominally given access to all ranks in policing in the 1970s-1980s, cultural assumptions remained embedded : that women would elect to undertake work in child protection, would provide a friendly face at police station reception desks, and that they should most certainly not 'request' to work in squads specializing in riot control (*Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité* or CRS). Beneath the veneer of gender equality, the actual allocation of duties was still based on the sexual division of labour and women were expected to cultivate a feminine appearance. This image was reflected in Yves Boisset's 1979 thriller movie *The Woman Cop* (*La Femme Flic*). Individual 'token' women were able to step out of appropriately feminine roles, but most did not. Moreover, those women who were successfully promoted and became minor celebrities in the public eye – Danielle Thiéry, Martine Monteil and Mireille

Ballestrazzi, popularly known as ‘the three graces’ – drew a veil of silence over the presence of sexual harassment and discrimination within the National Police. Similarly, interviews with women officers who served in this period revealed a tendency to reproduce a personal ‘success’ story grounded in their own agency as ‘self-made women’. Individual women positioned themselves neither in the role of ‘spokesperson for women officers’ nor as ‘a standard bearer for feminism’. At the same time sexism in policing was presented as isolated or exceptional (pp. 238-240). Arguably, this was a coping mechanism that enabled women to withstand the prejudices they faced and to progress within the institution.

- 5 Significantly too, although the prohibition of women on the grounds of their sex had been lifted, a ‘quota’ system was used to restrict their numbers until, having been condemned by the Council of Europe, it was finally dispensed with in 1991. This official ‘quota’, however, was simply replaced by a further series of barriers to recruitment that indirectly favoured men : physical performance tests, minimum body mass index, and subsequently the imposition of one sole height restriction for both men and women. The phasing out of each barrier coincided with threats to bring test cases before the European Court of Justice. The continued attempt to restrict women’s numerical presence meant that, even when women were deployed to all brigades and teams, it was nevertheless assumed that they would be in a minority ; male force was still viewed as the base-line that underpinned police functionality.
- 6 Pruvost suggests that the male monopoly of force, on which the sexual division of labour was founded, could only be overthrown through the loss of life : women needed to kill and be killed to shift the gender paradigm. Thus she sees the deaths, in active service, of two women members of the *Garde de la Paix* (Keepers of the Peace) in 1991 as of huge symbolic importance. The year 2000 saw two separate complaints filed against women officers for firing at civilians. Notably, the police mobilized to defend their colleagues as engaged in self-defence, emphasizing the dangerous situation in which their job placed them and from which women were not immune. Thus full equality was only possible when, following Joan Scott’s arguments, a corresponding shift had been achieved between changes in the actual organization ‘of social relations between the sexes’ (i.e. women’s access to arms) and changes in the symbolic order (i.e. the way in which this was explained and thought about) (p. 16). Also significant development was the broader agenda of inclusivity in this period : the idea that the police should reflect and represent the communities amongst whom they work, in terms of ethnicity, social class and sexual orientation as well as gender.
- 7 A very strong conclusion offers some very pertinent comparative reflections. Why did women’s progress occur later in France than in Britain or North America, and why were their duties so narrowly defined until 1968 ? It certainly seems significant that no separate women’s department or bureau was created in France, as it was in many UK and North American cities in the 1920s-1950s. This precluded the development of a strong sense of identity and shared interest as women officers. Significantly, there were no national associations or networks of women officers in France until very recently. Clearly, too, the emphasis on the carrying of lethal weapons as the defining element of the French police officer was very different from the model of the British ‘bobby’, who was assumed to police through consent rather than coercion. Comparison to the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), as a paramilitary model, may have been useful here, given that the RUC successfully resisted European equality legislation by

arguing for exceptionality given the conflict situation of 'the Troubles'. The French case also reinforces a thesis that women were more likely to progress where policing was organized on a municipal basis and where there were significant levels of local autonomy. It is noticeable that it was within the Prefecture – and not the *Sûreté Nationale* – that the initial experimentation with feminisation occurred. Arguably, the size, governance and structure of municipal policing enabled women officers to gain the respect and trust of their most senior male officers who, crucially, were influential in the decision-making process regarding establishment and recruitment. As Pruvost shows, women's role in policing never mustered sufficient interest to become a popular topic of national debate; rather, their incorporation into the National Police was largely a response to the promotion of a broader agenda relating to gender equality within the public sector professions.

- 8 Given the huge scope of the research undertaken for the book, it is unsurprising that much of it seems underutilized here. The interview material merits further mining and, in terms of themes, more discussion of the practicalities of everyday policing, the nature of the work that women undertook, and the lived experience of gendered social relations – as much as its symbolic representation – would have added an extra dimension. Yet these quibbles should not detract from the high quality of the work and the contribution that it makes. Clearly Pruvost has much more to say on the fascinating topic of gender and policing in modern France and I look forward to her further publications. As she indicates in the introduction to her book, feminist criminologists and historians of crime in the USA, Canada, and UK have tended to pay more attention to women's involvement in policing. Where feminist research was undertaken in France it tended to be on women's status as 'victims' of law and order, rather than as 'collaborators' with patriarchal institutions. Pruvost very persuasively demonstrates that gender analysis can offer significant new insights into the nature of rule in twentieth-century nation states. Moreover, whilst there has not been space to comment on it in any depth here, her analysis of the role of feminist organizations, women politicians and the Council of Europe in promoting women's employment in policing will be of great interest to students of feminism and international law. This book is a very significant contribution to the study of policing and governance, and deserves a wide readership.

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