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Who are the enforcers?

The motives and methods of muscle for hire in West Scotland and the West Midlands

Abstract

Enforcement, ranging from threats, intimidation, to assault and homicide, has long been an established practice within criminal networks. However, comparatively little academic research exists about the nature and role of enforcers within and beyond the context of contract killings. Drawing on qualitative interviews with criminal enforcers from two contrasting sites within the UK—the West Scotland and the West Midlands—the current study examines the articulated, identifiable pathways into criminal enforcement; the **nuanced nature of enforcement and the** roles those men commonly adopt within the context of organised crime, and the relationship between these men's activity, the wider context of organised crime, and presence of social and cultural capital within it. This article provides insights into how one becomes an enforcer; how contact is made between all parties involved; the degree of planning involved; and costing arrangements, with important implications for research and practice.

Keywords: Bourdieu; debt collecting; enforcement; hitman; organised crime; violence

Introduction

What exactly does it mean to be a criminal ‘enforcer’? To what extent and in what ways does this intertwine with violence and the adoption of the role of ‘hitman’? Both terms conjure up images of glamour and professionalism in the underworld. However, very little is known about the lived experience of muscle for hire. Accordingly, this paper seeks to add and extend the somewhat limited existing scholarship on enforcers, and the nuanced nature of their roles. It combines unique qualitative data sets gathered in two geographical locations in the UK – West Scotland and the West Midlands, focused on in-depth semi-structured interviews with people involved in enforcement activities. Through comparative analysis of their extended narratives, we zero-in on their motivations for and roles within enforcement contexts in different geographical locations of the UK. In doing so, we seek to add to the emerging literature on UK organised crime (e.g. Antonopoulos 2016; Hall et al 2017; Campana & Varese 2018; Rahman 2019) and the nuanced roles associated with gang enforcement, arguing as we do that – contrary to popular mythology – there is a spectrum of enforcement roles in the criminal underworld.

In the first section, we outline the insights from the extant literature on organised crime, begin to interrogate the somewhat limited existing scholarship on criminal enforcement and argue that enforcement roles extend beyond those of ‘hitmen’. Secondly, we outline the research methods used to gather data in both of our geographical settings. Thirdly, we present the findings from the data under thematic themes. Fourth and finally, drawing on insights from Bourdieu (1985, 1986, 1990) as well as the wider extant literature on criminal enforcement, we draw together a summary of our main insights and make recommendations for policy, practice and future research.

Literature Review

Organised crime (OC) can be a nebulous concept, and the question of what constitutes organised criminal activity and how it should be defined has been hotly debated by criminologists (Kelly & Caputo 2005; von Lampe 2016; Bjorgo 2017). Most agree that it tends to be a productive activity, involving the provision of illicit goods and services (Varese 2010; Antonopoulos and Papanicolaou 2018; McLean et al. 2018). However, another aspect of OC is the regulation of illicit production and exchange, such as controlling the supply of protection; which may include protection against extortion, theft, property rights and the settlement of various disputes (Varese 2010; Wang 2013). **Although traditionally organised crime groups (OCGs) were viewed as fiercely hierarchical, in contemporary terms this may be the exception rather than the rule – more commonly, they may be seen as ‘loosely affiliated networks of criminals who coalesce around certain criminal opportunities’, often lacking a rigid hierarchy (Finckenauer 2005).**

Often viewed as essential to the definition of organised crime is ‘the ability to use, and the reputation for use of, violence or the threat of violence to facilitate criminal activities’ (Finckenauer 2005, p.66). However, organised criminal activity also in many ways involves profit-oriented criminal activity that might include drug crimes, child criminal exploitation, human trafficking, money laundering, the infiltration of business operations and the corruption of public officials and the political process, but may not necessarily involve extreme violence (Finckenauer 2005;Gottschalk and Markovic 2015; Bjørgo 2017; Rahmen 2019). Some evidence suggests that many OCGs have mirrored developments in the conventional economy and shown greater versatility in their criminal acts, pursuing opportunities based on online fraud and identity theft (Kelly & Caputo, 2005). In the process, they have developed a willingness to engage in relatively peaceful international partnerships with other OCGs for mutual benefit (*ibid*).

The view of Mafias as ‘enforcers’ was proposed by Schelling (1984) and developed further by Gambetta (1996). Historical evidence suggests that originally Mafias were coalitions of ‘guardians’ who provided enforcement of ‘legitimate rights’, with enforcement at first a competitive activity within the Sicilian Mafia with very little interaction between Mafia ‘families’ (Anderson 2000, p.2). Later, coalitions were formed, and within this context contract killings became prominent (*ibid*).

There is some evidence that OCGs outsource threats, intimidation, and violence, thus avoiding direct participation in these activities and insulating themselves from potential negative consequences (Kelly & Caputo 2005). International evidence of this can be found, for example, in the context of triad culture in Hong Kong and China. Lo’s (2012) research has suggested that youth gang members scattered around Hong Kong often become hired by triad ‘snakeheads’ or enforcers to provide the lowest tier of triad society, acting as ‘foot soldiers’ in order to collect drug dues, transport large quantities of money to and from triad leaders and engage in ruthless forms of violence where required (Lintner 2004: 87; see also Gastrow 2001; Deuchar 2018). In his own research in Hong Kong, Deuchar (2018) identifies clear links between some young men’s initial involvement in street gangs, their later susceptibility towards exploitation by Mafia-style criminal networks associated with triad culture, and their eventual transition to membership of a ‘reserve army’ of triad societies, where they became ready and willing to provide muscle for the collection of dues within the context of drug dealing.

Illicit markets, by definition, cannot be regulated by contracts and courts (Reuter 2009). Instead, transactions typically are enforced by ‘systemic violence’ (Goldstein 1985). However, as alluded to above, there is also evidence to suggest that organised criminals may at times relate to and cooperate with one another, including within the context of global networks, through social norms associated with reciprocal exchange but still limited trust

(Kelly & Caputo 2005). Hence, some criminal transactions may run smoothly without the need to resort to violence (Vargas 2014). Thus, while some criminal networks may clearly adopt the need for employing an enforcer whose task is to simply ‘employ violence to maintain or advance a criminal enterprise’ (Rahmen 2019, p.75), others may require the threatening, but less lethal, activity such as monitoring of victims’ whereabouts or providing threats of intimidation (Schloenhardt 1999; Aronowitz, 2001). Even less sinister practices may also include, for example, ‘seizing of documents, confinement of victims to the workplace or threatening them with deportation’ (Aronowitz 2001, p.177). Accordingly, enforcement in the underworld could be said to exist on a continuum, with simple debt collecting and other forms of less lethal coercive activity on one end and contract killing on the other.

In the more extreme cases, targeted homicides may be conducted to eliminate an ‘obstacle’ or ‘rival’ within the context of illegal drug supply, human trafficking, fraud, money laundering, armed robbery and theft (MacIntyre et al. 2014; Rahman 2019). Within these wider contexts, recruitment of youth street gang members into OC may be pertinent (Densley 2013; Deuchar 2018) and payment for a killing provides a ‘useful remove between the person who benefits and the killer or killers themselves’ (MacIntyre et al. 2014: 326; see also, Shaw & Skywalker 2016).

Criminal ‘hits’ have been defined as ‘the targeting of specific individuals for murder’ whereby a third party is contracted for political, economic or personal gain (Shaw & Skywalker, 2016: 382). A hitman is a criminal undertaker (Hall 2012), that is a person ‘who accepts an order to kill another human being from someone who is not publicly acknowledged as a legitimate authority regarding “just killing” for financial or material gain’ (Brolan et al. 2016: 221). Such a distinction separates hitmen from soldiers and state executioners (MacIntyre et al. 2014: 326). However, research suggests that the military and

other violent occupations can be a fertile recruiting ground for criminal enforcers (MacIntyre et al. 2014; Van de Blunt et al., 2014).

The limited (largely ethnographic) research evidence on hitmen and enforcers suggest this type of criminal role may be relatively common in the context of OC (Brolan et al. 2016). MacIntyre et al. (2014) found UK enforcers were almost exclusively male and their average age was 38 years—the youngest hitman, from London, was 15, and the oldest, from Staffordshire, England, was 63. However, the enforcer role was less glamorous than the media stereotype, and the majority of paid killings took place for nominal financial sums, disproportionate both to the value of human life and the risks that enforcers absorb (Cameron 2013; MacIntyre et al. 2014).

Media portrayals tend to depict hitmen as ‘professionals’ who act on behalf of criminal networks and ‘hits’ are often seen to take place in ‘smoky rooms, bars and casinos frequented by gangsters’, usually very much hidden from the general public (MacIntyre et al., 2014: 326). However, MacIntyre et al.’s (2014: 31) historical exploration of killings associated with British hitmen suggests that hits have traditionally been carried out ‘in the open, on pavements, sometimes as the target was out walking their dog, going shopping, with passers-by watching on in abject horror’. Most hits took place within the suburbs rather than in the criminal underworld and the victim and the hitman tended to live in the same geographical locality. Brolan et al.’s (2016: 230) case review similarly finds that hits tend to take place ‘on the doorstep, on the threshold of domestic space’, in part because targets often are distracted when ‘fumbling for keys’.

Clearly the context in which contract killing occurs always involves a distance between the victim and perpetrator (MacIntyre et al. 2014), but wider research has drilled down more deeply into the nuanced nature of hitmen characteristics. The most widely recognised and pioneering typology is associated with Schlesinger’s (2001) work. Here,

hitmen are divided into ‘amateurs’, ‘semi-professionals’ and ‘professionals’ depending on specific patterns and characteristics (see also MacIntyre et al. 2014). Within this typology, an ‘amateur’ engages in little or poor planning and often conducts personal hits including those that target intimate partners; a ‘semi-professional’ engages in detailed levels of planning, leaves little evidence and targets mostly those involved in business-level disputes; and ‘professional’ hitmen engage in high levels of planning, leave no evidence and are generally associated with OC (Schlesinger 2001; see Shaw & Skywalker, 2016). However, others (Wilson & Rahman 2015; MacIntyre et al. 2014) have contested this distinction, arguing that it is difficult to establish how Schlesinger differentiated between his three categories and that the typology may not be of any great practical use to law enforcement.

In MacIntyre et al.’s (2014: 334-7) work, an alternative typology is put forward that suggests that four different types of enforcer may exist. First, the ‘Novice’ is seen as trainee or beginner. However, novices can still make successful hitmen, engage in reasonably effective planning and leave little in the way of forensic evidence. Second, the ‘Dilettante’ may be much older than the ‘Novice’, may not necessarily come from an offending background but may simply accept a contract as a means of resolving a personal (often financial) crisis and engage in the killing with little enthusiasm and minimum of skill; in the Dilettante’s case, firearms may not always be accessible. Third, the ‘Journeyman’ tends to be experienced and reliable, but not necessarily an exceptional performer. And fourth, the ‘Master’ hitman tends to be closest to Schlesinger’s category of ‘professional’. ‘Masters’ may often come from military or paramilitary backgrounds, tend to exist in the shadows like ‘ghosts’ and often evade justice as a result of their transient nature where they travel into communities and then leave immediately after the hit has taken place (see also Wilson & Rahman 2015). In attempting to consider what ultimately might drive someone to become a hitman, Wilson & Rahman (2015: 263) suggest that motivation is most commonly economic.

They argue that some neutralise their intended victims as ‘targets’, reframe their actions as ‘just money’ and ultimately view their job as ‘shoot to kill’ – thus separating their ‘morally-responsible selves’ as a means of being able to kill, while also de-personalising their intended victims (*ibid*).

Accordingly, **much of the existing scholarship** on enforcers tends to be dominated by a focus on criminal undertaking. In this context, criminal enforcement is often seen to be associated with the presence of a perpetrator as a third party, disassociated with the intended victim, who simply seeks to eliminate an obstacle, shooting to kill (Wilson & Rahman 2015; Brolan et al. 2016). However, recently emerging suggested typologies begin to move beyond Schlesinger’s (2001) rather simplistic continuum and suggest the presence of nuanced roles, including those of Novice and Dilettante that may potentially be associated with the involvement of younger members of street gangs and wider roles beyond contract killings.

Indeed, the wider literature on organised crime suggests that enforcement roles may be much more nuanced than commonly thought, and that while the act of enforcement will invariably represent an intention to uphold a powerful foothold in the underworld, it may not always involve extreme violence. In short, there is a spectrum of enforcement that includes roles that may contradict much popular mythology that focuses on ‘hitmen’. In our own study, we attempt to move beyond the existing simplistic accounts on enforcement to recognise and explore further the distinction between contract killing and the wider roles associated with criminal enforcement.

The Current Study

Although there has been some limited criminological literature that has focused on the sociology and economics of contract killing, to date there has been comparatively little academic research about the nature and role of enforcers or ‘hitmen’ within and beyond the

context of contract killings, since these men often tend to occupy a secret, covert world (MacIntyre et al. 2014; Shaw & Skywalker, 2016).

Our empirical research focused on two comparative sites within the UK: the west of Scotland and west Midlands. While each region has some notable differences in terms of demographics and population characteristics¹, in regard to criminality both share a number of similarities. Despite lulls, both sites have shown historically embedded criminality, and often displayed above national average crime rates. Alongside cities like London, Liverpool and Manchester, both sites are also notable for organised criminal activity: producing a number of prominent underworld figures, including most recently Robert Dawnes, Jamie Daniel and Eddie Lyons. Feuds have often resulted in violent crimes being carried out in the public domain. In addition, while the west Midlands has been historically renowned for association with gun crime, and the west of Scotland with knife crime, as the illegal drugs market continues to generate considerable wealth, both sites have shown emerging comparative trends with west Midlands increasing in knife crime, and Scotland in gun crime. Furthermore, both sites have deeply embedded post-code violence. In addition to site similarities, as with any research, the sites chosen are typically linked to researcher networks: of which the first and second author have unique insight into the underworld of either arena. All of which make for excellent comparative analysis.

Through adopting a small-scale but in-depth qualitative approach, we focused on the following research questions: (1) What are the articulated, identifiable pathways into criminal enforcement for a small sample of men in these two geographical locations? (2) What roles do these men commonly adopt within the context of organised crime? (3) What is the

¹ Having said this, although different in terms of ethnic populations, both sites have undergone intense immigration over the last century which have significantly shaped the current landscape. Likewise, many parts of the major cities of Glasgow and Birmingham suffer similar socio-economic characteristics.

relationship between these men's activity, the wider context of organised crime and presence of social and cultural capital within it?

Method

The participants in this research have been given pseudonyms to uphold ethical precepts. Before commencing interviews, they were advised to not talk about any ongoing criminal activities that they were aware of, nor talk about any crimes that only they knew about. Also, they were counselled not to reveal personal information of any cases that they wanted to shed light on as a reference point for a question or a prompt that they were voluntarily responding to. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the first and second authors' universities.

West Scotland

Data from the West Scotland site are derived from a qualitative study of gangs and OC conducted in two shifts from 2012–2019 and encompassing interviews with a combined purposive and snowball sample of 65 (ex)offenders (53 men, 12 women) aged between 16 and 55, who had engaged in behaviour defined as serious and OC (Scottish Government 2015). The current study draws on a limited account of these interviews. While a significant number of participants in the study had engaged in some form of enforcement – via threats, assaults, and occasionally serious attacks – to varying degrees, it was rare for any participants to perceive their role as an active 'enforcer' first and foremost and, for example, a drug dealer second. Only a handful of individuals saw their main role as an enforcer (often for specific groups or partnerships) or muscle for hire more generally. It is this small minority within the sample group that the current study draws upon, in particular the participants Wi, Ge and Joe.

At the time of interview Wi was in his 20s, but reflected upon his experiences to discuss how he moved from being a core member of a street gang to eventually working as an enforcer for a number of groups/individuals involved in serious and OC. The relationship he shared with several older individuals involved in pre-existing criminal networks contributed significantly to this transition. Ge is Wi's best friend, and both have known each other since childhood. Like Wi, Ge was involved in street gangs and regularly engaged in violence. Unlike Wi, Ge is from a middle-class background. It is his ties to Wi that arguably played the greatest role in bringing him into enforcement practices. Joe on the other hand was an elder individual who was one of two main enforcers involved with a well-known OCG. Joe was brought into such activities due to his local reputation as an ample fighter, displaying bravado and having a general lack of fear. After a dispute over pay, along with other growing minor incidents, the OCG turned against Joe and sought to carry-out several attempted 'hits' against him. Joe in turn retaliated. The dispute remains unsettled to this day. Other participants include recently turned practitioner Matt, who drew upon his military experience and military connections to act as a freelance agent procuring weaponry and (anti)surveillance devices either for sale or hire, to help facilitate enforcement practices.

Interviewees were initially accessed via gatekeepers at several charitable outreach organisations, including those working with (ex)offenders seeking to desist from crime. Most of the sample were interviewed once, although a few were interviewed numerous times. Interviews were mostly conducted face-to-face in a neutral public space, although some were conducted via mobile phone, using apps such as WhatsApp Messenger or Viber. A small number of interviews were also conducted in groups. Interviews typically lasted an hour or less. Thematic analysis took place thereafter.

The Midlands

Historically, the Midlands, especially the west Midlands is renowned for its criminal groups. The internationally renowned TV series *Peaky Blinders* depicts the exploits of a crime family during the aftermath of World War I (Chinn 2014). The findings from the Midlands site derive from three in-depth semi-structured interviews that were conducted between the months of June and August 2019. The three men that were researched have previously been involved in extra-legal governance, namely within OC settings. John, who had previously been interviewed for academic research on OC (Insert reference after peer-review process), is a freelance private investigator, who is ex-military and is also an ex-police officer that worked during the peak of the Irish troubles. As will be discussed later, John admits that his experiences as law enforcement and private investigator have served him well in his involvement within criminal enforcement. Aaron was recently released from prison after serving time for multiple drug related offences. He has previously worked as a doorman for several prominent nightclubs in Birmingham, West Midlands, and has extensive knowledge and links to the city's underworld. So too, through his work as a doorman, he has previously been involved in debt collecting for local businessmen and those who are submerged in the criminal landscape. Similarly, to Aaron, Theo has recently served prison time for drug related offences. Before his incarceration, Theo was involved in debt collecting on a regular basis.

Here it is important to note that all three men have not worked together, yet they have several commonalities that are worthy of consideration. As will be revealed in the findings, they have all been involved in enforcement, chiefly within the context of debt collecting. So too, they have first-hand experiences of operating as paid enforcers, who have 'planned' and 'executed' activities that have descriptions of underworld enforcement. In addition, all three men offer narratives on how they have previously operated on behalf of businessmen as well members of criminal groups.

Findings and Discussion

Findings are presented thematically. The three themes speak to specific aspects of enforcement. These are ‘becoming an enforcer’, ‘the economics of enforcement, ‘planning and execution’. The accounts presented demonstrate the ‘blurred boundaries’ of enforcement, which von Lampe (2008) considers to be a small degree of separation between legal and illegal economies.

Becoming an Enforcer

Like most serious crimes, OC does not operate within a social vacuum (Hobbs 2013; Deuchar 2018; Rahman 2019). Indeed, it is a social phenomenon that has many interfaces when contrasted with the legitimate societal sphere. The nexus between licit and illicit worlds are not dissimilar or aimed at avoiding one another. Rather, OC has a routine of intermingling with its social environment. Van de Bunt et al. (2014: 322) argue that ‘social embeddedness means that existing relations and structures are not only the breeding ground for criminal activities, but also determine the form these activities can take’. The notion of social embeddedness can be applied to occupation, gender relations and ethnic minorities. As this paper reveals, enforcement, for some of the men in this study, is considered as an occupation. However, before discussing how legitimate occupations can serve as fertile grounds for enforcement activities, this section will first consider what it takes to become an enforcer, as well as how social embeddedness and its underpinning variables facilitate this.

The concept of social embeddedness derives from the field of economics. Polanyi’s (1944) work on England’s social and political upheavals during the rise of the market economy argues how economic activity cannot be considered without taking into consideration the social and cultural framework within which this behaviour is situated. Four

decades later, Bourdieu (1985) developed similar thoughts by suggesting that explanations for economic behaviour are not only sought in “physical capital”, but also in “social capital”. In recent times, Bourdieu’s work has been influential when studying offenders. Burgeoning criminological research in Western Europe has used social capital as a framework of exploring offenders in group settings (see, for instance, Deuchar 2009; Fraser, 2015), with some advancing Bourdieu’s initial work on capital so as to be able to produce groundbreaking perspectives of street level crime (Sandberg & Pedersen 2011; Harding 2014). Social capital is defined as ‘the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.119).

While social capital may be viewed as a simple network of social connections, Bourdieu used it to explain the harsh realities of social inequality. In short, social capital resonates with the saying: ‘It’s not what you know, it’s who you know’. However, this view is not exclusive to the legitimate world, as the relational side of embeddedness is paramount when collaborating in illicit operations. When asked whether social capital is needed to be a successful enforcer, John stated:

100% social. But it’s social in the criminal world. You need to have that name. Everybody needs to know that you’re the person who collects the debts. Often, you gain that criminal reputation and respect from the work that you’ve put in, the prison time that you’ve done, and those that you are affiliated to. Everyone in the East Midlands knows who collects and who has the name.

Aaron also believed that social capital is essential when operating as an enforcer, but also considered the importance of cultural capital:

I’d say a combination of all. Because if you’re just a Joe Bloggs coming up to me and you’re saying “yo, you owe some money”. And I’ve never heard of you or you ain’t got nothing about ya in terms of you being able to look after yourself or being associated to a certain group or name, then I’m just going to tell you to fuck

off. However, if I know that you're affiliated to a group or I know; "fuck me, he'll be a handful if I don't pay the money", then it's a whole different thing.

Both men consider the significance of street social capital (Ilan 2013), which acts as an extension of street culture. In doing so, they narratively establish that having a 'name' is crucial for reputation and position when undertaking enforcement duties. This echoes the ethnographic work of Anderson (1999), who alluded that street culture is often contingent upon informal 'respect' based hierarchies that are the epitome of violent potential and illicit entrepreneurialism. Interestingly, both men use the term 'affiliated', which denotes that enforcers are often part of a wide network of criminal operators. For John, being incarcerated can contribute towards developing criminal affiliations, which supports Rahman's (2019, p.124) claim that the 'institutionalised' form of street capital 'is much needed for one to be legitimated in the eyes of those who are embedded in the underworld'.

While respect is imperative for cultivating a reputable identity as well as an entrée in underworld settings, the relational and occupational aspects of social embeddedness is worthy of consideration. Two Scottish enforcers, 'Wi' and 'Ge', discussed this concept when reflecting on how they fell into this line of work:

Wi: I don't think I had a precious way in which I fell into it.

Ge: Nah, wouldn't say so

Wi: I had always had backing from dodgy guys. It was well known, [so I] had always been a bit brazen about the scheme... fact actually the first time I got paid was wee [Jason]. Gave me £5.

Ge: (laughing) and a bottle of Bucky

Wi: (laughs) mind his slasher cap [also]

Ge: Aye, after words.

Interviewer: What was that for?

Wi: £5, a bottle of B, and a cap to batter fuck right out of [young gang member]. I didn't like him either but.

At the age of 14, Wi had been a core member of a local youth gang. As such, another member paid him a small fee to sort an ongoing dispute. Coincidentally, this individual would

also later pay Wi again to carry out a more serious offence on the individual's brother-in-law, still unknown to his partner. As Wi's reputation grew, so did the opportunities afforded him:

... aye, we just hung out in [southside area]. My mates' mate, [mate A] said some guy fucked his auld man over ... [I suggested that we go] to [the guy's] house. My mate chapped his door, the maw came out so I fuckin' gubbed (punched) her right in the mooth. The da[d] came charging and scooped Ge here (pointing to Ge while laughing). Everybody was scrapping outside the boy's house (laughs)... [afterwards] I glanced a missed call ... [returning the call a voice] answer (Mate A's dad) said "cheers", stick up for him ... Asked us round ... [after several meetings] we were in [mate A's] drinking [and his dad] asked to speak to me... said "you want a wee job eh lad?". Always called me lad. Course, I'm fucking steaming, said aye, "what's it doing" ... [he asked me] to do some guy in round on [street name] ... gave me the address on a bit of paper, said tell "no cunt lad. Destroy that" (Wi motions tapping paper) ... [I] steak[ed] the place out a bit. Knowing his routine, that, you know... [one night he] was coming [down lane C], back from [pub name], only two ways back to his I had been waiting in the bushes. They (the bushes) run up the side of the wall (demonstrating with hands) ... no chance [would] get clocked. The street light shines across the building so its pitch dark. [the victim always] used the side door whenever going back from work. I assumed he would do the same ... I came up behind him before he put key in the door, just torn the knife along his face like that (gesturing horizontal motion). He was fuckin' wrecked, didn't scream, nothing ... So, I plugged him in the back and bailed ... [I received] £750. Was paid about a month, 5 weeks later.

As Wi states, while he had a criminal reputation locally and had already received a payment at the tender age of 14 for conducting an assault, how he received his first 'proper' payment for a 'hit' was quite different. Then, six months later, Mate A's dad again approached Wi and asked him to go for 'a drive':

Was just cruzin. I didn't think nothing other than he was wanting to talk shit ... he smacks the breaks, shouts "that's the cunts", pulls the car on the other side of the road and hands me a massive KD (abbreviated for kitchen devil) ... [I] ran up behind the guy [and] grabbed his jacket collar ... stabbed him rapid as fuck all over the body ... mainly the back ... must have been about 20 times ... don't know how many stabs went through the jacket, no' that sure ... fucking bailed I didn't even ask for anything. Crazy man, I knew nothing. Out driving next thing fucking GBH on some dude I've never clocked before ... [Mate A's dad] did that (motions with his hand), put about £340, no £45 (£345) up my sleeve.

Like legitimate activities, illicit activities are hard to separate from social relations between participants and the institutional environment in which interactions take place. Regularly the term “partners in crime” is used to describe relationships that are bound by established social ties. Therefore, crime is habitually embedded in existing friendship, familial and occupational relationships. So too, criminal enterprises are often epitomised by strong internal relationships based on trust. As there is no protection from opportunistic behaviour, offenders prefer working with or for individuals that they have established ties with. John’s involvement in enforcement started after he was approached by a “school mate” who worked for an OC group. It was his school friend who introduced him to the criminal group:

Because of my law enforcement and private investigator backgrounds, they knew that I had methods and techniques of tracking people down and finding out in-depth information about people. I’m not justifying what I’ve done, but at that time I needed the money and therefore I’d be the person that certain individuals would rely on when it came to offering strong intel on someone who owed money and what not. But then I got greedy. The money was coming in nicely and I got myself involved more and more to the extent whereby I’d go on knocks and be on the front line. So from being offered a grand or two to provide accurate information on a person, my role became more expensive and more hands-on.

While it was relational embeddedness that facilitated John to get involved in underworld activities, it was his occupational embeddedness that supported him to occupy a niche position within enforcement. Most OC activities that are sophisticated or continuous require reliable information. Often, criminals achieve this by using corrupt law enforcement agents, as their occupation serves as a source for intelligence. According to Van de Bunt et al. (2014: 327-328), in some circumstances ‘the link between organised crime and occupations is easily explained: certain occupations provide their practitioners with ideal opportunities to engage in organised crime’.

The work of Benson et al. (2009) offers a threefold explanation of how certain occupations provide opportunity to commit crimes. They first consider *nodes*; how social contacts established through the course of a career can contribute towards criminality. Alongside occupational networks, they consider *paths*; how individuals follow established procedures, and how they find certain people to achieve the right goals. Finally, they consider *edges*; that is how individuals find grey areas that present opportunities to commit crimes. This often occurs when activities are insufficiently supervised. In John's case, it can be said that his opportunity to be involved in enforcement stemmed from being connected by an established social contact, who realised that his prior occupations in law enforcement were valuable, so as to be able to "achieve the right goals". However, Aaron's opportunity to become an enforcer was a combination of node and edges:

I first got involved when I was working on a few nightclub doors. This one doorman approached me and knew that I could handle myself. He also knew that I worked at the gym so he asked whether I'd be interested in making some additional money through debt collecting. It was as simple as that. He reassured me that there was minimal risk attached to jobs and I went for it. Basically, for a while, I was an enforcer in the morning and a doorman at night.

The above passage reveals how certain legitimate occupations like nightclub security encompass individuals who are involved in extra-legal governance, particularly in relation to the provision of a service – debt collecting – which has previously been criticised for being unregulated even in a legitimate context (Verkaik 2000). Put simply, occupations in some cases can serve as a breeding ground for criminal activities. Crimes like enforcement will take on the shape of a social environment, and those who become enforcers are often the product of an expanding network through social ties.

The Economics of Enforcement

The understanding of money being the keystone asset for offenders extends beyond OC studies. Gary Becker's (1968) work on the economic approach of crime and punishment examined how offenders calculate; the practicalities of earning legal income, the income offered because of such opportunities, the income received based on illicit methods, the probability of being apprehended because of illegal acts and the probable punishment should the offender be caught. A swathe of economic studies of crime has emerged since Becker's seminal work.

Most academic work that considers offenders who operate in criminal enterprises for monetary gain emphasize the rationality of perpetrators as well as their ability to maximize their operations subject to constraints (Reuter 1983; Fiorentini & Peltzman 1997; Allum & Glimour 2012; Densley 2013; Hobbs 2013; Abadinsky 2016). However, Bakkali's (2019) pioneering research on road life in London, UK, argues how economic capital on road can be entrenched in the form of *cultural capital* (an individual's embodied, linguistic, objectified and institutionalised state) and *social capital* (the networks that individuals are connected to) (Bourdieu, 1986). Likewise, a person's social and cultural capitals can be institutionalised in the form of economic capital. John emphasised how "debt collecting works by name". When asked how contact would be made for a debt collecting service, he alludes to the significance of social and cultural capital:

For instance, if an individual who lives in the East Midlands is owed money by someone in the North East; regardless of criminal or business reasons, one of the first things that would happen is a dialogue between a big name in the East Midlands and someone that he knows in the North East. Sometimes a conversation between individuals can settle a lot of things. The bigger the name, the less violence is employed. So, the chances of that debt being collected is relatively high because mutual agreements can be made. If you're a household name in the criminal underworld, that alone gets half of the job done.

John's perspective of enforcement on a regional level illustrates the dialectical relationship between social and cultural capitals in the underworld and its significance for economic gain

for the lender as well as the enforcer. Like most underworld activities, debt collecting is a rarified niche in the labour market, which is seemingly contingent upon social ties. While Bourdieu (1986: 247) defines social capital as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’, he fails to consider how it should be measured. Seemingly, for John, social capital in extra-legal duties hinges on “a household name in the criminal underworld”. Although he does not offer insight on how a name is amassed within the illicit realm, he reinforces a recurring theme in this study thus far, which is that *reputation* is crucial in the criminal landscape.

In addition, John stresses the importance of a “dialogue” taking place and alludes to how a “conversation” between operatives can mitigate victimisation and the procuring of outstanding finances. Evidently this reinforces Bourdieu’s (1990) understanding of linguistic cultural capital, which argues that the mastery of language, speech and its relations, that is a person’s means of communication and self-presentation, is acquired from the national culture. In this case, the culture that the dialogue is acquired from may involve prior successful interactions with nefarious individuals as well as engagement in illicit goods or services.

At a house party in Glasgow, for example, a discussion ensued in which Wi would disclose his activities vaguely to a reputable OC group. One of the group’s members later contacted Wi and asked if he would be willing to “do a few things” in return for payment. The pay fluctuated depending on the job, but Wi would agree or disagree to the terms if he needed the money, if he was not busy, and if the job would not take too long. On some occasions, he did not even ask for money because the gang gave him “cheap” and occasionally “free” drugs. Wi felt he was part of the group and that he “owed” them, but with hindsight he knows he was really being exploited:

Wi: To be honest mate, they just use people. Like vulnerable wee guys wi' [reputations] from the scheme. End up thinking "aye they are cool" cause they are giving you [drugs], aye, whatever They do back you up [also though if] I was to get in trouble. Makes it hard, know, if you're being used or not really They would fling me under a bus if it came to it [however]. That's why they get wee guys to do shite for them. Shit falls on them if they get caught.

Ge: That's in the contract but mate. You get paid

Wi: Aye, mate, aye mate.

For Aaron and John in England, by contrast, enforcement is very much a monetary-driven service, which is rewarding. As Aaron states:

In debt collecting sometimes you find that the lender will tell you to get back his money and from that, you get a percentage. I've been involved in situations whereby individuals have had to pay back the money with interest. In them cases I've been told by the lender to take a percentage from the money that he's owed and whatever else he's charged on top. But these kinds of things you agree before you go and do the job and you first assess how big the job is.

John's stance on costing is much firmer. Seemingly, his cost is contingent upon the value of the debt as opposed to the severity of recovering the outstanding money:

For me, it depended on the size of the debt. If it was a debt below £20,000 it'd be 20% of whatever I'm told to recover as opposed to what I end up recovering. If it's a big job, then I would ask for a flat fee for £10,000. Especially if it's a flat fee and work out of town, a collection that's six figures. I'd ask nothing less than ten grand.

While both men differ on how they justify the economics of their work, they both echo that costing is agreed prior to commencing any extra-legal work. Interestingly, their perceptions of costing differ from Becker's (1968) viewpoint of how offenders calculate the economics of their crime. Both men do not factor the probability of being apprehended in their costing, nor do they decide the monetary value of their work in relation to the punishment that they would receive if convicted. This should not be mistaken for imprudent behaviour, as the next section

reveals that the men are indeed rational and sophisticated in their planning and execution of extra-legal work.

Planning and Execution

Based on the above, social ties are crucial, as offenders operate in volatile environments, primarily because of their illegal activities. Before this section exemplifies the similarities between legal and illegal activities, especially within OC settings, it should be stressed that illegality does make a difference when it comes to how an activity takes place. By default, illegality insinuates that contracts are not enforceable. This denotes that illegal actions must be clandestine, as people can be arrested and their assets can be seized at any given point. The concept of OC is nebulous, yet it is globally accepted that the phenomenon is financially lucrative. There is little by way of guidelines and mechanisms that govern transactions in the underworld. For instance, entering a contract and paying off debts add to the everlasting list of unregulated actions in the illicit world, hence cooperation in the world of organised criminality can be problematic. Thus, cooperation is paramount.

Aaron, who has previously worked as a debt collector on a freelance basis for several underworld figures, reflects on the rational nature of debt collecting, a process which in popular culture is synonymous to violent practice, but one that he considers to be complex:

You see, something like debt collecting is not about inflicting violence. A lot of it is about approach. Sometimes it's about how you talk and how you can go about handling an intense situation. Often I've observed a lot of doormen that are employed as debt collectors. I've even worked with a few. They're usually involved because they've got the gift of the gab. They can talk their way through situations but at the same time they're usually big and therefore intimidating.

Interestingly, Aaron's experiences of debt collecting involve working alongside nightclub doormen. His sentiments echo the work of Hobbs et al. (2005), whose ethnographic research revealed how licit and illicit opportunities are often presented to private

security, which usually come in the daunting form of “bouncers”. Although Aaron makes it clear that violence for him is not a defining function when it comes to enforcing debt collection, he does consider intimidation to be a crucial characteristic. His perspective supports Schloenhardt’s (1999) research findings of how actors in trafficking organisations use threats and intimidation as enforcement tools, so as to be able to continue the flow of illegal enterprises. When Aaron was prompted to expand on his thoughts about employing violence when debt collecting, he stated:

... you have to approach these things with a bit of sense. If you’re out to collect money, you need to have a feel of the person that you’re going to deal with. Remember, they can just end up going to the police. What you’re doing isn’t legal, because after all what you’re doing is intimidating them and you are kind of putting the feelers out. It depends on the situation. Debt collecting is different to say beating someone up.

Based on the above, Aaron is prudent of the illegalities of debt collecting via enforcement. Similarly, to Aaron, Theo is wary of employing violence, especially when dealing with debtors that are not from criminal backgrounds:

I’ve been part of situations where it’s been a ‘criminal figure’ so to speak, that dealt with a legitimate company who owed him money. So, in that case I didn’t go in with tools (weapons). It’s because I was dealing with normal 9 to 5 people, who would happily call the police. So, you’re better off reasoning with them and having a conversation. But I suppose if you’re dealing with those that are involved in OC so to speak, then there would be no police involvement and therefore you’d send a message in a different way, and maybe that could be through the use of weapons. It’s about knowing who you’re dealing with, but most importantly it’s about how you’re able to get that money back.

Seemingly, Theo’s approach towards the use of violence is contingent upon the operating position of the debtor. Indeed, enforcement, in relation to debt collecting is not a process that is exclusive to underworld operatives. His approach of “reasoning” with

legitimate figures implies logic as well as rationality, which is much needed when retrieving owed money.

However, his perspective on employing violence differs with those from OC settings. While there is no primary evidence to support this statement, it seems that Theo's viewpoint of no police involvement observes the notion of omerta, which means that those from criminal fraternities are required to maintain a code of silence about any illegal activities that they carry out or ones that are carried out against them. Research that considers omerta reveals how organised criminals are not in a position to ask for law enforcement protection, nor are they able to initiate civil action when they have been exploited (Reuter 1983; Gambetta 1996; Paoli 2002; Zaitch 2005). In addition, Theo's involvement in enforcement has required him to collect money from a legitimate company on behalf of a criminal. This is a prime example of "blurred boundaries", which is an ongoing discussion in studies of OC that considers how interactions between licit and illicit worlds are often fluid. When prompted as to why business owners would require the help of those part of criminal organisations, Theo stated:

You'll find that legit businesses have ties with individuals that are in the underworld when it comes to assets like property, cars and other things. Also, businessmen work with other businessmen and sometimes they need enforcers to settle an issue in order to avoid court fees, legal fees and other issues that will cause hassle or economic strain. So therefore, you'd go to a man and say "I got an issue, can you deal with it?"

The above excerpt resonates with Aaron's experiences as an enforcer on one occasion:

One case that I was involved in was because this guy started up a coffee shop in town and he took out some credit. Legit business of course but the guy owed £15,000. In this case, I think things were done legally, as there was paperwork and signatures involved, but the lender didn't want to take it to court and end up with the hassle of paying legal fees. So, I had to go down and speak to this guy respectfully and ask him where are we at with the repayments etc.

Both Aaron and Theo mention the instrumental value of enforcement. In the Western world, financial disputes are often settled through legal channels, which therefore involves judicial processes that are costly. The instrumental value in enforcement is that individuals like Aaron and Theo help one achieve a particular end. In doing so, they become arbiters of an alternative form of criminal justice. Both men's experiences depict the commodification of enforcement, an illegal activity which they consider to be a service that they offer for profitability. Aaron stated that he viewed his time as an enforcer as 'employment, because at the end of the day it's all about being paid'. Similarly, Theo viewed his role as enforcer as a 'job' that involved 'getting paid'. By rationalising enforcement as a method of occupation, as opposed to a criminal act, both men have employed rationality and sophistication, so as to be able to continuously offer a service that is a rarefied niche in the criminal market. John, who has worked alongside professional enforcers demonstrates rationality and sophistication when planning and executing an act of enforcement:

I've collected in many cities between Glasgow, Scotland and London, England. I used to work for a guy who lived in southern Spain, and he would often get me involved in jobs. But there was a pattern when it came to debt collecting. The knock itself is probably 20-30 minutes max. But the preparation for it is weeks. If done correctly, you'd have to establish who's the debtor? What are they capable of? Can the debt be collected? How much can be collected? Who is the debtor linked to? Can we come to a compromise? Are we wasting our time here? What other information do we have? What school do their kids go to? Can we get easy access to his wife or girlfriend?

As mentioned, John's involvement in enforcement is unconventional. Evidently, John takes an intelligence approach when operating alongside professional enforcers. The above excerpt not only demonstrates rationality and sophistication, but it also unearths the underpinning acts that are crucial for the successful planning and execution of a debt collection. Given John's expertise, one may think his method is an exception, however, Aaron also stated that "a vetting process of the debtor is important", while Theo put forward how enforcement "is all about knowing who you're dealing with".

Some of the stories from Scotland highlight why vetting is so important. Wi was once hired by an Edinburgh-based crime group to assault one of its own group members. Wi took the job, even though it was outside of his comfort zone, and recruited his friend Ge to help him with it:

Wi: Fuck that am fucking going places, fucking don't know place. Meeting fucking guys, I don't fucking know.

Ge: I said to him [once he told me], "am fucking going mate".

Wi: Aye, did... was fucking dodgy mate, aye. We are out in a scrap yard. Well no' really. Like an industrial estate, [partly demolished]. Middle of nowhere. These guys come up in a [car type] ... I thought they would have Edinburgh accent, but they were [Glaswegians].

Ge: Nah mate, I think I've seen the tall yin. I am sure he is from Dundee.... [they] gave us an address, said have it done by the night... went to [house A] Fucking didn't even know where it was.

Wi (laughing) walked it using sat nav.

Ge: I chapped the door. About ten times before he answered.

Wi: Well [he] didn't answer, but was speaking through the door. The glass panel you see. Mumbling shit.

Ge: Wouldn't answer, [so Wi] fucking pans the window wi' a boulder from the boy's front yard (laughs).

Wi: Fucking guy's holding on for life. Like jamming his body against the door.

After several attempts to enter the property in an effort to assault the individual in question, the would-be victim managed to fend off his assailants. Wi and Ge were forced to leave because the commotion was attracting too much attention and this failure pretty much sounded the death knell for his enforcement career.

Also in Scotland, Joe survived a hit because, like the group who hired Wi and Ge, his enemies had hired the wrong man for the job:

Open[ed] front door and this guy's just pure standing there ... didn't know what he was doing. Was fumbling about, going through his jacket, twitching.... [eventually] this big blade falls on the floor... I took the axe off the wall and chased him '... he ran into [rival group member's] car. I knew it was them straight away. Paying a junkie to do me in.'

In this case, the hitman was a drug addict (“junkie”) who had been manipulated into the deed. Wi also talked about this practice:

Mostly [youths that are] used, [or] fucking junkies... you do get like high level guys... they usually have like [paramilitary experience]... they would only be used for like high shit to get to guys that no one else can get to ... yeah, I’ve been given a gun before and told “do this”... I didn’t do anything but ... not the same as using professional know. Anyone can shoot a gun [but] hard to aim them. You wouldn’t think it but hitting targets isn’t easy.

While Wi discussed earlier that he regularly used weapons, such as knives, to carry out enforcement, the use of firearms indicated a new level, which he was unwilling to progress to, largely due to inexperience. Former soldier Matt, an ex-offender recently turned practitioner, discussed his prior involvement in criminal networks and how military and professional experience may often play an important role in the higher echelons of enforcement.

[Anyone] could get a gun if they really pure tried. Would likely be of poor quality... [or] more likely lack the proper ammunition [however]. Most [firearms used aren’t] like gun guns ... [they are typically] replicas, air rifles, modified pieces with reactivated firing pins ... antiques ... Bullets are usually cut to fit. Need the knowhow to get guns with the proper ammunition [ammo] is overlooked by the run of the mill guy. When I [left the army] I had connections ... [I was] approached from time to time ... [asked] what could I get my hands on. Punters can be flipped off wi’ a pirate (antique revolver with modified ammunition). They just want to look flash [to say] “I have a gun, back up”. I knew [when someone was a] serious geezer ... [I usually] knew ... or knew of ... the boys that [approached me] on behalf [of the OCG].

Matt notes the importance access to firearms, and their proper discharge, plays in the social structuring of criminal networks. Once Matt left the army, he was approached by local criminals whom he had shared childhood experiences with. They would enquire as to whether Matt could use established military connections to obtain firearms for them in exchange for

an agreed fee. Over time, Matt would gain a reputation as someone with connections. With this reputation Matt would occasionally be approached by criminal groups involved in the higher echelons of OC. Interaction would usually be facilitated, not by key members of the OCG themselves, but rather other, usually known, individuals who like Matt had prior (para)military experience. These individuals could draw upon existing knowledge and experience to discuss which specific weaponry was required for the intended event. This level of detail, insight and professional experience often separates low-mid level enforcers, such as Wi, from more serious offenders. This can be as simple as knowing how to actually load and discharge a firearm, as Matt states:

See wi' handguns you can stand there, me here, pure unloading clips on each other [and] hit everything in the room but each other.

Mistakes such as these can result in 'civies' (civilians) getting caught in the cross fire or collateral damage in the form of partners, friends and family members being unduly assaulted.

Irrespective of rationalising enforcement as employment, Aaron, John, and Theo are mindful that the act itself is criminal and punishable by imprisonment. With this in mind, the men are cautious of enforcement, with Aaron stressing that debt collecting must be approached "with a bit of sense". Similarly, Theo highlights the importance of "reasoning", while John provides a detailed example of executing an act of enforcement:

Debt collecting and being an enforcer is a shady business. Long gone are the days whereby you could trust people that you'd work with. Now it's all about greed. Now with technology on everyone, every day, you don't know who's monitoring or recording your nefarious and criminally driven conversations. One example I can give involved myself and a well-known figure in the East Midlands. We were on a job which involved a lot of money that needed to be collected. Me and this guy turned up to the debtor's house and I did all the talking. I said to the man: "Hello, I'm here on behalf of the individual who you owe money to. I don't know

much about what's gone on between you and the lender but what I can say is that you should pay the man his money back because it's the moral and right thing to do. I really don't want to be disturbing family time with you and I apologise if I've done so, but let's just settle this as gentlemen". Now while I've said all this, the man next to me is holding a sign which reads out as: "We know you're recording us. Don't make a scene or else we'll make it difficult for you to breathe". Do you see what I mean? If this guy now goes to the police and makes a statement saying that I threatened him, I'll counter by making the police listen to what I had to say because I would have recorded that whole conversation on my Dictaphone.

Concluding Discussion

The focus of our research has been to address the relative paucity of scholarly insights into the pathways into criminal enforcement, the nuanced roles undertaken by enforcers **that often exist on a continuum**, and the relationship between these men's activity, the wider context of OC and presence of social and cultural capital within it (Bourdieu, 1985, 1986, 1990). As such, in this paper we have drawn upon a comparative micro-analysis of the narratives of three men in west Scotland and three men in west Midlands, respectively, as a means of providing an initial, exploratory understanding of these issues from the perspective of those hard-to-reach individuals who are immersed in extra-legal undertakings. By presenting their voices, we have sought to present real-world insights into the often misunderstood and not well-captured lives of active enforcers. In so doing, we have been able to provide personal viewpoints, examples and anecdotes from those men who have been successful and less successful in their endeavours. This, we believe, speaks well to the structure of the illicit business of enforcement in different geographical, cultural and historical locations.

In our initial literature review, we drew upon previous scholarly insights to distinguish between the wider, macro- presence of enforcement and the more micro- focus on contract killings. We identified the evidence that suggests the way in which organised criminals often outsource threats, intimidation and violence as a means of insulating

themselves from the negative consequences of this activity and that – *at times* – this outsourcing process may include the need for contract killing (Schloenhardt 1999; MacIntyre et al. 2014; Wilson & Rahman 2015; Brolan et al. 2016). We also focused on the blurring of boundaries between occupational roles and criminal enforcement **and the (albeit limited) evidence in the literature on OC that suggests a spectrum of enforcement roles and activities that contradict popular mythology and indicate that many criminal transactions may run relatively smoothly, without resort to violence. In relation to the more extreme end of enforcement roles, we also critiqued** the previous typologies that suggest the nuanced nature of ‘hitmen’ characteristics, which may often include the presence of ‘dilettantes’ and ‘journeymen’ as well as more professional ‘masters’ (Schlesinger 2001; MacIntyre et al. 2014).

As we have alluded to, the Midlands areas of England have historically been renowned for the presence of criminal groups (Rahman 2019), and the men we interviewed there clearly had many years of licit and illicit occupational roles behind them. Contrastingly, although some high profile underworld figures and families have been notoriously associated with the criminal history of Glasgow (Scotland’s largest city), in a more general sense the west of Scotland has traditionally been more renowned for its territorial street gang culture (Deuchar, 2009; Davies, 2013), albeit that recent evidence has suggested emerging links between this and the wider work of OC groups (McLean, 2019). The traditionally different historical, cultural and geographical contexts that surrounded the men we interviewed perhaps in some ways gave rise to the subtly differing insights and perspectives that arose in our data.

While men like John, Aaron and Theo traditionally worked on the basis of clearly defined and carefully negotiated financial fees that preceded enforcement activity, those in the west of Scotland were at times less proactive and due to their younger age and reduced

prior experience, they could feel exploited by those who recruited them (see also Deuchar 2018; Mclean 2019). Although a level of rationality was usually present across both of our sites, and enforcement acts were always predicated on the presence of both social and cultural capital, the latter appeared more deeply embedded within the perspectives of the men in the west Midlands due to their deeply relational and also occupational embeddedness (Bourdieu, 1985, 1986, 1990). In west Scotland, the younger men at times appeared to fall into the categories of ‘amateurs’, ‘dilettantes’ and ‘journeymen’ (MacIntyre et al., 2014); while their roles were clearly wider than those associated with professional ‘hitmen’ (involving violence that stopped short of killing), they were also prone to a lack of careful planning and the making of mistakes. Those in the west Midlands evidently also engaged in more nuanced roles beyond the use of contract killing or even violence, including the need for rational approaches to debt collection and acting as arbiters of alternative justice with those involved in both legitimate and illegitimate businesses. However, their more advanced levels of advantageous occupational experience, social embeddedness and related ability to draw upon appropriate nodes, paths and edges (Benson et al., 2009) illustrated the importance of advanced cultural and institutional street capital in successfully entering, advancing and navigating the terrain associated with OC as recognised professional enforcers.

Our research suggests that **nuanced enforcement roles** may be deeply woven into the fabric of organised criminality within some parts of the UK, yet it is a criminal activity that is overlooked in policy and national debates (HM Government, 2018). While we must be cautious about overgeneralizing the insights from our qualitative research, the findings could help to inform the future work of UK law enforcement in tackling the issue of OC and the work of enforcers within this context.

For example, in the *West Midlands Police and Crime Plan 2016-2020*, the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (2016, p.13) makes the link between OC and

‘urban street gangs’ and focuses on the need for ‘detecting, disrupting and bringing perpetrators to justice’ (p.14). Our research, albeit small-scale in nature, suggests that those who define themselves as enforcers may not always be directly associated with urban street gangs but may have occupational roles that enhance their ability to become recruited by organised criminals and rely on strong reputational profiling to ensure repeat business and financial gain. The Commissioner also makes reference to the need for reducing gun and knife crime and for increasing the volume of ‘weapon surrender bins’ in relevant boroughs and communities (p.14). However, our insights illustrate the way in which killing, and even wider, non-lethal violence, is only one element of an enforcer’s role and that planning and execution may equally involve logic, rationality, careful use of verbal communication and intelligence-led approaches arising from prior occupational knowledge.

In Scotland, Police Scotland (2016) has identified that its service faces ‘significant demand’ in respect of investigations into OC, and in its national strategy for reducing the harm caused by it, the Scottish Government (2015) presents a four-pronged approach: *divert* people from OC; *deter* OC groups; *detect* and prosecute people involved in OC; and *disrupt* OC groups. The data outlined in this paper suggest that discussion, debate and strategic decision-making around OC enforcement should be further guided by insights into the potential exploitation of young men, the nuanced nature of the enforcement roles they may take on, and the risks they can become subjected to due to their relative inexperience in undertaking these roles.

At the same time, we believe that further research is needed into the extent to and ways in which men of all ages and from differing social and occupational background may become attracted to, recruited for and gain traction through, enforcement roles within differing geographical areas of the UK. In particular, we suggest that future research needs to

focus on exploring and examining the potential links between occupational backgrounds in areas such as the military and involvement in lethal and non-lethal enforcement roles.

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