

How the police deal with difference – in terms of race, ethnicity or culture – has become a key issue for policing. Public discourse is dominated by shocking news events, many of them in the US, but also in Europe. The book investigates everyday interactions between police officers and citizens, often those labelled as ‘migrants’, asking how such differences are brought up and in what way they shape these encounters – with findings that do not fit neatly into the highly polarised contemporary public discourse.

Taking an ethnographic approach, contributors to this volume study the perspectives and rationalities of both police officers and migrantised citizens, with a keen awareness of the asymmetries of power and knowledge. This entails exploring the practices, discourses and beliefs of actors with whom social scientists do not always easily sympathise: police officers. Such a positioning, while often ethically challenging, is unavoidable for a nuanced understanding of policing.

Public discourse and scholarly work on policing have frequently been dominated by news and events from the US. The detailed ethnographic descriptions in this volume highlight how police practices and the practices of othering vary widely, even within Europe, and the unique trajectories of modern US history may not provide a productive framework to understand the policing of differences elsewhere. By studying these questions in ten European countries, each with a particular history of policing and othering, the book contributes to the development of a comparative and distinctly European perspective on policing.

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