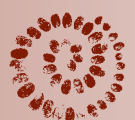
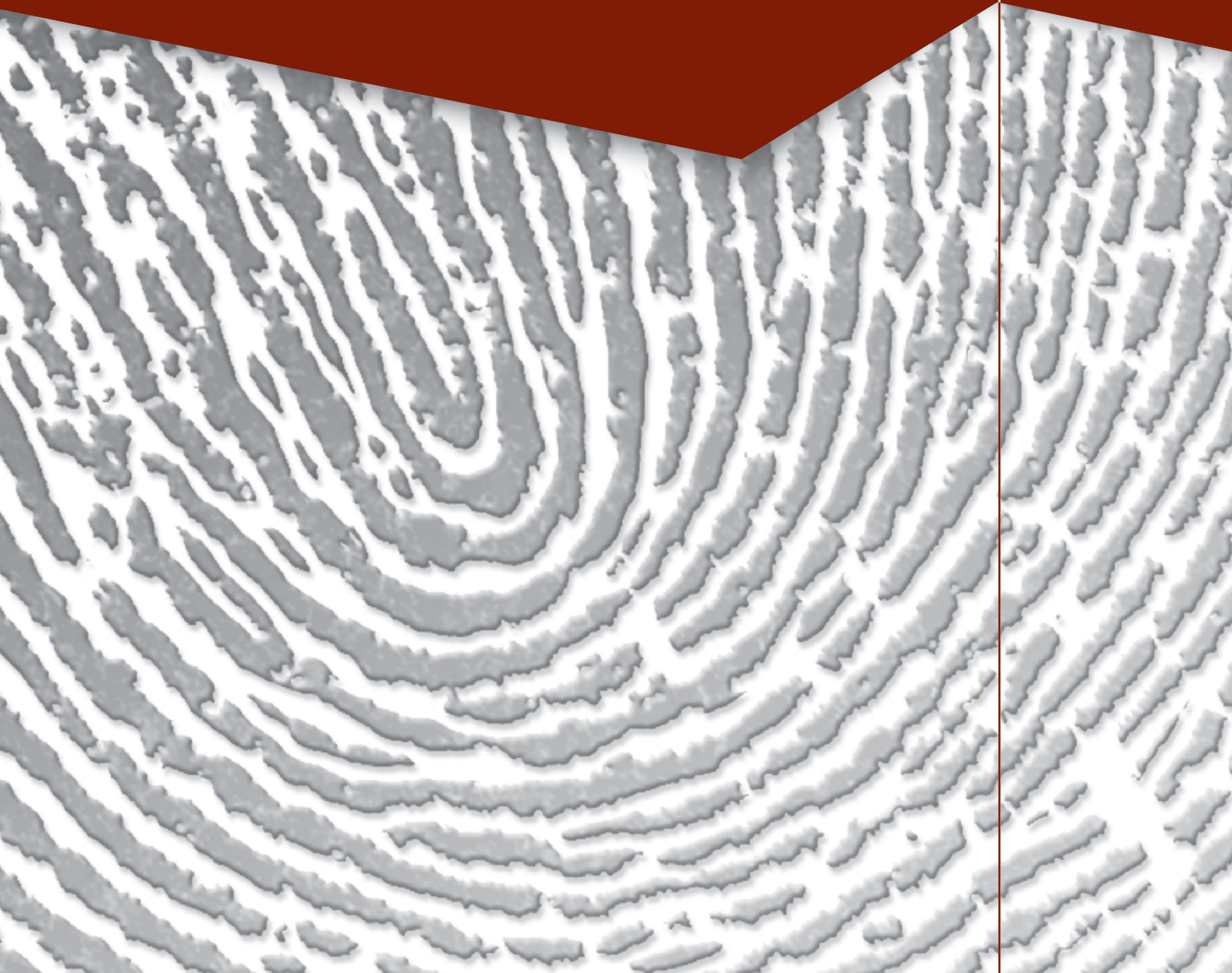


A Tale of Two Englands -

'Race' and Violent
Crime in the Press



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The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organization focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Educational Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in close collaboration with eminent thinkers and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships, and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. We stimulate debate and suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment and citizenship.

Since 1968, the date of Runnymede's foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today.

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Foreword

The media commands immense influence on the development of public discourse on most subjects, and its influence on the subject of ethnic diversity is profound. The public relies on the media to provide them with information in particular about events taking place outside of their direct experience. This places journalists and editors in a powerful position and it is vital, therefore, that the practices and beliefs of news organizations are held to account and subject to contestation and debate.

Yet sections of the press have in recent years shown extraordinary resistance to engage in debate about their practices, particularly when faced with charges of racial bias. Too often, critiques are dismissed by the media as an assault on freedom of speech. This is missing the point. Freedom of the press is, of course, fundamental to our existence as a democracy. But that is not a reason to reject open and honest debate - indeed in the spirit of free speech - on the rights and responsibilities freedom of speech bestows upon the media. In the foreword to Runnymede's 1976 publication *Publish and Be Damned?*, Jim Rose was advocating the exact same debate. He was aware that suppression of freedom of the press is neither desirable nor acceptable. But he was also clear that "editors and chief sub-editors have a responsibility to see that they do not excite passions and that the treatment of news in this field is not sensational."

Jim Rose was writing in the context of the way the press reported Enoch Powell's contribution to race relations in the summer of 1976. Over thirty years on, the language may have changed, but many of the issues and arguments remain salient today. The media's reporting of race and violent crime, identified in this Perspectives paper, could and should be challenged by increasing diversity in the press rooms. The media is lagging behind in terms of equality and equal opportunities. The under-representation of minority ethnic journalists continues to be an abject failing of the profession, an issue that now seems to have been debated for decades with too little progress.

But it is also our hope that the press will begin to take a more active part in a discussion on how ethnic diversity is evaluated and understood in present day Britain. This should include a reflexive assessment of the way ethnic minorities stories are reported. Interestingly, editors were able to do this 37 years ago. In a Runnymede publication entitled *Race and the Press*, published in 1971, the editors of four British newspapers reflected on the relationship between the print media and race relations in Britain. Whether one agrees with their conclusions or not, it is striking that these editors were willing to open-mindedly think about their own profession and its impact on race relations; by the standards of 2008, the four editors were distinctly self-critical and willing to engage in a constructive dialogue with dissenting voices. Their basic supposition was that Freedom of Speech demands responsibilities as well as bestowing rights. There is no reason why this should not be as true today as it was then.

Dr Samir Shah OBE
Chair, Runnymede Trust
March 2008

Executive Summary for 'A Tale of Two Englands'

This report explores the reporting – and the semantic meanings transmitted through reporting – of violent crime in relation to the ethnicity of both victim and perpetrator. The purpose of this study is to analyse the place of 'race' and ethnicity of both victim and perpetrator in reporting of violent crime, and to draw out and make explicit the implicit theories underlying and informing this reporting. By systematically examining crime articles in the national print media as well as a selection of regional media over a period of two months, this report demonstrates how notions of race still tint the lens through which criminality is both viewed and projected. The report argues that violent crime is seen as endemic within the minority ethnic 'communities', but unrelated to the structure of British society and the experience of minority ethnic people within it. In crime reporting, wider structural factors – such as discrimination, disadvantage and inequality – are generally ignored as contributors to crime trends and patterns.

The key argument is that a particular understanding of 'culture' has replaced overtly racist ideologies as the dominant discourse on race and crime. However, following the decline of racial determinism as a paradigm of diversity, 'culture' has re-introduced racism through the back door. 'Culture' appears to have replaced 'race' because, as a non-biological concept, it is supposedly non-racialized, and thereby non-racist. But in spite of its de-essentializing appearance, 'culture' still leaves racial understandings of diversity and difference as a profound challenge. Together with two other master tropes – community and ethnic identity – culture has become one of the pillars of the dominant discourse about ethnic diversity and ethnic minority groups. This discourse conceives culture as an innate quality, something people have and makes them act in certain ways under certain circumstances; culture is understood as a 'way of life' determined by birth.

Culturalist explanations for behaviour have

entered crime reporting of the mainstream media in force. The debate about crime in contemporary Britain, particularly violent teenage crime, habitually invokes a specific notion of 'culture' to explain the behaviour of perpetrators of violent acts. Gang, gun and knife violence is conceptualized as 'cultural' phenomena, albeit pathological sub-cultures distinct from and in contrast to the moral values of the law-abiding majority. Given the simplistic equation between 'culture', 'ethnic identity' and 'community', the report demonstrates the ways in which the press connects different types of criminal 'cultures' to specific ethnic communities.

The connection between criminal 'cultures' and 'communities' leads to a logical fallacy. The claim that 'culture' is the source of violent crime necessarily attaches violence to certain 'communities' defined by their ethnic 'identity'. This implies that most members of those groups are violent. The effect is that entire 'communities' are criminalized on the basis of their 'cultures'. Importantly, this equation relates exclusively to ethnic minority groups, but largely excludes the white majority. 'Culture' and 'community' are seldom evoked when speaking about white Britons. White middle-class England is not thought of as a 'community' in itself, and to be English is not considered a 'cultural' trait.

The purpose of this study is not to accuse the media of institutional racism – a term that is often used without particular qualification of what it actually means – but rather to explore the ways in which popular understandings of race and crime influence reporting in the media, and vice versa. A fair and reflexive media representation of the state and nature of crime in Britain – including the involvement of all ethnic groups as both victims and perpetrators – is necessary not only from a social justice point of view, but for practical reasons as well. Through this report, we hope to engage the media in a constructive dialogue on how British society thinks about the complex relationship between race and crime.

Key points

- Although diverse views are discernable both between and within papers, there are clear differential patterns in the way in which the press reports on violent crime. These patterns are strongly informed by notions of race.
- In essence, England is conceived as two-fold: an England consisting of a law-abiding and morally superior Us; and an England inhabited by criminal and pathological Others. The current breakdown of law and order is conceived as spilling out from inner cities and sink estates into leafy suburbs, threatening the very pillars of Englishness.
- Many journalists employ a strategic lack of precision when discussing different ethnic groups. In some instances, this includes an allusive taxonomy equating criminal cultures with particular communities: Eastern European bag snatchers, Jamaican Yardie crack dealers, Somali gang members and so on. At other times, however, all these different 'communities' are lumped together as standing in direct contrast to white middle-class England. This strategic lack of precision creates an impression of a 'tide' of alien and hostile elements threatening the white English identity and its values.
- Media theories – both implicit and explicit – of the connection between race and crime are often 'common sense' theories. Anecdotal evidence is habitually treated like evident truths and conclusive proof. For example, an inconclusive and brief Metropolitan Police report on the London gang profile was employed as evidence that the majority of young refugees from 'anarchistic warlord cultures' are necessarily committing violence on the streets of Britain.
- An important aspect of the common sense connection between 'culture', 'community' and crime is that it freely lends itself to a logical fallacy generic in the press; while

it may be true that certain groups are responsible for a disproportionate amount of certain types of crimes, it does not logically follow that most members of those groups are involved in offending behaviour. However, this logical leap is often made.

- Although a 'gang' can refer to both black and white youth, it is not a race neutral term. Young black criminality would more often be associated with 'gang membership', drawing on stereotyped images of gangs in America. The archetypal 'gang member' is black; correspondingly, a murder covered in the news was more likely to be assumed to be 'gang related' if there was black youth involved than if all involved were white.
- It would be unfair to point the finger exclusively towards the media. The press is part of a discursive system which includes a range of social actors. However, the media *does* have an immense influence on the development of social and ideological perceptions and practices of not only its audience, but other elite institutions and influential social actors as well, such as politicians, corporations and civil society.
- Judging from senior politicians' responses to the media frenzy of 2007, crime reporting is potentially a strong force in policy development. The over-representation of young black people in the criminal justice system (CJS) is a problem of enormous severity, and the gap appears to be growing wider. Media attention to these matters may prompt a more decisive policy response. However, the question is how the problem, and by extension the solution, is analysed and formulated. Policies based on the assumption that black 'culture' is criminogenic, that black crime is qualitatively different from white crime, and that black communities are themselves to blame for their overrepresentation in the CJS are unlikely to be effective.

A Tale of Two Englands – ‘Race’ and Violent Crime in the Press

Kjartan Páll Sveinsson

1. Introduction

In January 2006, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair caused a furore by calling the media institutionally racist. The incidents that sparked his comments were the murders of white lawyer Tom ap Rhys Pryce and Asian builders’ merchant Balbir Matharu. Sir Ian’s charge was that the two murders, and their treatment in the media, demonstrates how the press devotes more space and focus on white and middle-class victims compared to those of ethnic minorities. His point was that murders in minority communities appeared “not to interest the mainstream media” and were relegated to “a paragraph on page 97.”¹

The media responded furiously. *The Times* decided to focus on Sir Ian’s clumsy comment on the Soham murders² rather than his point about media bias; their front cover featured a large picture of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman under the headline ‘Why did Soham get so much attention, asks Britain’s top policeman’,³ succeeded by quotes from a plethora of politicians undermining the police commissioner.⁴ *The Daily Mail* printed five of their own front pages featuring stories of black and Asian teenage murder victims (ranging from 1997 to 2005)⁵ and conceded that “it is true some murders receive more attention than others. But the fact is (and this should really be exercising Sir Ian) that murder today is so common it doesn’t automatically command media treatment.”⁶ Phil Hall, former editor of *News of the World*, said that journalists had to make choices, as they could not cover every single murder case, but insisted that these choices are unproblematic: “[t]he fact remains that the public

do not like it, they don’t find it palatable on their breakfast tables. So newspapers will choose one murder, one crime a day, and focus on that. And they will go for the one that is *the most human*, the one that they think readers are going to *connect with most of all*.”⁷ *The Guardian* accused him of exaggerating the disproportionality. To support their claim, *The Guardian* calculated that 5525 words had been written about the death of Tom ap Rhys Price, and 4443 about Balbir Matharu,⁸ a negligible difference. Five days later, they published a correction admitting a miscalculation, where a “more accurate count, based on articles specifically relating to the respective deaths, produced a result of 6061 words for Rhys Price and 1385 for Matharu.”⁹ Perhaps the most interesting response of all, however, came from the head of BBC TV news, Peter Horrocks, who denied there was a ‘colour bar’ in reporting. In his opinion, “news is largely based on rare and surprising events” and that audiences “are interested in, and we as a society want to understand things, that are new, that are different, and are surprising.” Following this logic:

When you look at surprising events, you’re often looking at geography, because there are clearly parts of the country where there is a higher level of criminal violence than there is in others. So it tends to be that surprising murders can happen in leafy, suburban areas, or in the countryside, something like that. That kind of story might well therefore get more coverage. And just because of the distribution of the population, sometimes that can be white. Is that an issue about racism? I don’t think that it is.¹⁰

1 BBC News (2006)

2 In his critique of the race bias in the media, Sir Ian took as an example the murders of schoolgirls Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in Soham in 2002. The murders sparked a national outrage and received sustained media attention. To make his point about race bias, Sir Ian said: “If we look at the murders in Soham almost nobody can understand why that dreadful story became the biggest story in Britain” (“I can’t understand storm over Soham, police chief admits”, *The Times*, 27 January 2006).

3 ‘Why did Soham get so much attention, asks Britain’s top policeman’, *The Times*, 27 January 2006

4 ‘I can’t understand storm over Soham, police chief admits’, *The Times*, 27 January 2006

5 ‘Met chief’s attack’, *Daily Mail*, 27 June 2006

6 ‘The crass insensitivity of Sir Ian Blair’, *Daily Mail*, 28 January 2006.

7 BBC Ten O’Clock News, 27 January 2006. Emphasis added.

8 ‘Met chief labels media institutionally racist’, *The Guardian*, 27 January 2006.

9 ‘Corrections and clarifications’, *The Guardian*, 1 February 2006.

10 BBC Ten O’Clock News, 27 January 2006. Horrocks’ formulation of the function and purpose of news is in stark contrast to BBC policy, as outlined in the BBC Public Purpose Remit: “The BBC should provide news and current affairs that interests and informs people of all backgrounds, ages and levels of knowledge, enabling them to engage with the major issues of today” (BBC Trust, 2007a); “The BBC should provide engaging output that gives an accurate picture of the many communities that make up the UK and that informs understanding and stimulates discussion about their concerns” (BBC Trust, 2007b).

The media's harsh and unsympathetic response is illuminating in three important ways. Firstly, the immediate and categorical denial of a racial bias – however unintentional – propounds the media's unreflective stance towards their own practices and their reluctance to engage with and think about criticism. Secondly, structural factors influencing criminality were ignored across the board, with the complex relationship between 'race' and crime reduced to a simple equation. The fact that Horrocks disconnects issues of race and racism from geographical and economic distribution is telling. Thirdly, the response reveals a complex discourse on insiders and outsiders, who is a victim worthy of attention and who is not. While race certainly plays a large part in this equation, it is not the only factor. As Horrocks made abundantly clear, poor inner city residents are of no particular interest to the general public, and 'just because of the distribution of the population' this disinterest extends to the minority ethnic population – although it could equally be argued that the high concentration of ethnic minorities in the inner cities is the cause of this disinterest in the first place. If, as the *Daily Mail* and Phil Hall both suggest, journalists must pick and choose which events should 'command media treatment,' the question automatically arises about which yardstick is used to measure what 'is the most human' element of a story.

There was no shortage of media coverage of violent crime in 2007. Following the shootings of three black teenagers in south London in February that year, teen-on-teen murders captured the attention of journalists, with a long string of high profile cases followed at length and in depth, spurring a debate in which even Prime Ministers felt they needed to partake. Black victims were certainly not invisible, but whether they were under-represented or not is nevertheless open for debate. In London, for example, only three out of twenty-seven teenagers murdered in 2007 were white. All three events received media attention, whilst a large number of murders of minority ethnic teenagers were almost totally ignored. The three white teenagers murdered in the Greater London area were Ben Hitchcock, 16, stabbed in Beckenham; Martin Dinnegan, 14, stabbed in Holloway; and Jack Large, 14, stabbed in Chigwell. Ben's murder was covered in 15 articles with a total of 5483 words; Martin's murder was covered in 21 articles with a total of 4320 words; Jack's murder was covered in 13 articles with a total of 2872 words. By contrast, Annaka Keniesha Pinto, 17, was shot outside a bar in Tottenham. Her murder generated three articles

with a total of 391 words,¹¹ but was thereafter relegated to 'total death toll' lists commonly at the end of articles. Biendi Litambola, 17, was beaten to death in Canning Town. His murder generated 5 articles with a total of 641 words. Philip Poru, 17, was shot in a car in Plumstead. His murder generated 4 articles with a total of 529 words.

It is not immediately obvious why this should have been the case. Defenders of this disproportionate coverage might posit that the nature of the murders of the three white teenagers warranted in-depth coverage above and beyond other murders. But this would imply that many other killings were somehow less meaningful. It is more likely that notions of race – subtle or direct – influence journalists' choices of newsworthy stories in a variety of ways.

There is, however, more to the debate on race and violent crime in the media than a mere word count. A qualitative analysis of the way in which the media reports crime and conceptualizes differing crime patterns for different social groups is of crucial importance, especially following a year of intense media reporting of violent crime and a belief amongst the public that crime has gone up.¹² This report systematically examines crime articles in the national print media as well as a selection of regional media over a period of two months to demonstrate how notions of race

Stating that 'black people have a criminal nature' is not politically acceptable. Stating that 'black culture glorifies crime' is.

still tint the lens through which criminality is both viewed and projected. The key argument is that a particular understanding of 'culture' has replaced overtly racist ideologies as the dominant discourse on race and crime. But following the decline of racial determinism as a paradigm, 'culture' has re-introduced racism through the back door, where wider structural factors – such as discrimination, disadvantage and inequality – are ignored as contributors to crime trends and patterns. Stating that 'black people have a criminal nature' is not politically acceptable. Stating that 'black culture glorifies crime' is. Yet both statements are saying the same thing: crime is endemic within the black

11 This is perhaps particularly perplexing, given the extensive media focus given to the gunning down of Letisha Shakespeare and Charlene Ellis in Birmingham in 2003.

12 Interestingly, the British Crime Survey reports that "[r]eaders of national 'tabloids' were around twice as likely as those who read national 'broadsheets' to think the crime rate in the country as a whole (43% and 21% respectively) and in their local area (18% and 9% respectively) has increased 'a lot' in the previous two years" (Nicholas, Kershaw and Walker, 2007: 97).

Box 1: The Structure of the Report

The report is divided into two sections.

Section I: Methodology and Theory

Chapter 2 details the methodology used in the study, including data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3 considers theoretical perspectives relevant to the data. In particular, the concepts of 'culture', 'community' and 'ethnic identity' are explored, as well as their semantic relationship to violent crime in British discourse.

Section II: 'Race' and Violent Crime in the Media, 1 May – 30 June 2007

Chapter 4 inspects Leaders, Comments and Opinion, where many of the subtle assumptions in actual reporting are made explicit. This chapter provides a broad canvas against which the more detailed discussion of reporting of actual violent events can be understood.

Chapter 5 looks at two official reports published in the period under consideration, and compares what they actually said to what the press claimed they said.

Chapter 6 explores how notions of 'culture' and 'community' inform violent crime reporting, both in relation to victims and perpetrators.

Chapter 7 narrows the focus down to gangs and teen-on-teen murders. A number of different stories with differing ethnicity of victim and perpetrator are explored in order to demonstrate the implicit – but clear – connection between gang related crime and notions of blackness.

population, and is unrelated to the structure of British society and the experience of black people within it. Furthermore, both statements are general and imply that all black people are prone to crime, either through their nature or their culture. In this way, stereotyped images of the 'black community' as riddled with crime are maintained.

The purpose of this study is not to accuse the media of institutional racism, a term that is often used without particular qualification of what it actually means. On the contrary, we want to avoid pointing a finger at any one social institution in particular, but instead explore the ways in which popular understandings of race and crime influence reporting in the media, and vice versa. Indeed, discursive practices in the media need not necessarily be due to an intentional media bias, but can be attributable to trends within public and political discourses more generally: "Changes in media representations do not come fully formed from another planet and produce changes in behaviour patterns *ex nihilo*. They are themselves likely to reflect on-going changes in social perceptions and practices."¹³ Nor are the media's audience inactive recipients and consumers of messages. However, the media *does* have an immense influence on the development of social

and ideological perceptions and practices of not only its audience, but other elite institutions and influential social actors as well, such as politicians, corporations and civil society.¹⁴ This is important, because media events can have an extensive effect on political rhetoric and development of policy.

The fact that a number of black and minority ethnic victims of violent crime have received sustained media attention in 2007 is a positive development in its own right. But the way in which these stories are reported is as important as the actual salience of BME victims on the front pages of newspapers. The evaluation of newsworthiness of events, and narratives of the stories that are covered in the media, influence both the public's understanding of race and crime as well as policy responses to the over-representation of young black people in the criminal justice system. A fair and reflexive media representation of the state and nature of crime in Britain – including the involvement of all ethnic groups as both victims and perpetrators – is necessary not only from a social justice point of view, but for practical reasons as well. Through this report, we hope to engage the media in a constructive dialogue on how British society thinks about the complex relationship between race and crime.

13 Reiner (2002: 399)

14 van Dijk (1993)

Section I: Methodology and Theory

2. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to analyse the place of 'race' and ethnicity of both victim and perpetrator in reporting of violent crime, and to draw out and make explicit the implicit theories underlying and informing this reporting. To this end, all the national newspapers and a selection of regional papers were monitored for a period of two months, spanning May and June 2007. All articles, leaders and comments on violent crime (excluding sexual and domestic violence) in England were read and analysed. In addition, the Lexis Nexis search engine was used to facilitate the search on particular topics, and the internet was used to collect secondary data – such as police press releases – which could add breadth and depth to the analysis. The primary data in this report, however, is drawn from the newspapers themselves.

2.1 Topics

Four considerations clarify the scope and exact choice of this research topic. Firstly, narrowing down the criteria for inclusion was deemed necessary in order to ensure that like was being compared with like. For this reason, stories covering sexual and domestic violence were excluded from the sample. This is in many ways unfortunate, and a wider research scope incorporating these crimes would have provided an interesting dimension. Indeed, the under-reporting of domestic and sexual violence is noteworthy in itself, and a study investigating ethnicized discussions on this topic would be worthwhile. Through the research process for this study, a large number of so-called 'honour killing' stories were detected, which at first glance appeared to be severely over-represented compared to their incidence relative to domestic violence or intra-familial murder generally. Here, it is highly likely that 'culture' plays a huge role in the media rhetoric.

Secondly, 2007 was a year of particular media interest in violent crime, especially gun, knife and gang related crime, 'teen-on-teen' murders, and violence against 'have-a-go heroes' (who in many cases were fathers). Indeed, these crimes were

arguably amongst the defining news categories of 2007, and often displayed all the hallmarks of a moral panic. Race played a central role in explaining the patterns and causes of these crimes, albeit often implicitly. A detailed analysis of these particular issues was thus deemed of particular importance; they powerfully demonstrate the ways in which the press conceives the relationship between race and violent crime.

Thirdly, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were excluded from the analysis for the sake of simplicity, as they have distinct issues and discourses on race and ethnicity and would therefore widen the scope of inquiry beyond the remit of this research. For the same reason, the study focuses exclusively on the print media to the exclusion of broadcasting. This is primarily due to the ideal of 'neutrality' in broadcast media "characterized by an ethic of political neutrality and professional objectivity in performing a public service of providing news information,"¹⁵ an ideology far less salient in the overtly opinionated print media. The extent to which this ideal translates into practice is questionable, however, and calls for a detailed inquiry in its own right.

Fourthly, due to lack of reporting in newspapers in the time-period under consideration, gun crime and racist violence does not form part of the main text of this report. However, these are topics of particular importance, and Appendix 1 includes a brief exploration of the concept of 'culture' in relation to gun crime and racist violence. In short, we examine why 'culture' is a highly questionable analytical concept where gun crime is concerned. Furthermore, we also ask why, following the logic of the 'crime-as-culture' theory which informs reporting on crime committed by minority ethnic individuals, racist violence is not considered a 'cultural' problem.

2.2 Papers

Table 1 shows the papers included in the research. All national newspapers were monitored, as well as a sample of regional papers. The sample was chosen based on readership numbers and to represent the various English regions. A total of 413 articles from national newspapers were analysed, and 390 from regional papers. It should be noted that capitalized first words in quotations are the same as in the original texts.

2.3 Analysis

The data gathered for this study were extensive and complex, demanding robust tools for analysis. The analytical process was mainly inductive.

15 Reiner (2002: 402)

Table 1: Newspapers included in the sample

National Newspapers	Publisher
<i>Daily Express</i> and <i>Sunday Express</i>	Express Newspapers
<i>Daily Mail</i> and <i>Mail on Sunday</i>	Associated Newspapers
<i>Daily Mirror</i> and <i>Sunday Mirror</i>	Trinity Mirror
<i>Daily Star</i> and <i>Daily Star Sunday</i>	Northern and Shell
<i>Financial Times</i>	Financial Times Group
<i>Morning Star</i>	People's Press Printing Society
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> and <i>The Sunday Telegraph</i>	Telegraph Group
<i>The Guardian</i> and <i>The Observer</i>	Guardian Newspapers
<i>The Independent</i> and <i>The Independent on Sunday</i>	Independent Newspapers
<i>The Sun</i> and <i>News of the World</i>	News International
<i>The Times</i> and <i>The Sunday Times</i>	News International

Regional Newspapers	Publisher
<i>Birmingham Mail</i>	Trinity Mirror
<i>Bristol Evening Post</i>	Northcliffe Newspapers Group
<i>Evening Standard</i>	Associated Newspapers Ltd
<i>Leicester Mercury</i>	Northcliffe Newspapers Group
<i>Liverpool Echo</i>	Trinity Mirror
<i>Manchester Evening News</i>	Guardian Media group
<i>Nottingham Evening Post</i>	Northcliffe Newspapers Group
<i>Yorkshire Post</i> and <i>Yorkshire Evening Post</i>	Johnston Press

Indeed, many of the researcher's preconceptions were dismantled; issues assumed to be of importance turned out to be of marginal relevance, and others emerged as highly significant. The results of the study were intended to identify underlying and often unstated assumptions which inform reporting. For this reason, the main concern was to ensure that the theoretical framework through which the results are explained emerge from and fit the data, rather than vice versa. To this end, a combination of the following analytical approaches was adopted:

- 1) Narrative analysis: the basic stories being told in the newspaper articles were identified, and the styles, constructions and messages were analysed to draw out the main features of the storyline.
- 2) Discourse analysis: particular attention was given to language use and rhetorical devices in articles, and what they reveal about theories explaining social actions.
- 3) Grounded theory: the narratives and discourses analysed were coded to draw out emerging concepts and categories, which allowed for their interrelationship to be investigated.

3. 'Culture' and 'Community' in British Discourse

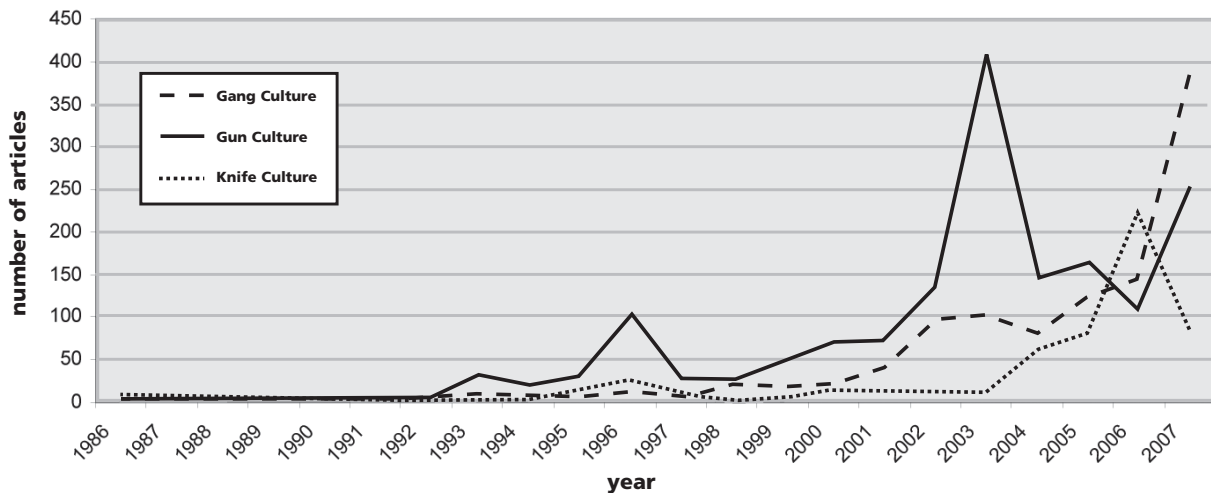
The main body of this paper examines the implicit – and sometimes explicit – theories of the relationship between race and crime as

propounded by the print media. In order to make sense of these theories – their various shapes and forms, ideological rationale, social relevance, and relationship with other popular theories of race and ethnicity – it is necessary to outline the logic of these theories. The thrust of the argument is that, in the media, crime is attributable to 'culture' which is in turn attached to certain 'communities.' The debate about crime in contemporary Britain, particularly violent teenage crime, habitually invokes a specific notion of 'culture' to explain the behaviour of perpetrators of violent acts. Gang, gun and knife violence is conceptualized as 'cultural' phenomena, albeit pathological sub-cultures distinct from and in contrast to the moral values of the law-abiding majority. This 'crime-as-culture' perspective is not entirely new, but as indicated in Graph 1, has only recently entered the media vocabulary as the dominant – but also uncritical and offhand – way of describing certain types of criminal activity and crime trends. Given the growing salience of this particular understanding of criminal 'culture,' it is worth investigating the meaning attached to 'culture' in British discourse, and the subsequent implications of a 'crime-as-culture' perspective.

3.1 'Culture'

'Culture' as an epistemological tool to understand ethnic diversity in Britain is by no means confined to the media. Indeed, 'culture' has displaced and replaced the discredited notion of 'race' as the paradigmatic conception of diversity,

Graph 1: Crime-as-Culture



Frequency of articles containing the terms 'gang culture', 'gun culture' and 'knife culture' in national newspapers, 1986-2007. The graph was collated through Lexis Nexis.

and pervades everything from casual everyday discussion to political rhetoric. Once the domain of anthropologists describing exotic foreign tribes, "no anthropological term has spread into public parlance and political discourse as this word has done over the past twenty years."¹⁶ Culture, of course, is not a term with monolithic meaning, neither in academic debates nor public parlance, and is used in a variety of ways:

Politicians urge cultural revolution.

Apparently a seismic cultural change is needed to resolve the problems of poverty, drug abuse, crime, illegitimacy, and industrial competitiveness. There is talk about cultural difference between the sexes and the generations, between football teams, or between advertising agencies. When a merger between two companies fails, it is explained that their cultures were not compatible.¹⁷

However, a specific understanding of culture has gained a dominant place in British discourse on identity, particularly in association with ethnicity. Culture has become a political battleground, where protagonists on the left and right of the political spectrum may disagree on the value of culture, but nonetheless share certain common premises and understandings of its meaning. Different cultures are conceptualized as separate and bounded entities. Multiculturalists celebrate this and claim that all cultures are different but equal, while conservatives claim that cultures can only clash

with each other, where ultimately something must give; minority cultures must therefore assimilate to the majority culture (although the concept of choice is normally 'British values'). Fundamentally, the disagreement between the two political camps is on whether different 'cultures' can exist side-by-side, but both share an understanding of what culture actually is.

In essence, this dominant discourse conceives culture as an innate quality, something people have and makes them act in certain ways under

In spite of its de-essentialising appearance, 'culture' still leaves racial understandings of diversity and difference as a profound challenge

certain circumstances; "it has to be filled with standardized meanings, that is, specified as a substantive heritage that is normative, predictive of individuals' behaviour, and ultimately a cause of social action."¹⁸ In this sense, it is not human beings who make and constantly reinvent culture, but culture which makes human beings who they are. Culture is understood as a 'way of life' determined by birth; individuals are born into 'cultures'. According to Adam Kuper, a danger emerges when "culture shifts from something to be described, interpreted, even perhaps explained, and is treated instead as a source of explanation in itself."¹⁹ This insight is particularly relevant when

¹⁶ Baumann (1996: 9)

¹⁷ Kuper (1999: 1)

¹⁸ Baumann (1996: 9)

¹⁹ Kuper (1999: xi)

we take into consideration that ‘culture’ appears to have replaced ‘race’ because, as a non-biological concept, it was supposedly non-racialized, and thereby non-racist. Therein lays the danger. In spite of its de-essentialising appearance, ‘culture’ still leaves racial understandings of diversity and difference as a profound challenge: “The idea of culture could actually reinforce a racial theory of difference. Culture could be a euphemism for race, fostering a discourse on racial identities while apparently abjuring racism.”²⁰

3.2 ‘Community’ and ‘Ethnic Identity’

The significance of ‘culture’ as an epistemological tool becomes apparent when we consider the relationship between ‘culture’ and two other master tropes: community and ethnic identity. In his study on discourses of identity in west London, Gerd Baumann demonstrates the cognitive connection between culture, community, and ethnic identity, and how these terms and understandings have become pillars of the dominant discourse about ethnic diversity and ethnic minority groups. The problem, according to Baumann, is the powerful simplicity of this discourse, which reduces “all social complexities, both within communities and across whole plural societies, to an astonishingly simple equation: ‘Culture = community = ethnic identity = nature = culture.’”²¹ In other words, every ethnic community has its own distinct culture, and conversely, every culture corresponds to a bounded ethnic community. Importantly, however, this equation relates exclusively to ethnic minority groups, but largely excludes the white majority. ‘Culture’ and ‘community’ are seldom evoked when speaking about white Britons, although this is somewhat complicated by class.²² At the very least, white middle-class England is not thought of as a ‘community’ in itself, and to be English is not considered a ‘cultural’ trait.²³ White English people may live in ‘communities’, but these are understood as spatially bounded rather than ethnically defined entities. Furthermore, as Alexander argues in her discussion of the construction of Asian-Muslim youth violence, communities are often classified and contrasted as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ communities. This process of classification is informed by notions of ‘culture’ and ‘British values’: “‘Community cohesion’ carries within in it a dual notion of ‘community’, one which

opposes ‘bad’ versions of culturally bounded and segregated collectivities with ‘good’ locally based sensibilities fully integrated into the mainstream of national culture.”²⁴

3.3 ‘Culture’, ‘Community’ and Crime

Given Baumann’s simple equation, we can then ask the question: if crime is cultural, which ethnic communities do different criminal sub-cultures belong to? For example, do gun, gang and knife cultures emanate from specific ethnic communities? As we shall see, the way in which the press reports on and explains violent crime suggests that the answer is yes. Furthermore, headlines such as ‘Blair blames spate of murders on black culture’²⁵ demonstrate that this theory is explicit and actually makes sense to a large part of the population. The headline refers to a passage from a speech Tony Blair gave to the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce on 11 April 2007, largely in response to the high profile shootings of black teenagers in south London. Although Blair certainly made a clear link between gang culture and the black community, he did not actually use the phrase ‘black culture’. This was added by the media. Nonetheless, his comments and the media’s augmentation of them are indicative of a powerful ‘common sense’ theory of race and crime, one that is authoritatively vying for political clout and explanatory validity. However, the claim that culture is the source of violence is a *subjective theoretical model* designed to explain and understand an *objective reality*, and is as such difficult, if not impossible, to either prove or refute. The important point is that this model has become part of the dominant discourse on diversity in Britain. As such, it has become central to the production of knowledge and meaning through which ethnic diversity and difference is understood.

While it may be true that certain groups are responsible for a disproportionate amount of certain types of crimes, it does not logically follow that most members of those groups are involved in offending behaviour.

An important aspect of the common sense connection between ‘culture’, ‘community’ and crime is that it freely lends itself to a logical fallacy generic in the press; while it may be

20 Ibid: 14

21 Baumann (1996: 17)

22 The ethnicisation of the white working-class has received some academic attention recently, and we will return to this subject later.

23 Cf. Baumann (1996: 96)

24 Alexander (2005: 205)

25 ‘Blair blames spate of murders on black culture’, *The Guardian*, 12 April 2007

true that certain groups are responsible for a disproportionate amount of certain types of crimes, it does not logically follow that most members of those groups are involved in offending behaviour. However, this logical leap is often made. As Sims demonstrates in her study on Vietnamese people in the UK, statements such as ‘most cannabis cultivators are Vietnamese’ easily becomes ‘most Vietnamese are cannabis cultivators.’²⁶ The effect of this kind of discourse is that the whole ‘community’ becomes the culprit. In the case of the Vietnamese, Sims quotes a police drugs coordinator in saying that: “The Metropolitan Police have had a *Vietnamese problem* for some time and maybe their people think they can go about their business in relative anonymity in our city centres.”²⁷ This logical fallacy, of course, is not new. Hall et al. demonstrated how notions of blackness informed the construction of ‘mugging’ in the 1970s with the effect of criminalising the black ‘community’ generally,²⁸ and Gilroy has argued that “certain categories of crime are now identified not merely as those which blacks are most likely to commit, but as crimes which are somehow expressive of the ethnicity of those who carry them out.”²⁹ This statement is as true today

26 Sims (2007: 8)

27 Ibid.: 8; original emphasis

28 Hall et al. (1978)

29 Gilroy (1987: 117)

as it was in 1987. At the most extreme end of the spectrum, the ‘gang member’ has largely replaced the ‘mugger’ as the “folk devil *par excellence*,”³⁰ a point discussed in depth below. The bottom line, however, is that when a category of crime is seen as stemming from a particular ‘culture’, there is invariably a ‘community’ linked to it; as a result, the whole ‘community’ becomes suspect by default.

The purpose of this report is not to prove or refute the ‘truthfulness’ of media reporting on violent crime. We are not suggesting that the press wilfully distorts facts and consciously creates ‘truths’, but that it is part of a discursive system which includes a range of social actors. Although Tony Blair was arguably responding to the media coverage of violent events (rather than the events themselves), he was clearly adding his own interpretation and weight to the discussion, which in turn was amplified by the press. Thus, the purpose of this report is to evince the ways in which meanings and truths are constructed in the press. If Gilroy is right in stating that “there is consistency in the way that it is always crime which tells the British people what racial differences add up to,”³¹ representations and their meanings as propounded by the media offer us important insights into wider meanings ascribed to Otherness in Britain.

30 Hallsworth and Young (2004: 12)

31 Gilroy (2003)

Section II: 'Race' and Violent Crime in the Media, 1 May – 30 June 2007

The two month period under consideration, 1 May – 30 June 2007, did not fall into the most intense periods of media coverage of crime in that year, but did include a number of relatively high profile cases as well as a large number of low profile stories. The media frenzy of February, March and April had somewhat subsided, but the threat of violent crime was by no means forgotten. Indeed, stories repeatedly referred to 'spates of violence' and painted a picture of general lawlessness on the streets of Britain.

The sample of newspapers for this analysis is large, and displayed diverse views both between and within different papers. As could be expected, the greatest difference was between tabloids and broadsheets. However, it is not the purpose of this report to name and shame individual papers. Rather, we want to identify the patterns of underlying assumptions of the connection between race and crime. Perhaps predictably, these patterns were most easily distinguishable in the tabloids. Nonetheless, while the patterns were less express and obvious in many of the broadsheet papers, similar assumptions could be discerned. Broadsheets avoided the sensationalist language of tabloids, but often seemed to share a basic outlook. Furthermore, regional newspapers differed in one important respect, namely that they often included descriptions of suspects to assist police investigation, but otherwise displayed similar patterns to national press.

It should also be noted that not all articles were informed by racialized assumptions, and many were more or less race-neutral. Although this was certainly more often the case in the broadsheet papers, some articles in the tabloids also demonstrated progressive thinking on race. Variation could stem from a number of reasons: journalists are individuals and have different styles of writing as well as personal convictions; incidents have their individual characteristics, and present journalists with varying degrees of facts to work with; the information available to journalists can also be of varying quality, and could depend on the disposition of, say, a particular police force and/or their spokesperson; other stories coinciding timewise can also influence how a particular event is covered. Nonetheless, clear patterns were discernible, and it is to these that we will now turn.

4. Leaders, Comments and Opinion

Before we begin exploring the subtle assumptions made in press coverage of actual events, it is useful to examine leaders, comments and opinion, where these subtle assumptions are made explicit. This chapter demonstrates the veiled but nevertheless racialized association between violent crime and ethnic minorities in order to give a clear picture of the main themes of the dominant discourse of the press. It should be stressed that a variety of opinion was observed. However, much of this variety was found in the broadsheet papers, while the tabloids had a more unified stance, and dominant themes were distinguishable in both types of papers. The difference between these two categories of papers largely conforms to van Dijk's analysis. In short, the right-wing popular press is more prone to define ethnic minorities as blatantly "different, problematic, deviant, or threatening."³² The liberal press, on the other hand, also focuses on problems but more often looks at problems experienced by ethnic minorities, such as unemployment or discrimination. Importantly, however, the liberal press tends to focus on how We can solve Their problems.

So ethnic events are covered in such a way that negative action of Them, e.g., violence, is topicalized; and possible social explanations of ethnic conflict that reflect negatively on Us, such as discrimination or causes of poverty, are de-topicalized in news reports.³³

Similarly, Alexander has argued that the liberal press largely concurs with culturalist explanations for violence, which in turn negate socio-economic analyses; even structural inequality and its effects are seen as stemming from 'the underclass' and 'cultures of poverty'. Alexander's discussion relates specifically to the reporting of the Oldham riots of 2001, but her argument has bearing on the current topic:

...even a traditionally liberal newspaper such as the *Guardian* shows the currency

³² Van Dijk (1993: 249)

³³ Ibid.

of culturalist arguments, which suffuse and underpin the discussion of socioeconomic marginalization, so that the two explanations – what might be termed loosely the ‘class’ (socio-economic) and ‘underclass’ (culturalist) debates – become effectively inseparable.³⁴

In our sample, four interconnected themes were of particular significance. Firstly, many writers engaged in a ‘golden age’ discourse, where the current breakdown of law and order was juxtaposed against a mythical England of the past. Secondly, the current breakdown of law and order was primarily attributed to elements alien to white England and its values. As a result, England was conceived as two-fold: an England consisting of a law-abiding and morally superior Us; and an England inhabited by criminal and pathological Others. Thirdly, the current breakdown of law and order was conceived as spilling out from inner cities and sink estates into leafy suburbs, threatening the very pillars of Englishness. Fourthly, England was constructed as at breaking point, where the only solution is to rid society of unwanted alien elements, either through long prison sentences or deportation.

4.1 The ‘Golden Age’

The ‘golden age’ discourse was distinguishable in a number of articles. The reasoning was that there once was an England free from crime and anti-social behaviour, or at the very least where violent incidents were isolated, both numerically and socio-geographically. This notion is in many ways reminiscent of the ‘imagined community’ discussed by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. Historical memory is selective and excludes those elements which do not fit the dominant national story: “Many complicated strands are reduced to a simple tale of essential and enduring national unity, with everything in past history leading inexorably up to a triumphal conclusion.”³⁵ Part of this story is the civic responsibility and values of the past. An example of this is Sue Carroll’s *Mirror* column. Writing about the stabbing of Kevin Johnson in Sunderland, Carroll reflects on how modern youths differ from those in the past:

There was a time when youths, congregated outside his home might have listened, considered his argument and then dispersed.³⁶

Carroll does not specify the exact time in history when youth would rather have considered complaints than stab the complainant. Anna Pukas suggests in *The Express* that civic responsibility was alive and well 50 years ago, and cites Charles Murray, co-author of the controversial book *The Bell Curve*,³⁷ for evidence of its death:

Charles Murray, the US academic who coined the name “underclass”, describes the vicious circle which, he says, has led to a growing brutalisation of Britain. If someone intervened to stop trouble, even vulgar language, 50 years ago, he could count on other passengers backing him up. Nowadays that wouldn’t happen – nobody stepped forward to help the 15-year-old girl [harassed by a boy] on that bus in Romford.³⁸

Judging from Bryony Gordon in *The Daily Telegraph*, this need not have been so long ago:

When I was 15, a friend of mine was mugged and stabbed in our local park in west London. He was pretty lucky, really: the knife missed an artery by two millimetres and, after a week in hospital, he was discharged, at which point he became a sort of local celebrity. Everyone wanted to talk to him. “Is that the boy that got stabbed?” people would gasp, as if the Queen had just shown up. “Do you know the boy who got stabbed?”

This was because things like that did not tend to happen around there, back then; when I say back then, it was only 12 years ago. Today, I rather imagine he would be told to dust himself down and get the hell on with it, because that sort of thing seems to happen, if not all the time, then all too often.³⁹

4.2 Two Englands? The Inner City versus the Leafy Suburb

The recurring theme was that things are worse now than they were before, and that the decline is rapid. Many articles referred to ‘catastrophic social problems’, ‘epidemic of lawlessness’, ‘out-of-control gangs’, ‘Britain’s growing knife menace’, etc. In other words, the Britain of the ‘golden era’ has been corrupted and replaced by anarchy and lawlessness. The cause of this shift was made abundantly clear in many leaders and comments. Outsiders – or what Patrick O’Flynn refers to as

34 Alexander (2004: 530)

35 CFMEB (2000: 16)

36 ‘The time has come to lock up street killers and throw away the key’, *The Mirror*, 21 May 2007

37 A book which promulgates the idea that black people are on average less intelligent than white people.

38 ‘Knifed for nothing’, *The Express*, 29 June 2007

39 ‘Doesn’t anyone care about knife crime?’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 June 2007

‘crime invaders’⁴⁰ – have descended upon England importing their ‘foreign cultures’, incompatible with white English values. In this way, ‘culture’ implies a degree of distancing, creating a space between Us and Them, where We are increasingly threatened by dangerous Others. This dichotomy is not restricted to the black population, but includes a whole range of outsiders – or different ‘communities’ – as well. Often, this would include an allusive taxonomy equating criminal cultures with particular communities: Eastern European bag snatchers, Vietnamese cannabis growers, Jamaican Yardie crack dealers, Somali gangs and so on. At the same time, however, all these different ‘communities’ were lumped together as standing in direct contrast to white middle-class England. O’Flynn’s ‘crime invaders’ refers to young people from a range of different continents. This strategic lack of precision, apparent in a number of articles, creates an impression of a ‘tide’ of alien and hostile elements threatening the white English identity and its values.⁴¹

The distancing involved in attributing violent offending to certain ‘communities’ is strongly informed by geography. Under the headline ‘Knifed for nothing,’ Anna Pukas carves Britain into two camps: council estates inhabited by “the poor working class – the unemployed, the shiftless or the damned unlucky” and middle-class leafy suburbs “populated by the aspirational.”⁴² This idea is supported by the myth of the ‘inner-city misery’ of poor areas, which are often characterized as blighted by dysfunctional social dynamics of a homogenous unruly underclass.

The situation is even grimmer and more dangerous in multi-ethnic areas, with the added bane of ethnic tensions. Thus, notions of race and ethnicity are never far off. As Peter Horrocks and other journalists argued in response to Sir Ian Blair,⁴³ murders of ethnic minority victims are of little interest because they tend to occur in poor inner-city areas where murders happen all the time. The association between ethnic minorities and inner cities highlights the parallel between the dysfunctional social dynamics of the poor and the criminal culture of ethnic minorities. In both cases, media representations tell us more about white middle-class values than the lives of real people. This view has been challenged by a number of commentators.⁴⁴ Baeten, for example, has forcefully argued that while council estates

and other poor inner-city areas are certainly not problem free, the way in which they are perceived in the public imagination may tell us more about middle-class values and fears than working-class realities.⁴⁵ Indeed, Baeten’s critique of a report on urban policy could quite easily be extended to Anna Pukas’ article referred to above:

The immediate and uncritical association of bored (black) youngsters with crime reproduces one of the most vulgar urban prejudices that are alive and well in mainstream society. The implicit message is quite clear: these people and their neighbourhoods are deprived because their social and cultural attitudes, beliefs and habits are inferior to those of the middle classes.⁴⁶

The immediate and uncritical association of bored (black) youngsters with crime reproduces one of the most vulgar urban prejudices that are alive and well in mainstream society.

The epitome of pathological ethnic minority groups in inner cities is the development of a ‘gang culture’. Writing about the Metropolitan Police Authority report on gangs discussed in greater detail below, Kelvin MacKenzie argues in *The Sun* that “an influx of immigrants” committing violent crime on the streets of “our nation” should come as a surprise to no one: “Criminologists – and frankly anyone with half a brain – have always known that youngsters who are forced to act violently to survive in their homeland were partly responsible for an upsurge in gang violence.”⁴⁷ The solution, he writes, is as simple as the problem itself. “There is an easy answer. Close the door to youngsters from these countries. Our streets and our people would be safer. Surely that’s all that matters.”⁴⁸ Elsewhere, *The Sun* concedes that immigration is necessary for a thriving economy, but immediately adds that immigrants are responsible for an ‘explosion in organised crime’: “Some [council tax payers], like those in Slough, struggle to cope with unaccompanied Romanian youngsters who, by law, must be fed and housed. Others endure an alarming rise in theft, violence, gun and knife crime.”⁴⁹

40 ‘Now can we fight the peril of these crime invaders?’, *The Express*, 3 May 2007

41 I am indebted to David Faulkner for pointing this out.

42 ‘Knifed for nothing’, *The Express*, 29 June 2007

43 See Introduction.

44 Bauder (2002); Baeten (2004); Sveinsson (2007); Alexander (2005)

45 Baeten (2004)

46 *Ibid.*: 238

47 ‘Slam door on youths from warlord cultures’, *The Sun*, 10 May 2007

48 *Ibid.*

49 ‘Migrants toll’, *The Sun*, 15 May 2007

In a similar vein, Patrick O'Flynn writes in a leader for *The Express* under the headline 'Now can we fight the peril of these crime invaders?':

BIT by bit the Leftwing political establishment is being forced to own up to the catastrophic social problems caused by the uncontrolled immigration of the past decade. Attempts to stifle public debate by throwing around accusations that sceptics about immigration are bigots who wish to "play the race card" are unravelling in the face of undeniable reality.

...

Now, finally, those in authority are confessing to their greatest taboo, something I described on this very page 18 months ago, just after the murder of PC Sharon Beshenivsky, as their "dirty little secret": the central role being played by incomers from backward, uncivilised countries in the explosion of gang crime in Britain.⁵⁰

O'Flynn reaches the conclusion that "youths from countries where life is cheap are devaluing the worth of a life on Britain's streets."⁵¹ In spite of proclaiming this state of affairs an 'undeniable reality', he acknowledges that the evidence base for this is pretty thin and tends to be anecdotal, and the only evidence he cites is "that up to one in seven of all inmates of British jails [are] foreigners – about 12,000 people in total."⁵² In an attempt to de-racialize his argument – and at the same time employing a 'face-keeping disclaimer' of an "apparent concession that there are also "good blacks"⁵³ – O'Flynn then proceeds to state that "MANY people from our established ethnic minority communities are now at the forefront of those who feel uncontrolled immigration is putting them in danger."⁵⁴ Again, his evidence is anecdotal – the constituency of a Labour MP – but the conclusion is nonetheless categorical: "This is not a matter of white against black but of the law-abiding British public as a whole attempting to maintain civilised values against brutal and ruthless foreign criminals."⁵⁵

Some less race-aware writers, however, were less inclined to include ethnic minorities as part of 'the law-abiding British public'. In another *Express* leader, Gary Mason discusses the crisis of 'lawless teens' and "a growing sense that not only is gang violence spiralling out of control

but, even worse, the police, the courts and the Government are powerless to prevent a significant minority of young people from descending into a criminal abyss."⁵⁶ Following a general outline of the problem – juvenile delinquency and teen-on-teen murders 'spiralling out of control', and a politically correct justice system treating "hardened young criminals as children" and confusing "the distinction between youthful indiscretion and pre-meditated criminality"⁵⁷ – Mason finishes by singling out 'one particular section of society' as particularly – and 'culturally' – problematic:

Pussyfooting around the serious issues of youth gang culture in the name of political correctness does a serious injustice to the communities most badly affected by violence.

Many of the perpetrators and victims are black and Tony Blair recently said that the problem would not be tackled by pretending it did not primarily affect one particular section of society.

Some community groups roundly criticised Blair for saying this but official figures show that young black people represent fewer than three per cent of all 10-17 year-olds but constitute six per cent of those within the youth justice system – a figure that has remained constant for the past five years.⁵⁸

Mason thereby clearly demonstrates the logical fallacy discussed above: an ethnic group constituting 6% of the youth justice system can logically be held responsible for a rising teenage murder toll; and the over-representation of young black people in violent offending can logically be extended to encapsulate an entire 'community', even though the overwhelming majority of young people from any 'community' are not involved in offending.

Making an even more explicit link between violence and black 'culture' is Richard Littlejohn in the *Daily Mail*. Commenting on the Youth Justice Board's (or "*dem Yoof Justiz Bitches*"⁵⁹ as Littlejohn dubs them) warning over the current indiscriminate use of the term 'gang', Littlejohn caricatures their argument by invoking a wealth of racialized stereotypes. The use of a popular understanding of black iconography and slang is distinct and definitive. There is little doubt that Littlejohn is referring to a perceived black 'culture' and 'community':

There they are, minding their own business on the street corner; rolling a spliff; drinking

50 'Now can we fight the peril of these crime invaders?', *The Express*, 3 May 2007

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*

53 Van Dijk (1993: 277)

54 'Now can we fight the peril of these crime invaders?', *The Express*, 3 May 2007

55 *Ibid.*

56 'As the murder toll rises, we have to solve the problem of lawless teens', *The Express*, 27 June 2007

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*

59 'Hell's teeth! Here's Sane Frankie Fraser', *Daily Mail*, 25 May 2007

the odd can or six of Red Stripe Extra Strength⁶⁰; nicking a few cars; doing a little light burglary; robbing the corner shop; smashing up the bus shelter; spraying their tags on every wall in a five-mile radius; mugging old lay-deez; and generally terrorising the neighbourhood with their joyriding and ghetto-blasters.

But don't you dare call them a 'gang'. That might undermine their self-esteem, the vulnerable little darlings.

Apparently, your common or garden yobbo doesn't want to be confused with a 'real' gang member.

You know, the kind who put up their own websites on the internet, call themselves things like *Da Kilburn Killaz Posse* and pay homage to their brave 'soljas' found stabbed to death in a stairwell after a showdown over a bucket of KFC.

THESE Boyz'N'The Hood wannabes imagine they are roaming the badlands of Trenchtown, Jamaica, or South Central Los Angeles, rather than the more mundane environs of Moss Side, Manchester, or the south side of Peckham.⁶¹

Slightly less frank, but providing a good example of van Dijk's differentiation between the tabloids and the liberal press, is Janet Street-Porter's *Independent* article 'We abandon these kids at their peril'. Street-Porter's starting point is the two white teenagers killed in London in 2007, but she quickly turns her sight to the origin of the current state of affairs, namely black 'culture':

Now we don't expect urban teenagers to use the language of the classroom or even popular television, but what is shocking is that street-speak now demands that anyone crazy enough to hang out in a gang which carries knives is seen as some kind of foot soldier in a war for control of the streets and someone worthy of that most ridiculous concept of all, "respect". How I loathe the bloody word "respect". It started out as a black way of greeting each other at the time when rap was really popular in the 1980s, and then morphed into something far more ominous. The rampant growth of bullying is just a way of one group of young men or women forcing another to "respect" them.⁶²

Street-Porter's solution to teen-on-teen murders "is

to sit down and spend a lot of time talking to the teenagers involved. It's something that their parents have opted out of, but this is a generation in desperate need of attention."⁶³ While her solution is more sensitive than those of the tabloids, she nonetheless considers the problem as endemic within certain 'communities'. Despite explaining gangs as "based around 'defending' their territory, which is based on something as rudimentary as a postcode,"⁶⁴ she does not make the connection between postcodes, relative deprivation and violent crime. Thus, Street-Porter's discussion effectively de-topicalizes "social explanations of ethnic conflict that reflect negatively on Us."⁶⁵

Apart from taxonomising and hierarchising the value of human beings, the distancing involved in attributing violent offending to certain 'communities' paints a picture of crime as a cancer, spreading from the black inner-cities to the white leafy suburbs.

4.3 Criminal 'Culture' as Cancer

If the 'culture' of violent criminality is confined to the 'communities' of ethnic minorities, one could ask why the primarily white media bothers at all to cover violent crime. As we noted in the introduction, a number of editors and journalists made it quite clear that poor black people in deprived areas are of no particular interest to the press. Why then the obsession so sharply distinguishable in the media in 2007? Anna Pukas provides a clue:

Once, teenage stabbings were rare and confined to vicious gangland feuds. But now innocent, well-educated and decent youngsters have become tragic victims of a disturbing knife culture that is destroying communities.

...

A MIDDLE-CLASS father living in Kingston worries when his teenage children go out for the evening in leafy Richmond upon Thames, where people go to watch rowing races. But at night and, increasingly, during the day, this affluent suburb on the south-western outskirts of the capital is plagued by gangs of marauding youths who,

60 There is no such thing as Red Stripe Extra Strength; the fact that Littlejohn chose a Jamaican beer to make his point, however, is hardly a coincidence.

61 'Hell's teeth! Here's Sane Frankie Fraser', *Daily Mail*, 25 May 2007

62 'We abandon these kids at their peril', *The Independent*, 28 June 2007

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Van Dijk (1993: 249)

it seems, would stick a knife in you as soon as look at you.⁶⁶

Indeed, much of Pukas' article implies that killings in 'vicious gangland feuds' are not problematic in their own right; violence and stabbings only become dangerous when 'innocent, well-educated and decent youngsters' are under threat. Apart from taxonomising and hierarchising the value of human beings, the distancing involved in attributing violent offending to certain 'communities' paints a picture of crime as a cancer, spreading from the black inner-cities to the white leafy suburbs. Thus, alien criminal elements are not problematic in their own right, but only become dangerous when they spill into peaceful middle-class areas. When Anna Pukas writes that "now innocent, well-educated and decent youngsters have become tragic victims of a disturbing knife culture"⁶⁷ it is clear that she is referring to white middle-class youth:

See how things have evolved: violent crime has moved from the murk of the pub to the brightness of the street in high summer, from adult males wielding fists to gangs of adolescent boys wielding knives. It has also moved from the council estates and the poor working class – the unemployed, the shiftless or the damned unlucky – to more middle-class areas populated by the aspirational. The victims of such crimes are now just as likely to be innocent passers-by as gang members.⁶⁸

The source of this cancer is foreign elements in general, and the 'black community' in particular. In the case of gang and gun culture, this holds true even when both victim and perpetrator is white. White working class criminality is often portrayed in conjunction with black iconography, such as hip hop fashion. As a result, violent black 'culture' is not only threatening the white middle class; it has also corrupted the white working class.

4.4 England at Breaking Point

All this suggests that England is at a breaking point. There is anarchy on the streets where law-abiding citizens cower in the shadow of "a new vicious underclass, feral and lethal, rejoicing in being beyond any law."⁶⁹ If this state of the nation was attributed to the development or introduction of alien criminal 'cultures', the situation was deemed to be made worse by a lenient criminal

66 'Knifed for nothing', *The Express*, 29 June 2007

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Ibid.*

69 'The Blair years 1997-2007: Stotty's verdict', *Sunday Mirror*, 13 May 2007

justice system, hampered by human rights legislation and political correctness:

The truth is we have among us an element who wish to rule by fear and believe they can do so with impunity. Why? Because mocking authority has emboldened them, short prison sentences handed out by soft judges are no deterrent and knife amnesties don't work.⁷⁰

Indeed, the proposed solution to lawlessness is as simple as the problem itself:

This kind of killing – a family man slaughtered for daring to stand up to a mob-handed bunch of yobs – is becoming so common that soon it will no longer be news. Before that black day, it seems that we have a choice.

Either we come down like a ton of bricks on these touchy, thin-skinned yobs.

Or we learn to cower beneath our bedclothes and hope they eventually go and stand outside someone else's home.

The choice is dead simple. Either make the yobs more scared of us than we are of them.

Or let them get away with murder.⁷¹

A *Mail on Sunday* article by Conservative MP David Davies summarizes all four themes. Davies writes about his own experiences as a Special Constable⁷² in north London. The title of the article sets the tone for its content: 'Crime in Britain is far worse than you imagine. How do I know? I joined the police.' The article is framed by a strong sense of the moral panic described above:

Shootings and stabbings are now so commonplace that the media bother to report only the worst examples. Burglaries and muggings are simply a fact of life. The breakdown in law and order in Britain – and let us be under no illusion, that is exactly what it is – is one of the biggest issues to confront us.⁷³

Davies then proceeds to identify the various culprits behind this 'breakdown in law and order'. In spite of a range of identified criminals, the only ethnic identifications Davies makes are of 'outsiders' – immigrants and ethnic minorities, many of whom he portrays as dubiously familiar with their human rights:

On another occasion I arrived at King's Cross to search and remove a family of East

70 'The time has come to lock up street killers and throw away the key', *The Mirror*, 21 May 2007

71 'Stand up to thugs', *The Mirror*, 28 May 2007

72 The Special Constabulary consists of trained volunteers who work with and support their local police force. Special Constables have full police powers but work on a voluntary basis and, in most forces, must dedicate 16 hours per month to their force.

73 'Crime in Britain is far worse than you imagine. How do I know? I joined the police', *Mail on Sunday*, 13 May 2007

European bag snatchers. Prior to my arrival they had claimed they spoke no English. Oddly, as I began searching one bag snatcher, he began to complain vociferously in fluent English that he had been hit by the lady whose handbag he had tried to grab and that it 'wasn't fair'.

Back at the police station his language skills mysteriously evaporated, so an expensive translator was found for him, along with a lawyer who will doubtless ensure that he is not put to any inconvenience by the British justice system.⁷⁴

Human rights are singled out as the policeman's worst enemy, especially when they are designed to protect the rights of marginalized groups. In relation to "gangs of pickpockets from various countries operating on the London Underground," Davies says that we can forget deportation: "Even those who commit the most heinous crimes are rarely sent home. Too many lawyers are ready to argue that it would – yes, you've guessed it – breach their human rights."⁷⁵

Particularly onerous is the recoding of stop-and-searches by the police. Guilt is of marginal importance, suspicion is all that matters. As Davies demonstrates – by only making ethnic references to minority groups – minority ethnic groups are more suspicious than whites by default. However, he lays the blame on the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, the effect of which is to make it "all but impossible for the police to stop and search suspicious individuals."⁷⁶ In a revealing passage, Davies directly links weapons to 'black youths' and thus implies that 'suspicious youth' are most likely to be black, and that blackness will be sufficient reason for suspicion:

Black youths are being murdered at a horrendous rate on London's streets, usually by other black youths, and nothing can be done because we have made it almost impossible for police to carry out searches in areas where knives are routinely carried.

We should trust those officers to carry out their duties properly. Scrapping the stop-and-search paperwork would be a good start. The police should be able to go into no-go areas in large numbers to carry out spot checks on suspicious youths, targeting those with any previous convictions.⁷⁷

Davies seems unaware of not only the logical rationale for Macpherson's recommendations on police stop-and-search practices and the statistical evidence justifying them (which are as relevant

today as they were in 1999),⁷⁸ but also of the history of the relations between the police and black people in Britain. The lasting legacy of mistrust left by uncontrolled and unmonitored stop-and-searches purely on the basis of suspicion – most famously exemplified by the Sus Law which permitted police officers to act on suspicion, or 'sus', alone – is ignored. Apart from demonstrating in the clearest possible terms why monitoring stop-and-search police practices is necessary – i.e. that officers such as himself consider blackness reasonable enough grounds to conduct a stop-and-search – Davies also reveals a wider attitude towards crime as an external threat, inflicted on the English by East European bag snatchers, black youth, and immigrants who cannot be deported due to the onus of human rights.

4.5 Discussion

The material in Leaders, Comments and Opinion is of particular importance, as it is there that journalists and commentators are free to expressly state their opinions. The theories which inform the more factual reporting on actual violent crimes are clearly discernible, and provide us with a framework through which to analyse the more obscured representations of race and crime. We analysed four interconnected themes: 1) the current breakdown in law and order is juxtaposed to a mythical 'golden age' of England; 2) the breakdown in law and order is attributed to elements alien to, and in contrast to, the values of white England; 3) violence within the 'underclass' is not considered problematic in its own right, but only becomes dangerous when the violence spills into 'middle-class areas populated by the aspirational'; 4) England is at breaking point, where the only solution to anarchy is to purge the nation of unwanted and dangerous alien elements.

Underlying these themes is a racialized discourse on insiders and outsiders. Ultimately, 'culture' is to blame for the current state of affairs. Asylum seeking youth from "countries where life is cheap are devaluing the worth of a life on Britain's streets"⁷⁹ are 'culturally' incompatible with white, middle-class, law-abiding England. This discourse assumes culture to be fixed at birth, which is why it becomes racist as well as culturalist. Culture, in this instance, becomes a proxy for race. Patrick O'Flynn, Gary Mason, David Davies, Richard Littlejohn and others demonstrate in the clearest possible way why this discourse is so dangerous. Home Office data clearly shows that within any category of crime – even those, like

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 In 2005/6, Black people were nearly 7 times more likely to be searched than White people. This ratio was 6 times in 2004/5 (Ministry of Justice, 2007: 24)

79 'Now can we fight the peril of these crime invaders?', *The Express*, 3 May 2007

gun crime, where over-representation of minority ethnic groups is most severe – minority ethnic offenders are always in the minority.⁸⁰ Yet many journalists and commentators wrote as though specific ethnic groups were responsible for the majority of offences within specific categories of crime. Furthermore, it is pivotal to remember that most young people choose not to get involved in criminal behaviour, regardless of their ethnicity,⁸¹ a fact that is often forgotten. Indeed, the Home Affairs Committee makes the important point that “[o]ver 92% of young black people in the year 2003-04 were not subject to disposals in the youth justice system.”⁸² Again, the way in which some writers discuss the relationship between culture, community and crime leaves the reader with the impression that most ethnic minority youth are involved in criminal activities.

5. Reports

During the period under consideration, a number of official reports on crime were published. Of these, two were of particular importance due to the media attention they received: 1) the Home Affairs Committee’s *Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System*; and 2) the Metropolitan Police Authority report on gangs in London. Both reports, and their coverage in the press, provide distinctive insights into how the media links certain types of violent crime to particular ‘communities’. To demonstrate this, we discuss each report individually, considering both what they actually said as well as what the press claimed they said.

The thrust of their argument is that the problem is primarily one of social exclusion and deprivation, with issues within black communities treated as secondary causal factors, and even then as largely stemming from inequality.

5.1 Home Affairs Committee

In June 2007, the Home Affairs Committee published its extensive report into *Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System*,⁸³ the first sustained official inquiry on this topic in more than a quarter of a century. The report makes no attempt to over-simplify the complex issues leading to the over-representation of young black people

in the various stages of the criminal justice system. In its discussion of these complexities, the report concludes that over-representation is primarily caused by three strands which interact and feed into each other:

Social exclusion – both historic and current – is the key, primary cause of young black people’s overrepresentation. Factors specific to the black community – such as family patterns and cultures amongst young black people themselves – are both fuelled by and compound socio-economic deprivation. Thirdly, the operation of the criminal justice system, including both the reality and perception of discrimination, mean more young black people come into contact, and stay in contact, with the system.

Thus, the thrust of their argument is that the problem is primarily one of social exclusion and deprivation, with issues within black communities treated as secondary causal factors, and even then as largely stemming from inequality. Indeed, the report is careful to avoid the usual stereotypical traps such as stigmatising single parent households and absent fathers. Ultimately, the conclusion is that “the causes of overrepresentation among young black people are similar to those which predispose a minority of young people from all communities to involvement in the criminal justice system,”⁸⁴ namely social exclusion. Indeed, the report states that “the profile of the area may be more important than ethnicity in understanding why young people from certain groups are disproportionately involved in crime.”⁸⁵

The Home Affairs Committee took care to distance itself from culturalist explanations of the relationship between race and crime. Indeed, in the introduction to the report, Tony Blair’s comment that “the recent spate of murders in black communities were being caused by a “distinctive black culture””⁸⁶ is introduced as a point of contestation. Even the press release was categorically clear on this point.⁸⁷ At the same time, however, the report does give the press a ‘cultural’ angle – however vague and secondary in importance – to latch on to. Consequently, the press reported on the issue as if the Home Affairs Committee had endorsed Tony Blair’s statement. Under the headline ‘Rap lyrics blamed for black violence: Report by MPs claims hip-hop music encourages a ‘desensitising’ climate’, *The Observer* claims that:

80 Home Office (2006)

81 Harris (1992: 108)

82 Home Affairs Committee (2007: 10)

83 Home Affairs Committee (2007)

84 Ibid.: 53

85 Ibid.: 25

86 Ibid.: 7

87 Home Affairs Committee Press Notice (2007)

Box 2: Extracts from articles covering the Home Affairs Committee report

Safe houses need to be set up for young people who want to escape from gang violence but need protection to do so, an influential committee of MPs recommends today.

The report on young black people and the criminal justice system also warns that boys and young men who lack the involvement of a father in their lives can develop “father hunger” – a trauma that leaves them vulnerable to peer pressure and involvement in gang culture.

The MPs also challenge radio and television broadcasters to tackle concerns that rap, grime and hip hop music glamorise violent, criminal lifestyles. (‘MPs urge safe houses for youths who want to break with gangs’, *The Guardian*, 15 June 2007)

A “WEB of disadvantage” is trapping young blacks and pushing more of them into crime, a probe by MPs warns today.

The epidemic of lawlessness is also being fuelled by gangsta rap and violent videos.

It is a culture that glorifies crime, the Commons Home Affairs Select Committee declares in a report.

The result is that some black youngsters “actively choose to emulate negative and violent lifestyles popularised in music and film.” Meanwhile poverty and poor schooling can leave black kids feeling there is no other way out. (‘Black crime “trap”’, *The Sun*, 15 June 2007)

Six out of ten dependent children in the black Caribbean community live in a single-parent household, compared with two in ten in the white British community, according to the Commons Home Affairs Select Committee report.

It urges ministers to consider “internal exclusion”, in which disruptive pupils are allowed to attend school but remain in a separate area. The report says that social exclusion, school exclusion and poor housing are key reasons for the over-representation of young black people in the criminal justice system.

It identifies a cultural problem: “Our evidence suggested there is a culture among some young black people, fuelled by media and popular culture, in which ‘success’ or credibility is built on ... willingness and ability to break the law or exercise power through force.” (“Give black boys a safe haven”, *The Times*, 15 June 2007)

BLACK boys in lone parent families develop a “father hunger” that can tip them into crime, MPs say today.

Six in 10 black Caribbean youngsters live in single parent households, invariably with their mothers, and this is three times the proportion in the white population.

The absence of a male role model is seen as a key factor in the “over-representation” of young black men in the criminal justice system.

A report from the Commons home affairs committee says they are far more likely to be stopped by police, arrested and convicted than their white counterparts.

The committee took evidence from black community leaders who regarded the lack of “traditional” family influences as a serious problem.

Figures cited by the committee indicate that 59 per cent of black Caribbean children and 54 per cent of mixed race youngsters are looked after by a lone parent. In the white British population, the figure is 22 per cent. (‘Broken families “fuelling black crime”’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 June 2007)

VIOLENT AND misogynistic rap and hip-hop lyrics are singled out as one cause of the violence engulfing Britain’s black communities in a far-reaching parliamentary report to be published this week.⁸⁸

Other papers reported in a similar vein, as is highlighted in Box 2. The main emphasis, therefore, was placed on: 1) rap music; 2) single

parent households; and 3) ‘father hunger’. This is far removed from the actual core message of the report. Rather, the message was turned on its head, with factors ‘specific to the black community’ given the status of ‘key, primary cause’ and structural factors of social exclusion reduced to an appendix. The Sun, for example, presents ‘a culture that glorifies crime’ as a primary explanation for young black people’s over-representation; ‘poverty and poor schooling’

88 ‘Rap lyrics blamed for black violence’, *The Observer*, 10 June 2007

is added almost as an afterthought.⁸⁹

Also arresting is the way in which some papers compared and contrasted the rates of single-parent households amongst the African Caribbean and White British populations. Both *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* highlighted that “[s]ix out of ten dependent children in the black Caribbean community live in a single-parent household, compared with two in ten in the white British community.”⁹⁰ This figure was taken from a table in the report, but the Home Affairs Committee did not specifically analyse this comparison, nor did they make it a central tenet of their argument. Furthermore, the *Telegraph’s* statement that the “absence of a male role model is seen as a key factor in the ‘over-representation’ of young black men in the criminal justice system”⁹¹ is simply false.⁹² This indicates that the press pursued some of their own interpretations while presenting them as if they were the Home Affairs Committee’s own.

5.2 Metropolitan Police Authority

The coverage of the report published by Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) differs in significant ways from that of the Home Affairs Committee report, as the report itself is in many ways supportive of the dominant discourse surrounding guns and gangs. As such, it reveals the interdependent relationship between the media and other social elite institutions (in this case, the Metropolitan Police). At the same time, however, the MPA is cautious in some of its statements, and the press certainly amplified and overstated certain elements of it.

It should be noted that this ‘report’ is merely a brief overview of ongoing collections of police intelligence of the London gang profile, and is as such both incomplete and inconclusive. Indeed, only three national newspapers saw reason to cover it in any depth. The inconclusive nature of the findings is stressed throughout the report. For instance, the MPA notes that 50% of identified gangs are primarily African-Caribbean. As for the remaining 50%, “MPS intelligence systems are not configured to identify whether these are newly arrived migrants or British born.”⁹³ In spite of the recognized lack of a clear overview of the demographics of gangs, their development is portrayed as grounded in ‘culture’: “Dealing with gangs is increasingly

complex as each gang is uniquely structured. This is compounded by cultural differences that often influence the formation and operation of the gang.”⁹⁴ How this can be squared with the Home Affairs Committee’s statement that “the profile of the area may be more important than ethnicity in understanding why young people from certain groups are disproportionately involved in crime”⁹⁵ is not entirely clear. Indeed, it has been suggested that gangs are formed around specific locations rather than ethnicity. It may be the case that many gangs consist of one dominant ethnic group, but it does not follow that ethnicity is the organising principle of gangs. Drawing on existing research on UK gangs, Young et al. conclude that “gangs or delinquent youth groups are more likely to be found in certain types of area and their ethnic make-up will reflect the ethnic make-up of the area *rather than* ethnicity as such, being the mainspring of gang formation.”⁹⁶ In relation to the Gooch and Doddington gangs in Manchester, Mares makes the important point that:

About 80 percent of the gang members are of [minority] ethnic descent, mostly Afro-Caribbean. There is however no reason to assume that either gang consciously decided to become an ethnically based street gang. The gangs are principally a reflection of the district’s ethnic composition. The presence of substantial numbers of white and mixed-race gang members and the strong territorial nature of both gangs also suggest that the gangs are not primarily organized around ethnicity, but rather around turf.⁹⁷

Further into the MPA report, the authors look at the impact of immigration on the development of gangs. Again, the evidence is inconclusive and no figures are provided:

21. A significant number of individuals arrested by Trident for gun-enabled offences reside in the UK illegally. Many emerging gangs come from [sic] new communities, where there is reluctance for victims and witnesses to engage with the criminal justice system partly due to their immigration status.

22. There is an indication from both police intelligence and the voluntary sector addressing gang criminality, that there is an increase in young people with significant post-traumatic stress resulting from witnessing and being involved in significant

89 ‘Black crime ‘trap’’, *The Sun*, 15 June 2007

90 “Give black boys a safe haven”, *The Times*, 15 June 2007

91 ‘Broken families “fuelling black crime”’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 June 2007

92 The Home Affairs Committee begin their discussion about single parent households and absent fathers by stating that the “fact that a father does not live in the same household with his children is not, in itself, an indication of insufficient parental support, as many of our witnesses made clear” (Home Affairs Committee (2007: 41).

93 Metropolitan Police Authority (2007)

94 *Ibid.*

95 Home Affairs Committee (2007: 25)

96 Young et al. (2007: 41; original emphasis)

97 Mares (2001: 155)

violent situations prior to arrival in the UK. These young people appear to have a disproportionate negative impact on their peer groups.⁹⁸

While stating that a ‘significant number’ of gun-related arrestees ‘reside in the UK illegally’, this is not qualified further, neither in terms of exact immigration status nor numbers or proportion. No particular clue is given as to what this actually means; it could refer to 5%, it could refer to 25%. Nonetheless, the three papers covering the report presented its contents as conclusive evidence that ‘illegal immigrants’ and asylum seekers are the driving force behind the current development of gangs. To be fair, the MPA report does provide the papers with fertile grounds to burgeon unsupported assumptions. Still, there are numerous large gaps in the intelligence presented, and to fill in these blank spots, analysts were consulted to shed further light on the development of gangs, particularly the role of ‘culture’. Perhaps rather predictably, these analysts were David Green, director of rightwing thinktank Civitas, and Sir Andrew Green, chairman of Migrationwatch UK. *Daily Mail* reports:

David Green, director of the Civitas thinktank, said: “We are importing 15, 16, 17 and 18-year-olds brought up in countries with an anarchistic warlord culture in which carrying knives and guns is routine.”

“That is no exaggeration. We are asking for trouble if we do not confront this issue, and coordinate Government policy properly.” He claimed “squeamishness” was preventing the Government or the police tackling the issue.

“If people come from a culture which is anarchistic, they are more likely to be violent, but the police will be frightened to target these people. The fear is that it would be called stereotyping. Actually, it is a valid group generalisation.”⁹⁹

Sir Andrew Green, in turn, was quoted by *The Express*:

“This is one of the costs of mass immigration. It is not easy to absorb into our society some people of a totally foreign culture.”¹⁰⁰

Many of the claims made in the MPA report point towards a real cause for concern. No doubt young people with a violent background are

disproportionately involved in violent offending, much of which will be caused by their own experiences of brutality. Again, however, a logical fallacy is at work, as this does not automatically mean that most ‘illegal’ immigrants and asylum seekers are involved in violent offending. Contrary to David Green’s view, this is far from a ‘valid group generalisation’. Neither the MPA nor the press provide statistical evidence for Green’s assertion. Indeed, the day after *The Express* reported on the MPA’s London gang profile, Patrick O’Flynn acknowledges the lack of data in the same paper, and cites Sir Andrew Green:

As Sir Andrew Green, the chairman of MigrationWatch UK, the immigration-sceptic think tank which has so often run rings around the Government, told me yesterday: “I would be extremely interested in analysing official figures on this aspect of immigration, if only official figures existed.” But because they do not, those who wish to investigate and expose this problem have had to rely on anecdotal evidence.¹⁰¹

Culture takes centre stage yet again, as immigrants and asylum seekers are portrayed as ‘culturally’ incompatible with the English nation and its values.

Nonetheless, *The Express* had no qualms about presenting anecdotal evidence as conclusive truths. Culture takes centre stage yet again, as immigrants and asylum seekers are portrayed as ‘culturally’ incompatible with the English nation and its values. As a result, a whole category of diverse groups are homogenized and criminalized across the board – ‘illegal’ immigrants and asylum seekers from countries as disparate as “Somalia, Nigeria and Kosovo” all have, according to *The Express*’s analysts, a suspiciously uniform “cheaper view of life”¹⁰² than the British public. Complexities are reduced to simple equations.

5.3 Discussion

A comparison between the actual content of the two reports discussed in this chapter and the way in which the press represented the content is illuminating in a number of ways. In the case of the Home Affairs Committee report, the press blatantly misrepresented the thrust of the report’s argument. A core message

98 Metropolitan Police Authority (2007)

99 ‘Migrants ‘who’ve grown used to violence are behind many of the 171 London gangs’, *Daily Mail*, 2 May 2007

100 ‘Migrant gangs ‘import terror’, *The Express*, 2 May 2007

101 ‘Now can we fight the peril of these crime invaders?’, *The Express*, 3 May 2007

102 ‘Migrant gangs import terror’, *The Express*, 2 May 2007

presenting social exclusion and socio-economic deprivation as the driving force behind over-representation, with cultural issues treated as secondary causal factors, was turned on its head. The MPA report, on the other hand, did provide the press with questionable material to work with. Nonetheless, the many gaps acknowledged in the report were filled with journalists' own conjectures.

In the media's treatment of both reports, responsibility for the current crime crisis is laid squarely at the feet of minority ethnic groups. Over-representation of young black people in the criminal justice system was described as an 'epidemic of lawlessness' driven by the criminogenic 'culture' to which the young people themselves belong, epitomized by 'gangsta rap' and 'father hunger'. Similarly, London's gang profile was attributed explicitly to minority

ethnic groups – above and beyond the limited evidence at hand – where asylum seekers received particular condemnation, conflating the moral panic about crime with moral panics about immigration.¹⁰³ The bottom line is that in the discussion on both reports, violent crime is attributed to the 'cultures' of minority ethnic groups while structural explanations are actively negated.

6. 'Culture' and 'Community' in Violent Crime Reporting

Through our examination of leaders, comments and opinion, as well as the reporting of two official reports, we have illustrated how Baumann's simple

¹⁰³ For recent analyses of media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers in Britain, see Smart et al. (2005) and Article 19 (2003).

Box 3: Extracts from reports on white and ethnic minority victims of crime.

White victims:

Kerry Barker, 38, a legal secretary from Muswell Hill, north London, said she and Richard Whelan, 27, had been sitting on the top deck of the No 43 bus after a night when they noticed a man at the back of the bus laughing and throwing chips ... The court heard that Mr Whelan, a hospitality agent, from Kentish Town, north London, received six or seven stab wounds, including a wound to the heart, which proved fatal. ('Girlfriend tells of fatal knife attack on bus', *The Guardian*, 10 May 2007)

Mr Langford, 43, was the sales director of a telecoms company and former chairman of Henley Round Table. ('Teenagers cleared of kicking Boris friend to death', *Evening Standard*, 23 May 2007)

The 43-year-old sales director was punched to the ground, knocking him unconscious, before Ingoldsby struck him like he was 'kicking a rugby ball', a jury was told. ('Family man 'kicked to death by son of millionaire'', *Daily Mail*, 9 May 2007)

A robber who stabbed Tom ap Rhys Pryce ... the successful City lawyer, through the heart has had his minimum jail term increased by the Court of Appeal. ('Ap Rhys Price term increased', *The Times*, 15 May 2007)

BME victims:

As the Sikh community voiced its anger, local taxi drivers claimed that the murder had been "waiting to happen" because of the failure of police to tackle taxi assaults ... Mr Chand was said to have played a prominent role in promoting community relations. ('Sikh taxi driver murdered with his own car', *The Times*, 25 May 2007)

Mr Chand Bajar was a pillar of the town's Sikh community. He was chairman of the area's Guru Nanak Temple and was helping to fund the construction of another one nearby. ('Minicab driver killed as thugs run him over in his own car', *Evening Standard*, 23 May 2007)

Jessie's aunt, Milly Henry, appealed movingly for the community to show 'more heart and a bit more courage' and produce the final clues to solving the crime. ('New hope in Jessie case', *Manchester Evening News*, 14 May 2007)

Mr Olagbaju was a successful promoter with his own music label and was highly thought of in his community of Hainault, Essex. Friends described the practising Christian as a dynamic and well-liked person. ('Plea to trace prime suspect in club killing', *The Evening Standard*, 14 June 2007)

equation of ‘culture = community = ethnic identity = nature = culture’ is the cornerstone of the print media’s understanding of culture and community. Crime is considered a problem of ‘culture’; if the rise in violent crime is due to the development of a particular ‘culture,’ the logical question to ask is whether there is a particular ‘community’ connected to it? We have already indicated that, according to the press, the answer to this question is yes. In its most obvious and crass expression, black youth culture is seen as the source of a variety of criminal sub-cultures, most notably gang culture and gun culture. However, other minority ethnic groups are also depicted as ‘communities’ with distinct criminal elements in their own ‘cultures.’ This has become the paradigm for much of ‘factual’ reporting of actual violent incidents, which we now explore in detail.

6.1 Victims and Notions of ‘Community’

The ways in which white victimisation was perceived and conceptualized is distinct from ethnic minority victimisation. In short, white victims were normally described in terms of their socio-economic status. Victims from an minority ethnic background, on the other hand, were usually defined as members of a ‘community.’ This was evident in a number of articles, especially in relation to the murders of ‘respectable’ law-abiding citizens. It is important to note that this was acknowledged in some papers. Indeed, we take our cue from a *Guardian* article which speculated that “[w]hen it comes to crime reporting, there is still a deeply-ingrained – and possibly quite warranted – suspicion that the public is most interested in a certain type of victim/criminal: white, well-off, connected, ‘respectable’.”¹⁰⁴

White victims were normally described in terms of their socio-economic status. Victims from an minority ethnic background, on the other hand, were usually defined as members of a ‘community.’

Box 3 shows excerpts from a number of articles, divided into white and BME victims. As can be seen, minority ethnic victims are frequently referred to as members of a ‘community’, and as such their murders have repercussions throughout the wider ‘community’ to which they belong. In this way, BME victimisation is collectivized and by extension, the very existence of BME *individuals*

104 ‘Murder reports don’t need a celebrity angle’, *The Guardian*, 6 June 2007

only has semantic importance as part of a whole. The tragedy of Gian Chand Bajar’s murder is that the Sikh ‘community’ lost one of its pillars. White middle-class victims, however, are referred to in their professional capacity as well as their socio-economic status. This individualizes their being and their murders become personal, rather than collective, tragedies. Although Stephen Langford was a ‘former chairman of Henley Round Table’, which could be described as a ‘community’ organisation, he was not construed to be ‘highly thought of in his community’. Thus, media construction of victimisation largely supports Baumann’s claim that white English people “do not speak of an *English community* because the *cultures* that define *communities* are the distinctive possessions of others, not one’s own.”¹⁰⁵

6.2 Perpetrators and Notions of ‘Community’

As we mentioned in the chapter on Leaders, Comments and Opinion, certain crimes are typically associated with particular ‘communities’, creating a taxonomy of criminal categories corresponding to specific ethnic groups. However, ethnicity comes to the forefront of crime reporting in more subtle ways as well. For instance, the ethnic identity of a suspect was more likely to be revealed when the suspect was minority ethnic. This was particularly prominent in the regional newspapers where information about suspects is given in order to assist police in their investigation. Statements such as “Two black males were seen fleeing the scene”¹⁰⁶ are unlikely to make or break an investigation. Still, these were far more common than “Two white males were seen fleeing the scene.” Where the white British ethnicity of a suspect was mentioned, this would most likely be in conjunction with BME accomplices: “The offenders were white and mixed race and in their early twenties.”¹⁰⁷ This, however, would not always be the case, and often minority ethnic identity would be stated without reference to white accomplices:

One of the offenders was of mixed race with light coloured skin, athletic and around 6ft. He was 28 to 32 with a round face and short black hair. He was wearing a blue and red jacket and blue trousers.

The other man was slim and not as tall. He was wearing black clothing with a hood pulled across his face.¹⁰⁸

105 Baumann (1996: 96)

106 ‘Boy, 16, on knife murder charge’, *Evening Standard*, 22 June 2007

107 ‘Witnesses plea in bottle attack’, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7 June 2007

108 ‘Family’s anguish after gun attack on father’, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 20 June 2007

Thus, we can deduce that black criminality is racialized to an extent which white criminality is not. In a criminal event, particularly if there is violence involved, blackness becomes important; whiteness does not. In other words, blackness takes centre stage whenever present in a violent event while whiteness is usually ignored or goes unnoticed. The notable exception to this is inter-racial violence – such as the stabbing of Sian Simpson – but this is usually in the context of others involved in the incident (i.e. the victim) being black.

Another notable technique to underscore ethnicity is the ways in which journalists use the term ‘black-on-black’. Writing on this in American news coverage, Jo Ellen Fair argues:

The use of the term “black-on-black” serves to remove any ambiguity of the perpetrator and victim of crime or violence. Both are black. In the U.S. context, this removal of ambiguity sharpens the boundaries of space where “black-on-black” is located in a physical sense. The mainstream press locates “black-on-black” crime in cities, inner-cities, rundown neighborhoods and poor communities.¹⁰⁹

The British context is more complex and subtle. Few articles used the term ‘black-on-black’ on its own. Instead, the same effect would surreptitiously be achieved through Trident, the Metropolitan Police Authority’s “anti-gun crime operation that was set up in 1998 to help bring an end to a spate of shootings and murders among young, black Londoners.”¹¹⁰ Again, this clearly demonstrates the interdependence between the media and other elite social actors. Indeed, Trident does publicize itself as investigating ‘black-on-black’ gun crime, which makes it unfair to point the finger exclusively towards the press. Nonetheless, the way in which ‘Trident’ is used in news articles does result in the same impression as that described by Fair. In this way, ‘Trident’ creates a “racially bound category of violence”¹¹¹ which is culturally different and socio-economically removed from white England. Similarly to Fair’s discussion from the US, it may be true that a large part of violent crime takes place in urban areas, but the “location of “black-on-black” crime in cities, inner-cities and particular neighborhoods creates a social space around the physical.”¹¹² This brings us back to the idea of ‘two Englands’ and the circular argument of race, class and geography. ‘Black-on-black’

clarifies all three in one stroke: both victim and perpetrator are obviously black, working-class, inner-city residents.

6.3 Discussion

This chapter has explored how the media’s understanding and use of the terms ‘culture’ and ‘community’ feeds into certain stereotypes of race and crime. Minority ethnic people are victimized as members of a ‘community’, while minority ethnic perpetrators are portrayed as belonging to a dysfunctional and criminogenic ‘culture’. Coming back to Baumann’s equation, the claim that ‘culture’ is the source of violent crime necessarily attaches violence to certain ‘communities’ defined by their ethnic ‘identity’. This equation has two crucial elements. The first one is that structural factors – such as inequality, disadvantage, social exclusion and relative deprivation – are left out of the equation. White, middle-class society is not only disconnected from violence, but is portrayed as an innocent victim of a criminal foreign ‘culture’. The second element is that the equation involves a logical fallacy. Over-representation of a particular group in a particular category of offending is taken to mean that most members of that group are offenders. The effect is that entire ‘communities’ are criminalized on the basis of their ‘cultures’.

This process of criminalisation in the media is similar to Jefferson’s description of the police: “police racism is *not* primarily about discriminating against young black males but rather about the production of a criminal Other in which, currently, young black males figure prominently.”¹¹³ This appears to be as true now as it was 15 years ago. The media does not imply that all criminals are black, but frequently invokes iconography of a perceived black ‘culture’ – such as rap and gang poses – even when discussing white offending. Thus, the press is involved in the production of the criminal Other, which can encapsulate white working class youth, but habitually invokes images of black ‘street culture’. Although criminal ‘culture’ can extend to the white working class as well, the source of this ‘culture’ is nonetheless the black ‘community’.

Having established the different ways in which notions of ‘culture’ and ‘community’ inform reporting on violent crime, we can proceed to investigate in greater detail how this manifests on the pages of newspapers. As will become clear, reporting on actual violent incidents is often laden with implicit assumptions. In order to demonstrate some of these assumptions, we turn to a number of examples of teen-on-teen murders.

109 Fair (1994: 36)

110 Stop the Guns – What is Trident? (not dated)

111 Fair (1994: 35)

112 Ibid.: 36

113 Jefferson (1992: 31; original emphasis)

7. Gangs and Teenage Murders

A large part of the media's attention focuses on fatal teen-on-teen shootings and stabbings. Alleged 'gangs' are commonly involved in these, usually without particular qualification of what is meant by the term. A 'gang' can be anything from a group of young people to highly organized criminal syndicates. The majority of 'gang' related stories in all papers, however, focused on young people carrying out random and/or gratuitous acts of violence. The racialisation of 'gangs' in the media is not straight-forward. There is not a direct correlation between 'gangs' and black youth; the word 'gang' is in itself often found in stories where perpetrators are white. However, this does not mean that 'gang' is a race-neutral term. The context in which the word is used, and the different meanings attached to the term as a result of the differing contexts, means that different forms of usage do have racial connotations.

In the first place, other words used in tandem with 'gang' differ in terms of which ethnic groups are involved in the incident. White 'gangs' are normally discussed in conjunction with 'yobs' or 'thugs,' which are charged with class allegory and are related to historical white British crime, such as football hooliganism or East End gangsters such as the Kray twins or 'Mad' Frankie Frazer. Unsurprisingly, then, white 'gangs' are related to grim council estates and mindless violence. The murder of Kevin Johnson in Sunderland, for example, was typically described in the following way by the tabloids:

COPS were last night hunting three yobs who stabbed one man to death and injured another in a violent rampage through streets.

The murdered man had complained about the gang's noise outside his home in Sunderland, where they also damaged cars.¹¹⁴

A DAD was stabbed to death outside his home after asking a gang of boozing teenage yobs to "keep the noise down".¹¹⁵

While young black suspects or offenders would occasionally be referred to as thugs or yobs, this was far less common. Young black criminality would more often be associated with 'gang membership,' drawing on stereotyped images of gangs in America.¹¹⁶ The link between gang activity

and black 'culture' was made abundantly clear in *The Sun*:

A GANG who are fans of US rapper 50 Cent were yesterday arrested by cops investigating a string of robberies.

The notorious Peel Dem Crew is accused of stealing £500,000 from firms to buy guns and drugs.

The 30-strong mob, some just 18, use the rapper's motto "Get Rich Or Die Tryin".¹¹⁷

The archetypal 'gang member' is black; correspondingly, a murder covered in the news was more likely to be assumed to be 'gang related' if there was black youth involved than if all involved were white.

The archetypal 'gang member' is black; correspondingly, a murder covered in the news was more likely to be assumed to be 'gang related' if there was black youth involved than if all involved were white. Furthermore, many articles covering incidents which involved black youth (either as perpetrators or victims) in inner-city areas framed the stories with warnings of the development of gang or gun 'culture'. Articles relating to white people in suburbs or rural areas, however, were often accompanied by a quotation denouncing the existence of a criminal culture in the area, as in the reporting on stabbing of Kevin Johnson in Sunderland. Many papers quoted the police in saying that Northumbria is a safe place and knife killings are rare. In spite of Kevin's murder being "the third knife murder in the Northumbria force area in three weeks"¹¹⁸ – and the perpetrators causing further damage and stabbing another man on the same night – none of the papers described this as evidence of the development of a 'culture'. The message is that Northumbria does not breed or harbour criminal 'cultures'. *The Observer* even drives home this message by quoting the police: "There isn't a knife culture in Northumbria."¹¹⁹

However, differential patterns were observed in relation to the ethnicity of both victim and perpetrator. In order to demonstrate these patterns, it is worth looking briefly at a number of different stories – chosen as being most representative of the general pattern in similar stories – with differing ethnicity of victim and perpetrator.

114 'Hunt for yobs on death trail', *News of the World*, 20 May 2007

115 'Killed for asking thugs to be quiet', *The Sun*, 21 May 2007

116 Hoodie stands somewhere in between. A hoodie can be black or white, and as opposed to 'gang member' on the one hand, and 'yob' or 'thug' on the other, the word in itself does not automatically connote either black nor white.

117 '50 Cent fan gang held by cops', *The Sun*, 31 May 2007

118 'All he asked was for yobs to be quiet so his baby could sleep. IT COST HIM HIS LIFE', *The Mirror*, 21 May 2007

119 'Police hunt for knife killers', *The Observer*, 20 May 2007

7.1 Black-on-black

Dwaine Douglas, a black eighteen year-old from Tulse Hill, south London, was stabbed outside a Tesco store in Thornton Heath, south London. He died in Croydon's Mayday Hospital shortly after the attack. The stabbing received scant interest from the press, and little seemed to be factually known about the incident, but it appears to have involved a confrontation involving a number of men. In the very limited coverage of his murder, the *Evening Standard* made immediate – albeit allusive and indirect – assumptions of Dwaine's gang affiliations. Under the heading '18-year-old dies after gang brawl' the paper writes:

Friends took him with another wounded youth to Croydon's Mayday Hospital after a gang clashed in Parchmore Road on Friday night near Tesco.¹²⁰

Subsequent coverage in the national press – after police had categorically claimed that there was no reason to think the incident was gang related – found it necessary to state that Dwaine had no gang affiliations, as if his gang membership could logically be assumed and needed to be refuted:

A TEENAGER stabbed to death in a fight was NOT a gang member, police said yesterday.¹²¹

The Express states this twice, but nevertheless connects the murder to a "plague of killings" in London.¹²² Furthermore, *The Express* quotes messages from gonetoooon.co.uk¹²³ which conjure up images of black culture and connect it to violence. To underscore this, Dwaine's murder was claimed to be the result of a 'confrontation' which is not further qualified; the reader does not know what this 'confrontation' involved, but is left with the impression that Dwaine was actively involved in a street fight. In contrast, reporting on the stabbing of white 17-year-old Zak Davis in Hampshire – which also received scant coverage in both national press and the regional papers – *The Sun*¹²⁴ makes no gang connection in spite of Zak's murder emanating from a 'brawl'.

7.2 White-on-white

Importantly, gangs were not absent in stories in which both victim and perpetrator were white.

120 '18-year-old dies after gang brawl', *The Evening Standard*, 21 May 2007
121 No title, *The Sun*, 21 May 2007. The capitalized and bold 'not' is from the article.

122 'Teenager killed in new knifing horror', *The Express*, 21 May 2007
123 gonetoooon.co.uk is an online memorial site, featuring many of the teenagers murdered in 2007. Not least for this reason, the site has captured the attention of journalists, who commonly cite messages from the website, often to drive home a wider point about the circumstances of the murder, or to portray and reinforce a particular picture of the character of the victim.

124 'Stab lad named', *The Sun*, 1 May 2007

Sixteen year-old Mark Smith, from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, was stabbed in the neck outside a late night takeaway on May 2, and died in hospital shortly after. Mark had been given an ASBO a year before his murder, but appeared to have turned his life around and had secured an apprenticeship as a car mechanic. Several stories made references to gangs or 'gang culture' and Mark's previous involvement in gangs.¹²⁵ The tone, however, was distinctly different from the stories relating to Dwaine Douglas. While Mark's criminal past was acknowledged, the emphasis was placed on his redress and rehabilitation:

A REFORMED teenage tearaway was stabbed to death in the street after falling victim to the gang culture he tried to leave behind.

Mark Smith, 16, had changed his lawless ways after being made the subject of an Anti Social Behaviour Order a year ago.

He had kept out of trouble, shunned the jobs who led him off the rails and just hours before he died had secured his first job.

But shortly after celebrating winning an apprenticeship as a car mechanic, the youngster was stabbed in the throat and bled to death.¹²⁶

Furthermore, his murder was not deemed gang-related in itself, and in contrast to Dwaine Douglas, Mark was not attributed a part in his own death. Where Dwaine was *involved* in a clash between gangs, Mark was not described as being actively involved in the events leading up to his death:

Detectives are questioning the youth from the Benwell area about the killing and a street fracas which allegedly flared up shortly beforehand.¹²⁷

In short, Dwaine's criminality was assumed *a priori* (one theory was that he "could have been knifed while trying to mug somebody"¹²⁸), while Mark's criminality was superseded by his decision to go straight.

Two weeks later, fifteen year-old Shane Jackson was stabbed to death on another Newcastle-Upon-Tyne estate. According to most reports, Shane had been involved in a row with a friend which resulted in Shane being stabbed yards from his home. Much of the reporting focused on the estate on which Shane lived, dubbed 'Little Beirut', and included descriptions of its decrepit condition:

125 'Knife tragedy of the boy who had given up gang violence', *The Express*, 4 May 2007; 'Murdered. The ASBO boy who tried to go straight; Mark, 16, knifed as he lands job', *The Mirror*, 4 May 2007; 'ASBO lad: teenager charged', *The Mirror*, 5 May 2007

126 'Knife tragedy of the boy who had given up gang violence', *The Express*, 4 May 2007

127 'Police arrest teenager over fatal stabbing', *The Guardian*, 4 May 2007

128 'Dwaine: Was it a mugging?', *Croydon Guardian*, 23 May 2007

CRIME in the area where Shane was killed has rocketed as gangs of drunken youths roam wild – leading to the nickname Little Beirut.¹²⁹

Although many papers mentioned ubiquitous gang activity on the estate, Shane's involvement in gangs was not considered a possibility. He was a good lad who "avoided local thugs because he was bullied at school."¹³⁰ According to friends and family, Shane "was well-known in the area and very popular. He had a few scrapes but he was not a bad lad."¹³¹ Again, Shane's murder is not considered gang related, and Shane was actively distanced from the fight leading to his death.

7.3 White-on-black

Ethnic identity took centre stage in the reporting of the stabbing of a seventeen year-old girl, Sian Simpson, from Croydon, south London. This is in many ways understandable, as a group of 15 white girls clashed with 3 black girls, culminating in the death of Sian, who was portrayed as an innocent victim trying to break up a fight. She got caught up in an argument between two girls and, acting as a peacemaker, she was stabbed in the heart. On an individual level, Sian's story is one of personal tragedy. On a collective level, however, the press implied that it was her membership of a particular 'community' which exposed her to dangerous violence in the first place and ultimately led to her death. Sian was not part of a 'gang' herself, but according to the press, she associated with and protected alleged 'gang members.'

Although her assailant was white, Sian was connected to, and aligned herself with, a black 'gang' which clashed with a white 'gang.' The fact she was protecting only two friends (making the black 'gang' a total of three girls) did not seem to dissuade journalists from describing the event as a "fight between the rival gangs of girls."¹³² In fact, some articles made a connection between Sian's murder and other 'gang related incidents' in south London.¹³³ Undeterred by their citation of Chief Inspector Nick Scola, of the Homicide and Serious Crime Command, that "they had no information to suggest that the incident was gang-related", *The Telegraph's* heading nonetheless read "Stab victim 'walked into ambush by girl gang'". Furthermore, *The Telegraph* finds reason to state that the 'gang' whose members killed Sian "is said to be made up of black and white youths, both

boys and girls."¹³⁴ In the 14 national newspaper articles relating to the event, the word 'gang' was mentioned 27 times – a significant number for an incident which was not considered gang related by the police.

7.4 Black-on-white

Similarly to the murder of Sian Simpson, the stabbing of white 14-year-old Martin Dinnegan in Islington, north London, was immediately deemed a 'gang related' incident. The details of the murder were slow to come in. On the first day of reporting, journalists could say little more than that an unnamed white youth in his mid-teens "was killed following a fight among a gang of youths in Islington."¹³⁵ *The Sun* states that "Police confirmed they were investigating a "gang incident".¹³⁶ The following day, however, the press focused on two different accounts from witnesses: 1) Martin was targeted for his mobile phone; and 2) Martin was stabbed because he looked at a 'gang member' the wrong way. Importantly, although Martin had been in the company of his friends, there was no suggestion that this group could have constituted a 'gang.' Similarly to the reporting of Mark Smith's stabbing, but in contrast to Sian Simpson and Dwaine Douglas, Martin was disconnected to the events, which were construed as outsiders targeting an innocent victim:

"Boys from other estates come down here and cause trouble," one said. "Martin would get into fights sometimes. But so would everyone."

Another friend added: "He was going to the local youth club to try to keep himself out of trouble."¹³⁷

The *Daily Star* even employed antiquated racialized language. They may not consciously have been thinking of colonial Africa when speaking of 'tribes' but it certainly reinforces the link between violence and a backwards and savage black 'culture':

It is believed the schoolboy – who was not part of a gang – was knifed after getting caught in a clash between two rival tribes.

...

One boy, who did not want to be named, said Martin was a victim of warfare between gangs from Finsbury Park and Wray Cray.

129 'Gangs run riot in 'Little Beirut'', *The Sun*, 16 May 2007

130 'Boy of 15 is knifed to death on estate', *Daily Mail*, 16 May 2007

131 'A day later he was dead; Stab lad last photo', *The Mirror*, 17 May 2007

132 'Pal's hug for dying Sian', *The Mirror*, 22 June 2007

133 'Teenager stabbed to death as girls brawl in the street', *Daily Mail*, 21 June 2007; 'Stab victim 'walked into ambush by girl gang'', *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 2007; 'Someone's going to be killed', *The Sun*, 22 June 2007

134 'Stab victim 'walked into ambush by girl gang'', *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 2007

135 'Teenager is stabbed to death after fight between youths', *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 June 2007

136 'Gang kills teen in knife frenzy', *The Sun*, 27 June 2007

137 'Boy stabbed to death because he looked at gang "the wrong way"', *The Times*, 28 June 2007

He said: “The Finsbury Park lot came down here looking for the Wray Cray and it all kicked off.”

Martin’s pals told how he was not in a gang but in the wrong place at the wrong time.¹³⁸

The reporting of the murder of Ben Hitchcock is similarly revealing, and demonstrates in the clearest possible terms how a cancerous and criminogenic black ‘culture’ is constructed as corrupting white youth. Again, the details of his murder were blurry and inconsistent. By most accounts, Ben had been denied entry to a birthday party he and a number of friends had tried to gatecrash. Police officers had been called to the scene to turn them away. Shortly afterwards, a forty-strong “black mob ... wearing ‘gang colours’”¹³⁹ attacked Ben, forcing him onto a spiked metal railing and ultimately stabbing him. Initially, the press portrayed the incident as a “blood-thirsty lynch mob attacking a fearful young lad.”¹⁴⁰ The following day, however, the press asserted that Ben had himself been a ‘gang member’ “who used the rap nickname Swipe.”¹⁴¹ The tone changed and the sympathy became more tempered. In an article by *The Times*, Ben’s fate was constructed as a result of him associating with black youth:

As bouquets multiplied along the roadside in Beckenham, where Ben was killed, schoolfriends described a happy, easy-going boy who had in recent years fallen in with a crowd calling themselves the ‘Penge Block’.¹⁴²

This is followed by a wealth of cultural stereotypes of black criminality, including messages posted by friends on the internet:

Friends have created a virtual shrine to him on the social networking website Bebo, which gives an insight into teenage culture of South London.

One girl, called Laura, wrote: “Miss ya loads true penge block soldier.” Another visitor mourned Ben, “our fallen soldier”. Simon Maluwe, 17, from Penge, wrote: “Our nigga, RIP Swipe.”

A six-minute clip on YouTube shows photographs of the dead teenager adopting a series of gangsta-rap poses, with friends, and features a rap song called *Too Young to Die*.¹⁴³

138 ‘Tragedy of stab boy caught in gang fight; Martin, 14, killed as he tried to run’, *Daily Star*, 28 June 2007

139 ‘Ben: Call mum... I want her’, *The Sun*, 26 June 2007

140 ‘Mob kills boy in weekend of terror’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 June 2007

141 ‘Ben: Call mum... I want her’, *The Sun*, 26 June 2007

142 ‘Mourning teenagers fear more violence from feuding gangs’, *The Times*, 26 June 2007

143 *Ibid.*

The *Daily Mail* printed pictures of Ben striking ‘gang-style poses’ and a photo of him ‘being embraced by black classmates’ – as if this were a kiss of death – which were juxtaposed against a happy, cheerful Ben with a group of white friends. He got into a ‘culture’ which corrupted and ultimately killed him, as *The Times* explains:

One friend, staring at the tributes for a boy he had known since childhood, said: “He was a happy-go lucky guy, always up for a laugh. But in the past couple of years he got into the wrong crowd. He became a different person and once someone has got into that culture it is very difficult to get out. It won’t stop until they are all dead.”¹⁴⁴

We could thus make the plausible assumption that Dwaine Douglas’ murder would not have been connected to gang activity if both he and his assailant had been white; conversely, Mark Smith’s murder would have been instantly deemed ‘gang related’ had both he and his assailant been black.

7.5 Discussion

The pattern in news coverage reveals an implicit – but clear – connection between gang related crime and blackness. The crucial factor in this regard is the ethnicity of the victim. Where the victim is black (irrespective of the ethnicity of the perpetrator), the crime is in most cases immediately assumed to be gang related. Where the victim is white, however, gang connections are usually not made until the perpetrator(s) emerge as black, but are negated where he/she emerges as white. We could thus make the plausible assumption that Dwaine Douglas’ murder would not have been connected to gang activity if both he and his assailant had been white; conversely, Mark Smith’s murder would have been instantly deemed ‘gang related’ had both he and his assailant been black.

The connection between gang membership and activity on the one hand and blackness on the other was underscored in stories not specifying victims and perpetrators.

In its discussion on a Metropolitan Police plan to introduce a witness protection scheme in relation to gangs, the *Evening Standard* claimed that “[s]even murders of teenage boys have taken place in London

144 *Ibid.*

since January, all suspected to have been linked to gangs,"¹⁴⁵ and then proceeded to name James Andre Smartt-Ford, Michael Dosunmu and Billy Cox. In fact, the exact motive for these murders is unclear, and no direct link with police-identified gangs have been established; what is clear, however, is that none of the three were gang members themselves. The same is true of the other murders as well. The thrust of the article, however, makes an explicit and direct link between 'gangs' and black youth and cites these three young men as evidence.¹⁴⁶

The intention of this chapter is not to suggest that some victims were more or less actively involved in the events leading to their deaths than others. We are not asserting that Dwaine Douglas *was not* involved in a fight; nor are we suggesting that Martin Dinnegan was part of a gang. On the contrary, the aim is to identify the assumptions journalists make in the absence of hard evidence, and how notions of race inform those assumptions. Indeed, the exact circumstances of the teen-on-teen murders which have been committed on the streets of England in 2007 are uncertain. Many of them are still unsolved, and the fact remains that little is known about them.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, the development of 'gangs' in Britain is under-researched and generally poorly understood. In a hard-hitting critique of the current sensationalisation of youth gangs, Hallsworth and Young question the arbitrary adoption of 'gang' as descriptive as well as a prescriptive term. In their opinion, the problem of 'gangs' must be put in perspective:

A key problem in attempting to do so is that the notion of 'gang' is terribly permissive. It can be evoked in so many ways that delineating what is and what is not one remains problematic. When is a group of young men not a gang? Does it apply only when they are poor? If so, are the 'gang-like' qualities observed conferred or self ascribed? And just how many crimes do not involve group activity of some kind?¹⁴⁸

This is evident from newspapers' approach to 'gangs' and the ad hoc way in which the term is used. There are nonetheless patterns in their coverage. One, as Hallsworth and Young rightly identify, is that only poor inner-city youth are deemed members of 'gangs.' Another, as we have

seen, is the connection between 'gang activity' and the 'black community.' Indeed, Hallsworth and Young make the insightful comment: "Where the street robber was the folk devil *par excellence*, it would now appear to be his brethren the urban delinquent gang."¹⁴⁹ Just as the 'street robber' of the 1970s was black in the public imagination,¹⁵⁰ so is the 'gang member' of the 2000s: "The cast of characters evolves but there is consistency in the way that it is always crime which tells the British people what racial differences add up to."¹⁵¹ Ultimately, the demographic breakdown of gangs is contested and dependent on how a 'gang' will be defined. However, drawing on their survey of 2725 arrestees in 14 police-force custody suites, Bennet and Holloway found that the overwhelming majority of gang members (75%) in England and Wales are white.¹⁵² For London, the Metropolitan Police Service estimates that 50% out of their 171 identified gangs are "from the African/Caribbean community," although they do not state the ethnic makeup of the remaining 50%.¹⁵³

The point is not so much whether most 'gang members' are black. It is the association between gang membership and blackness that matters, which leads us back to the logical fallacy discussed above. Again, the comparison with previous representations of muggers is illuminating. Webster argues that the statement 'most muggers are black, therefore blacks are more likely to be muggers than whites' allows "a false inference and prediction about black people as a group in relation to mugging behaviour, encourages fear of black people, and leaves out the fact that only a tiny minority of young black people are responsible for the majority of muggings in London Boroughs."¹⁵⁴ The same is true about gangs.

8. Conclusion

The introduction of the concept of 'culture' to the dominant British discourse has presented those promoting race equality with a beguiling challenge. 'Culture' may have displaced the notion of 'race' as the paradigmatic conception of diversity, but in certain significant respects it has also replaced it. An understanding of 'culture' which is "specified as a substantive heritage that is normative, predictive of individuals' behaviour, and ultimately a cause of social action"¹⁵⁵ introduces a dangerous substitute for 'race' in racist ideologies. Furthermore, it may also be appealing as an interpretive and descriptive term

145 'Families caught up in gang war will be moved to different boroughs', *The Evening Standard*, 4 May 2007

146 This relates to the Metropolitan Police Authority report on gangs. Importantly, to the *Evening Standard's* defence, coverage of this report was fairly representative of its content.

147 This much was recently admitted by a political commentator of a tabloid newspaper who, as part of the panel discussion on crime in the media, commented that assumptions about the gang membership of the young victims should be made with care as little is known about them. The question remains: if this is the case, why do so many journalists write about them as if they do?

148 Hallsworth and Young (2004: 2)

149 *Ibid.*

150 Hall et al. (1978)

151 Gilroy (2003)

152 Bennet and Holloway (2004a: 314)

153 Metropolitan Police Authority (2007)

154 Webster (2001: 16)

155 Baumann (1996: 9)

to those who would normally denounce prejudice and discrimination, thereby casting wider the net of racist understandings of ethnic diversity. The challenge is to identify, analyse and counter this insidious manifestation of racism wherever it arises.

This is what this report has endeavoured to do. Identifying ‘culture’ as a central concept in the ways in which “it is always crime which tells the British people what racial differences add up to,”¹⁵⁶ we have analysed the different and complex expressions of the ‘crime-as-culture’ theory which dominates reporting on violent crime. To summarize our argument, ‘culture’ reduces social complexities to dangerously simple equations: it locates and equates certain types of pathological behaviour with specific communities; as communities are defined and circumscribed by ethnic identities, pathological behaviour extends to those identities as well. Thus, attributing a certain type of crime to the ‘culture’ of a particular ‘community’ involves a generalisation which pathologizes entire ethnic groups. This is not only an unambiguous fallacy, but it is also a denial of the equal moral status of individuals. To see why, consider how the white English community is significantly excluded from this equation. The concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘community’ do not define ‘Englishness’ in the normative and reductive manner they do for ethnic minorities, and white English people are more likely to be evaluated on their individual merits and so taken as rational moral actors. On the other hand, pathological and criminal ‘foreign cultures’ are threatening Englishness.

A clear example of this is a map published on *The Telegraph* website.¹⁵⁷ The map depicts ‘the rural spread of foreign crime gangs’ throughout England and Wales, and indicates the rural towns where ‘foreign gangs’ are operating. The list includes ‘Chinese Snakeheads’ in Morecambe; ‘Asian Heroin Network’ in Bradford; ‘Albanian Prostitute Ring’ in Hampshire; ‘Colombian Cocaine Network’ in Chelmsford; ‘Yardie Crack Network’ in Newport; and ‘Vietnamese Cannabis Farms’ in Cambridgeshire. Apart from collectivising certain types of crimes – thereby criminalising entire ‘communities’ – the map demonstrates in the clearest possible terms how foreign cultures are perceived as a spreading ‘cancer’.

While the ‘crime-as-culture’ theory is general enough to include any ethnic groups from the ‘South’ in the global North–South economic divide which characterizes the economic landscape, African Caribbean youth received particular and sustained media attention in 2007. Black ‘culture’ has become the epicentre of the teen-on-teen

murder ‘epidemic’ throughout England. Central to this discussion is the development of ‘gang culture’, where the ‘gang member’ has largely replaced the ‘mugger’ as public enemy number one. It should be noted that not all news coverage accedes to ethnic stereotyping. Many articles were factual and race-neutral, and we found a number of articles both critical and reflexive in their discussion of race and crime. Furthermore, the very fact that many BME victims of violent crime now receive media attention is a positive development. Nonetheless, there is a clear pattern in the press, and insightful and balanced articles were certainly in the minority.

It has not been the purpose of this report to deny that violent crime is more prevalent amongst young black people, and we welcome the media’s increasing focus on young BME victims. There is a real concern amongst black people living in poor areas about the level of violent crime. However, the way in which the problem is framed is extremely important; a misunderstanding of cause and effect will lead to misinformed policies and harm community cohesion. Although the influence of the media on CJS policy cannot be assumed, a number of studies have demonstrated a clear link – in specific cases – between media furore on crime and, often quite drastic, policy making.¹⁵⁸ The media can also have detrimental effects on non-governmental efforts to address social problems. One of the authors of the REACH report¹⁵⁹ – *An Independent Report to Government on Raising the Aspirations and Attainment of Black Boys and Young Black Men* – said that following the media’s distortion of the report’s basic message, their impact was likely to be zero at best, and actually doing harm at worst. The report took 18 months to write and was produced by a very committed and knowledgeable group of people. But the presentation in the media – focusing exclusively on rap and role models – misrepresented the thrust of their work and potentially undermined the whole project.¹⁶⁰

It is difficult to determine whether Tony Blair’s comments linking gang culture to the black community – “when are we going to start saying this is a problem amongst a section of the black community and not, for reasons of political correctness, pretend that this is nothing to do with it” and “[t]he black community ... need to be mobilized in denunciation of this gang culture that is killing innocent young black kids. But we won’t stop this by pretending it isn’t young black kids doing it”¹⁶¹ – was a genuine attempt to engage with the problem or merely a response to the intense media outrage in the months preceding his speech. The answer needs not be one or the other, but two

¹⁵⁶ Gilroy (2003)

¹⁵⁷ ‘Foreign gangs ‘moving to rural areas’, *The Telegraph*, 5 October 2007. Available under: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/10/04/ngangs104.xml>

¹⁵⁸ See, for instance, Dorfman and Schiraldi (2001).

¹⁵⁹ REACH (2007)

¹⁶⁰ David Gillborn (personal communication)

¹⁶¹ Blair (2007)

facts suggest that the latter was certainly a strong factor. Firstly, while there is general consensus that teen-on-teen murder is increasing, this is not a new phenomenon. Teenagers have been subjected to extreme violence throughout the most deprived areas of Britain for many years. What the media labels ‘gang culture’ – which Mares considers “a clear continuation and redevelopment of already existing gang structures”¹⁶² albeit with certain new elements – certainly did not emerge in early 2007. Secondly, and following from the first point, Blair’s April speech came directly in the wake of in-depth media coverage of the deaths of a number of black teenagers in London, in particular James Andre Smartt-Ford, Michael Dosunmu, Billy Cox and Adam Regis. While these deaths were tragic and indicative of the need for robust intervention, they by no means signaled a qualitative shift in the level of precariousness in the lives of young people in deprived neighbourhoods.

In a similar manner, the leader of the Conservatives responded to media representations in a drastic and dramatic way. Having gained a reputation for softness after calling for increased understanding of young people in what was called his ‘hug a hoodie’ speech,¹⁶³ David Cameron made a u-turn on his position on crime following the murder of 11-year-old Rhys Jones in Liverpool. Instead of understanding, a tough policy approach was needed to deal with ‘anarchy in the UK’. Cameron’s ‘mini-manifesto’ on crime, *It’s Time to Fight Back*, is telling. The point of departure in Cameron’s introduction is – quite explicitly – violence as reported *in the news*: “Deaths by fists, knives and guns are becoming a regular feature of British news ... These murders must serve as a line in the sand – the point at which British politics and society declare that enough is enough.”¹⁶⁴ Cameron uses disputed official statistics to demonstrate that the media is indeed right. His analysis is close to that of Anna Pukas in *The Express* (discussed above), and the information provided by the media is employed as common sense evidence: “Serious crime is not a localized problem. As the deaths of Sophie Lancaster, Andrew Holland, Rhys Jones and Garry Newlove demonstrate, fatal violence is a risk that can strike anyone at any time. It is not confined to the turf wars of criminal gangs.”¹⁶⁵ The very fact that all of these victims are white is hardly a coincidence – he chose not to mention Michael Dosunmu or Jessie James. Overall, Cameron is responding to the media rather than real events; his mini-manifesto is a condensed mirror image of the media’s focus. He highlights exactly what the media highlights, and he excludes

exactly what the media excludes.

If the leaders of Britain’s major political parties are more willing to respond to media coverage of crime rather than crime itself, this can only be a cause for alarm. Indeed, Tony Blair’s response rejects any hint of structural explanations for violence:

I have come to the conclusion that we are in danger of completely misunderstanding the nature of what we are dealing with. In this instance, we need less Jenkins and more Callaghan. We tend to see this as a general social problem which, with the right social engineering, we could cure. More and more, I think this is not just wrong but misleading; I mean literally misleading us to the wrong answer.¹⁶⁶

By ‘less (Roy) Jenkins and more (Jim) Callaghan’ Blair clearly means a less “liberal view of personal lifestyle or action against prejudice” and a more “tough view of violence or wrong-doing that harmed others.”¹⁶⁷ On the same level, Cameron’s mini-manifesto proposes six measures through which his Government would tackle crime: 1) abolish the stop form; 2) extend stop and search; 3) permanent police visibility; 4) reform the police; 5) tougher action on anti-social behaviour; and 6) scrap the early release scheme. Again, inequality and relative poverty are conspicuously absent.

If the leaders of Britain’s major political parties are more willing to respond to media coverage of crime rather than crime itself, this can only be a cause for alarm.

The over-representation of young black people in the CJS is a problem of enormous severity, and the gap appears to be growing wider. There is also widespread concern that both victims and perpetrators of teen-on-teen violence are getting younger, and that this is a trend disproportionately affecting ethnic minority youth.¹⁶⁸ Media attention to these matters may prompt a more decisive policy response. However, the question is how the problem, and by extension the solution, is analysed and formulated. Policies based on the assumption that black ‘culture’ is criminogenic, that black crime is qualitatively different from white crime, and that black communities are themselves to blame for their overrepresentation in the CJS are unlikely to be effective.

162 Mares (2001: 162)

163 Cameron (2007a)

164 Cameron (2007b: 1)

165 Ibid.: 2

166 Blair (2007)

167 Ibid.

168 Young et al. (2007); Hales et al. (2006: 109)

Appendix 1: Gun Crime and Racial Violence

Two topics of particular importance – gun crime and racist violence – have not been analysed in depth in the main text of this report, due to lack of reporting in the period under consideration. The only gun related incident covered in depth by the press in May and June was the accidental shooting of 12-year-old Kamilah Peniston by her brother in Manchester, and the only racially motivated incident which includes a discussion of the perpetrators was the stabbing of Marlon Moran in Liverpool. This made comparison difficult and these topics were subsequently deemed not substantially supported by data for an in-depth analysis. Nonetheless, it is important to touch on these subjects in the light of our discussion.

Gun Crime

The development of gun crime in Britain has certainly been postulated as the development of a sub-culture. Although a detailed analysis of racialized connotation of media discussions of this sub-culture are not possible due to lack of data, it is worth briefly examining whether gun crime can be considered a ‘cultural’ phenomenon. Gun crime in Britain is notoriously under-researched and poorly understood, and the most detailed in-depth research to date is Hales et al.’s ethnographic study of 80 convicted male Firearms Act offenders aged 18 to 30.¹⁶⁹

Hales et al.’s discussion on the concept of ‘gun culture’ is interesting. Although stopping short of dismissing the very term ‘gun culture’, they are highly critical of the exposition of gun crime as culture, a discourse which they consider simplifying this complex reality to the point of distortion. Although they state that guns do have a symbolic element to them, this is overshadowed by their instrumental use:

In the present research the possession of firearms for symbolic purposes was mentioned, but the picture is equivocal and overall it appears that instrumental motivations are far more significant in relation to illegal firearms, for example for protection or to facilitate crimes such as robbery.¹⁷⁰

This is an important insight, as symbols and their meaning are often considered a hallmark of ‘culture’.¹⁷¹ If the symbolism of guns is negligible, the use of ‘culture’ as an analytical concept in relation to gun crime is highly questionable. Indeed, Hales et al.’s findings are supported by Bennet and Holloway’s large-scale survey of 3135 offenders in England and Wales, who report that only 7% of respondents said they carried a gun to impress people, while 36% carried a gun for protection, and 21% for use on an offence.¹⁷²

If Hales et al. are critical of the perception of gun crime as a ‘culture’, they are even more dismissive of the idea that it is a ‘culture’ stemming from a corresponding ‘community’. Although black offenders were heavily over-represented in their sample (28 out of 80), the largest group of offenders was still white (36 out of 80).¹⁷³ As a result, considering gun crime as a primarily ‘black’ problem excludes a large part of the offending population from the discussion on gun crime, and thereby distorts the picture. As Hales et al. argue:

In the use of language such as ‘Black-on-Black gun crime’ by statutory agencies and the media, it could be argued that race has often been positioned as the most significant variable in explaining involvement in gun and other criminality. The evidence collected for this research suggests that such an analysis is significantly limited.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, Hales et al. state that the “interviews suggest that American ‘gangsta rap’ has a relatively insignificant profile”¹⁷⁵ when compared to other styles of music. This insight poses a serious challenge to the idea that ‘gangsta rap’ – often postulated as the manifestation of a violent ‘black culture’ in its purest form – is a driving force behind gun crime. Overall, then, Hales et al.’s study lends little support to the ‘cultural’ theory of gun crime. Furthermore, they reject race as a primary variable in gun-related offending.

¹⁷¹ See, for instance, the highly influential *The Interpretation of Cultures* by Clifford Geertz (1973).

¹⁷² Bennet and Holloway (2004b: 244)

¹⁷³ Hales et al. (2006: viii)

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: 102

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: 28

¹⁶⁹ Hales et al. (2006)

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 98

Racial Violence

The general paucity of reports relating to racial harassment and violence is notable in its own right. Indeed, the seriousness of race hate violence, and its marked presence as part of everyday life for many ethnic minorities, was in some cases undermined through reports such as of Asian boys abusing a white bus passenger¹⁷⁶ or discrimination of ginger haired people as equivalent to racial hatred.¹⁷⁷

If the logic of the ‘crime-as-culture’ narrative was consistently applied across all ethnic groups and identities, however, perpetrators of racial violence could arguably be operating according to a prescriptive ‘culture’. In spite of media reports suggesting the contrary, perpetrators of racial violence primarily constitute one ethnic group – white British.¹⁷⁸ Accordingly, racism could thus be seen as a ‘cultural’ problem prevalent within a particular ‘community.’ Such an analysis is nowhere to be found. Of the few papers covering the stabbing of Marlon Moran, none implied that the murder was indicative of a racist white ‘culture’ on the Liverpool estate on which he lived. Similarly, there was no suggestion that the murder

176 ‘2 caged for racist violence’, *The Sun*, 13 June 2007

177 ‘Anti-ginger violence and vandalism force family to flee their home twice’, *The Times*, 2 June 2007

178 Isal (2005)

of Gian Chand Bajar disclosed a racist ‘culture’ in Gravesend, Kent. Indeed, *The Times* ‘de-ethnicizes’ racial violence by suggesting that ‘anti-ginger violence’ is as newsworthy as racial violence, and *The Sun* ‘re-ethnicizes’ – i.e. casts racial violence in new (minority) ethnic compositions – by giving ‘anti-white’ racism as prominent a place as violence against ethnic minorities. Advocating an understanding of race hate crimes as a problem of ‘white culture’ would be unwise and misleading for the same reason as advocating violent crime as a problem of ‘black culture’. But the absence of cultural explanations of racial violence simply underscores the way in which ethnic minorities are ‘culturized’ whereas white English people are not, or at the very least, that white English ‘culture’ does not contain pathological elements.

We have argued that the white working-class is often ethnicized in the media, especially in discussions on violent offending. We have also argued that this ethnisation is closely related to blackness, as white working-class criminality is often described in conjunction with black iconography, signifying that violent black ‘culture’ has corrupted the white working class. The de-ethnicisation of racial violence supports this argument, as it cannot be traced to black criminality.

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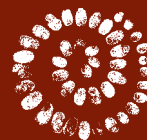
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