Challenging the Race and Gang Nexus.

Paper presented to the BTEG, BAME Young People and the Criminal Justice System (CJS) conference

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In Summary

• The gangs agenda is derived from and driven by police intelligence and practice.
• Gangs are groups whose behaviours are determined problematic by those in positions of power and disproportionately impact upon the powerless.
• Such groups are increasingly being regulated through the use of punitive, deterrent CJ strategies and punishments.
• Gang is a signposted, state-directed and politically derived signifier for societal threats which transcends the acute socio-economic problems endured within particular spaces (Smithson et al 2013).
Overview

• Establishing the ‘nexus’.
  – From the media to the grapevine
  – Findings from research
• But, there’s nothing new here!
  – From Otherisation to Criminalisation
• Deconstructing the nexus
  – Enter the gang-makers.
• Conclusions
  – Constructing the perennial Black folk devil.
‘the harder researchers look, the bigger the gang problem becomes.’ (Hobbs 1997)

• From the early 1990s, GM witnesses the emergence of what is consistently referred to as a ‘gang’ problem.
• Associated with the committal of serious violent offences (particularly gun crime).
• There has been a reduction in reported gang-related (gun) crime versus a growth in the number of identified ‘gangs’.*
• In 2004, the development of Xcalibre Task Force (XTF)
  – From Two: Gooch and Doddington to Sub-gangs: LSC, FMD, MSB, OTC and RC
  – Urban Street Gangs (USGs) recent forecast points towards the identification of approximately 100 Urban Street Gangs (USGs) Source: New Economy (2013).
  – Recent ACPO gang survey identified 40 gangs across Greater Manchester
Trends in firearm incidents

2004-2013 Source: GMP

- Total Firearms Discharges
- Gang Related Discharges

Year-specific data and trends are displayed graphically.
The Race and Gang Nexus

SHADOW Home Secretary Chris Grayling has said Manchester's streets are like a real-life version of violent cop show The Wire after claiming to have witnessed 'urban warfare' on the streets of Moss Side.

Grayling said that Britain now suffers from the same culture of drugs, gang and gun crime found in the US in a speech he was making in Westminster.

Tony Blair today called on Britain's black communities to speak out against gang culture, as he promised further new laws against knife and gun crime.

Tony Blair yesterday claimed the spate of knife and gun murders in London was not being caused by poverty, but a distinctive black culture.

What has happened is that the substantial section of the chavs that you wrote about have become black. The whites have become black. A particular sort of violent, destructive, nihilistic gangster culture has become the fashion and black and white, boy and girl operate in this language together, which is wholly false, which is this Jamaican patois that has intruded in England. This is why so many of us have this sense of literally a foreign country.
Research Aims
‘Chasing ghost Gangs’

1. assess the current situation in XXXXX in relation to the extent, and nature, of violent gangs activity.
2. provide an understanding of how involvement in violent gangs is changing and, drawing upon experience elsewhere and evidence of the factors leading to involvement in violent gang activity, to consider how this might change in the future
3. drawing upon experience and good practice elsewhere, making recommendations for how the ‘Partnership’ can tackle violent gangs activity, prevent involvement in violent gang activity and reduce progression into more serious types of violent gang activity.
## Emerging (and contradictory) views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Young People</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Control Agencies</th>
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| • “Hello Patrick, Rob, I didn’t know you lived around these ends!”
  • “We don’t . . .”
  • “What are you doing around here then?”
  • “We are doing some research on gangs . . .”
  • [laughter]
  • “Gangs! You won’t find any gangs around here. You’re wasting your time mate! There ain’t no gangs here [laughs]. Drugs yes, gangs no. That’s funny man, ‘gangs’ in [name of area], funny as . . . “
  • (Fieldwork conversation with a 24-year-old male, also an undergraduate student, resident in our research area) | • Critical of the focus on the research community.
  • Viewed our research study as a means through which ‘control agencies’ would secure funding
  • Acknowledged emergent problems of ‘substance use’ and extensive drug-dealing.
  • Absence of legitimate opportunities.
  • Inter-area rivalry (territoriality).
  • Wanting control of gang-related funding as best placed to tackle community based problems.
  • VCS orgs making applications for gang-related funding and gang prevention work. | • Violent Gangs Board
  • Multi-agency arrangements to manage perceived problems
  • Gang database (pictures, spreadsheets, hierarchical structures).
  • 90+ ‘gang’ members currently held on the database.
  • Firm belief in the existence of gangs within the area.
  • Drug dealing – nondetectable crime. “Unfortunately the police don’t put their resources into [tackling] drugs, they put them into guns and gangs” [Police Officer 3] |
Research
‘Profiling Gangs’ (EGYV)

GMP
(XTF)*
n = 210

YOS*
Gangs=14
SYV=36

GMPT*
Gangs=137
SYV=303
XTF ‘gang’ cases

• Of the 210 cases, 109 (58%) fulfilled the criteria to be included within the gangs cohort.

• Not all individuals on the XTF datalist were gang members!
  – no clear markers to elucidate who is an active gang member, a ‘gang-associate’, ‘at risk’ of gang-violence or no longer gang-involved.

• Thirty-nine individuals (21%) had laid ‘dormant’ on the police dataset (not under supervision nor convicted of an offence within the past three years).

• As above, 40 individuals (21%) had never had their details recorded on any CJ case management system.
  – Either, currently being processed through the CJS
  – Old cases lost in transition to the current CJ CM system (1997)
  – Individuals who have never been convicted of an offence.

• Finally, further police analysis of the gang cohort suggest there are 51 active gang members (revisit)

• Essentially an ‘intelligence driven’ process of gang identification ‘once a gang member, always a gang member...’
Profiling ‘Gangs’
Comparison with serious youth violence (SYV) cohort

• There were a number of significant findings to emerge from the original problem profile which were then followed up in the second profile.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GANGS</th>
<th>SYV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of young women (involvement)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Proportionate number within ‘central’ SRF area</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>*Proportionate number committing serious offence / high ‘risk of harm’.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>*Proportionate number of BAME individuals</td>
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Over-representation?

The proportion of young people flagged as gang-involved or SYV by race and ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYV (334)</th>
<th>BAME</th>
<th>White</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Police 'Gang' (172)</th>
<th>BAME</th>
<th>White</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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</table>
A profile of problems

**NORTH**
- Thinking and Behaviour (94%)
- Alcohol (65%)
- Lifestyle (61%)
- Attitudes (58%)
- Relationships (53%)

**GANGS**
- Thinking and Behaviour (98%)
- Lifestyle (95%)
- Attitudes (77%)
- Finance (64%)
- Accommodation and ETE (49%)

**CENTRAL**
- Thinking and Behaviour (95%)
- Lifestyle (71%)
- Alcohol (66%)
- Attitudes (53%)
- Finance (37%)

**NEW EAST MANCHESTER**
- Thinking and Behaviour (94%)
- Alcohol (79%)
- Lifestyle (75%)
- Attitudes (66%)
- Relationships (60%)

**WYTHENSHAWE**
- Thinking and Behaviour (88%)
- Alcohol (61%)
- Lifestyle (59%)
- Attitudes (53%)
- Relationships (43%)
Becoming the ‘other’
Deconstructing the ‘race and gang nexus’.

‘through time and over space the dominant themes in racializing discourses fluctuate and contradict each other. The precise nature of ‘Blackness’ that is connoted evolves. In Britain, at a crude level, the succession of racist images of (gender-specific) Afro-Caribbean criminality have followed from the pimp of the 1950s, to the Black power activist of the 1960s, to the mugger of the 1970s, to the rioter of the 1980s and, quite possibly, to the ultimate folk devil, the underworld ‘Yardie’ of the 1990s’.

(Keith 1993:245)
Becoming the ‘other’
The (re)emergence of ‘gang-makers’, risk talk and gang-speak.

Criminologist

The Black ‘Gang’

Control Agencies

VCS Organisations
Gang-makers

• **Criminologists**
  – An uncritical approach derived unproblematically from the ‘database’ or ‘gangs-lists’ of control agencies.
  – Adept in the art of *evidence-based, decision-making* (CSJ).
  – Attributes gang-involvement to a pathological Black culture (they are different to us).
  – The gang phenomenon has become conflated with ‘Yardie drug gangs, with ‘riots’, ‘on road’ cultures, etc.

• **Control Agencies**
  – Driven by a paradigm where ‘resources follow risk’.
  – The equation of personal, social and socio-economic ‘needs’ with ‘risk’.
  – Conflation of perpetration of ‘behaviours’ with gang involvement (drug dealing, SYV, negative attitudes to ‘gangs’).
  – “*There are serious crimes and then there are crimes that are taken seriously.*”
– Institutional racism?

• Voluntary and Charitable Sector (VCS)
  – The co-option of VCS groups in the identification and ‘management’ of young Black men ‘at risk’ or ‘on the periphery’.
  – Contribution to the emergence of ‘punishing partnerships’.
  – Perpetuates the very existence of ‘gangs’ within our communities
  – Essential funding only available through the gangs industry.*
In conclusion

Contemporary explanations for the onset and prevalence of the ‘gang’ are useless when set outside of the social context, reality and continuity of racism and institutional racism. This is a call for a re-engagement with structural explanations that centralise racialisation as a more appropriate lens through which to ‘make sense’ of the contemporary (hyper) criminalisation of young Black people and the race-gang nexus.
Postscript

‘You already know enough. So do I. It is not knowledge that we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions.’

[Lindqvist 1992]

• The continuity of CJS Disproportionality
• From ‘gangs’ to Urban Street Groups (USGs) to Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) to.....
• Joint Enterprise
• NDNAD
• Youth Justice and First time Entrants (FTEs)
The End