

**'Knife Crime'; Policing the Crisis in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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Declaration of Authorship:

I.....(Elaine Williams) hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

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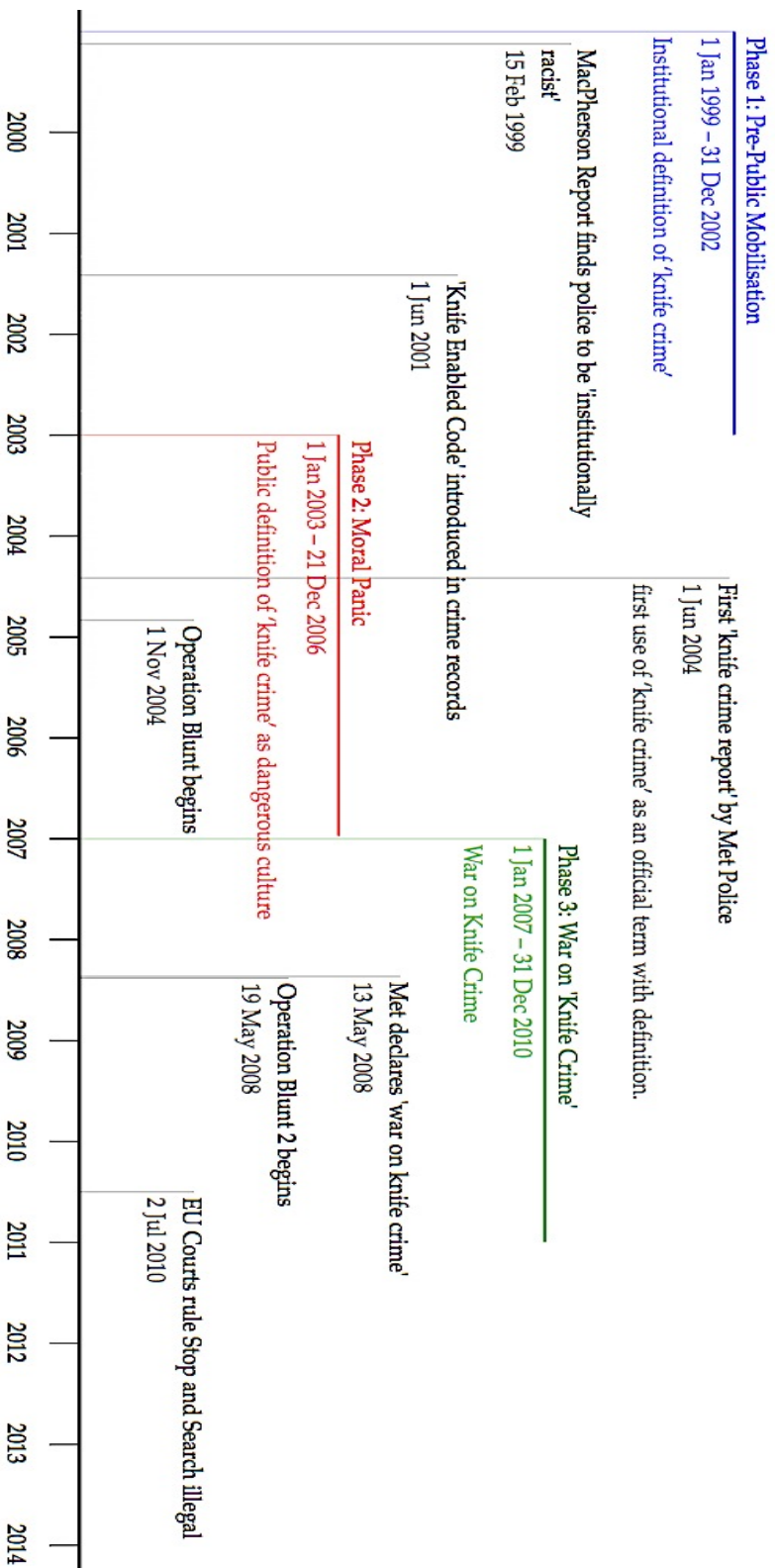
Finally, I would like to say special thanks to Jason, for making me laugh even in the hardest times. Your belief in me has always made anything seem possible. Thank you.

## **Abstract:**

The label 'knife crime' emerged as a new category of crime in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century and is used widely in contemporary crime discourse. Functioning as both noun and adjective, the phrase refers to singular or collective knife related acts and offences, as well as a perceived knife culture or an expression of criminality. Whilst its meaning is broad its application is narrow, concerned predominantly with the actions of a particular demographic; young, Black, inner-city males. Its matter-of-fact reference infers a common sense meaning but 'knife crime' is one of the most used and least understood crime labels in popular parlance. Applying a radical criminological understanding of deviance labelling as a specific response to crime, this project asks: How can the label 'knife crime' be understood as a particular societal reaction to crime? And to what extent can the response to 'knife crime' be considered a continuation of *Policing the Crisis* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? This project explores how political contradictions, policing and youth policy reforms, and the morphing shapes of 'new racism' were formative in the making of the label. The document and archive analysis of this research is combined with empirical inquiry, including original data from interviews with twenty youth justice practitioners and ten focus groups with young people in London. Along with content and discourse analysis of 'knife crime tweets' on Twitter, the methods of this project reveal crucial realities currently obscured by the dominance of the label and its practices.

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### **Timeline of 'knife Crime' History**

In this thesis it is argued that the emergence of 'knife crime' can be understood as taking place over three distinct phases identified through my research. I have developed the timeline above as a visual aid to illustrate this argument, providing a useful reference point throughout the project.

The declaration by the Metropolitan Police of a 'war on knife crime' in 2008 signals a peak moment in national concern and institutional response to 'knife crime'. However, as illustrated on the timeline above this is not the starting point of my investigation. Instead it is argued here that this moment can only be understood as the accumulative outcome of a mobilisation and crime-labelling project that began nearly a decade earlier.

Actions and interactions taking place even before the phrase 'knife crime' was in public use began to define the problem as early as 2001. Identified on the timeline as the 'pre-public mobilisation', it will be argued in this thesis that changes in policing and crime-recording codes reflected broader shifts in criminal justice and began a process of deviancy amplification that would later become recognised as 'knife crime'.

Data collected through policing changes in the pre-public mobilisation phase is then used to justify and incite moral panic as public use of the phrase 'knife crime' emerges from 2003 onwards. This second phase

identified on the timeline includes the first official definition of 'knife crime' provided by the police in 2004 and the launch of Operation Blunt, the first 'knife crime' focused pro-active policing initiative that locates the problem geographically and ethnically by targeting what they believe are 'knife crime hot spots'.

Chapters three, four and five of this thesis are structured to reflect the epochs defined on the timeline and provide detailed chronological accounts of the interactions that characterise each phase of the response. It is hoped that this timeline, as a visualisation of significant actions and temporal phases, enables the reader to conceptualise the following events not only as significant to each moment, but also within the context of the response in its entirety.



## **Chapter One.**

**How we Make Sense of 'Knife Crime';**

**A Review of Existing Approaches.**

## **Introduction**

The use of the label 'knife crime' as a crime category in England and Wales has a relatively recent history. Originally a descriptor of particular forms of violence in Scotland in the 1990's, the term was first publicly used in the early 2000's to refer to a perceived new crime phenomenon emerging in England and Wales. Since then its authority of reference has grown in such magnitude that this permutation of the label has been obscured. It has become such a matter-of-fact term in contemporary use that it functions as both a collective noun for knife related offences and an adjective denoting a criminal culture. News headlines commonly reference 'knife crime thugs', 'knife crime teens' or 'knife crime gangs' without justification of the label's meaning or the criteria of its attachment. Government institutions, police, the justice system, and scholars, all consistently acknowledge difficulty in establishing a workable, evidence based definition of 'knife crime' (Silvestri et al. 2009, Gilga 2008, Eades et al. 2007, Squires et al. 2008) and yet the phrase continues to be used with great influence and authority.

Arguably, the impact of the label was most strongly felt in the summer of 2008 when national concern over 'knife crime' triggered an extensive authoritarian policing response concentrated in the streets of London. The government claimed 'knife crime' was their number one priority - more urgent than terrorism, only a year after London's transport attacks. London's Metropolitan (Met) police declared 'war on knife crime', a war that would be fought primarily through controversial stop and search

operations facilitated by the extension of policing powers. At the time the Met police admitted their tactics were ‘in your face policing’ (Edwards, Farmer and Allen 2008), but claimed it was necessary in order to put an end to the ‘knife crime epidemic’.

In addition to the authoritarian policing response to ‘knife crime’, the label also became mobilised through high priority intervention schemes and prevention projects targeting young people from 2009 onwards. It was in the capacity of a practitioner within this work that I first became aware of the practical challenges presented by the label. Working for a south London based youth organisation throughout this period I witnessed ‘knife crime’ become a powerful organising feature for contractual youth provision and funded project work at this time, but the narrowing focus and targeting of knives presented increasing contradictions in practice.

The successful funding bids I submitted were the ones that described tailored projects that focused on educating young people on the dangerous consequences of carrying and using knives. However, I increasingly found that effective violence reduction projects in practice would actually speak very little about knives. Reprimanding highly vulnerable children about why they shouldn’t carry knives was guaranteed to demonstrate that you had no understanding of the realities of their everyday lives. Instead, practical projects acknowledged that the knives themselves represented a marginal component of a much broader normalisation of violence within

particular social conditions. I was concerned by what was being concealed in the continuation of work that was complicit in the reproduction of a contradictory label. It was this dilemma that became the inspiration for this research; a project that would challenge the authority of the term 'knife crime' and the response to interpersonal violence it has come to define.

As the title of this thesis suggests, the academic position outlined in this chapter was heavily influenced by the work of Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts in their seminal text, *'Policing the Crisis; 'Mugging', the State and Law and Order'* (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts 1978). Early research into the formative events of 'knife crime's emergence seemed to mirror that of 'mugging' in the 1970's with alarming similarity. It was this discovery that would inspire the framework of analysis deployed in this project and would lead to the unique findings and conclusions presented herewith.

It is emphatically stated from the start that the intention of this project is not to deny or excuse extreme violence between young people; the presence of knives unquestionably escalates the potential for harm during interpersonal violence with devastating and tragic consequences. To question the response to criminality is not to condone the crime, but to acknowledge that individuals exist within larger interacting forces that must also be understood. As Hall et al. (1978) describe; *'to blame the*

*actions of individuals within a given historical structure, without taking that structure itself into account, is an easy and familiar way of exercising the moral conscience without bearing any of its costs'* (Hall et al. 1978:183). This project depicts the making of 'knife crime' as a particular set of interactions within the current political conjuncture, in order to bare the true costs of its morality.

This chapter considers various contributions to the understanding of 'knife crime' through existing literature and the perspectives of contrasting criminological traditions. This review highlights the current boundaries in knowledge of the phenomenon and the absence of particular approaches in existing 'knife crime' research. By defining the theoretical position of the thesis this chapter identifies how this project provides a unique contribution to the field at a time of renewed 'knife crime' prominence. To begin with, the problem with defining 'knife crime' is introduced through scrutiny of existing positivist approaches and the subjectivity in articulation of knife related data.

### **The Persistence of Positivism; 'Knife Crime' and Risk.**

The Positivist orthodoxy in criminology is the continued legacy of 19th Century natural sciences that devoted itself to the search of 'cause-effect' relations in crime. Beginning with the work of Lombroso (1876) and the measurement of skull shape as a predictor of criminality, the identification

of biological or cultural antecedents is still a priority in many fields of criminological research. It is a well established and recognised preoccupation in the field of juvenile anti-social behaviour and violence for example, where research is focused on identifying causes, establishing methods of prevention, and evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions (Silvestri, Oldfield, Squires and Grimshaw 2009, Muncie 2009, WHO 2010).

This identification of causation is often understood as a measurement of 'risk factors' present in a young person's life that increase the potential of violent behaviours; *'Findings suggest that there are problem areas, known as 'risk factors', which can predict the likelihood of future violent criminal behaviour among young people'* (Silvestri et al. 2009:15). The influences identified as correlating with knife related offences can be subcategorised into individual, relationship, community or societal factors (WHO 2010) in order to coordinate and target preventative responses to specific aspects of a young person's life.

The earliest research project to adopt this approach with particular reference to 'knife crime' was published in 2004 and became an influential reference for others that followed. Written by Lemos and Crane (2004) with the title *'Fear and Fashion'*, the report used hospital admission data, MORI survey results and anecdotal evidence from youth practitioners to reach several conclusions about risk factors for knife offences:

Young people carry knives in school, youth clubs and on the street. Boys are more likely to carry knives than girls, though there is also a problem amongst girls. Young people who have been excluded from school are the most likely to carry, and use, knives and other weapons, as well as commit other offences. Fear is the most common reason given by young people themselves, by youth workers and teachers for carrying knives. Peer influences, group identity and fashion also seem to play a part in encouraging young people to carry knives (Lemos and Crane 2004:27).

Risk factors of gender, school exclusion, fear of violence and peer pressure were formative in the construction of preventative projects with young people following this publication (Kinsella 2011). Later studies concurred that the fear of violence coupled with peer assimilation were the most prominent risk factors for carrying or using knives (Gilga 2008, WHO 2010, Silvestri et al. 2009, Kinsella 2011). This was described by a psychological contribution to the field as a 'youth knife culture' in which *'young people carry knives because they want to protect themselves, or because they want to be respected by peers'* (Gilga 2008:20). The World Health Organisation (WHO) identified the same risks as 'fear of violence in the community' and 'associating with peers who are violent' (WHO 2010:42). Another common risk measurement for 'knife crime' is affiliation with 'gangs', seen as a risk factor for knife carrying and group violence (Kinsella 2011, Silvestri et al. 2009, Lemos and Crane 2004).

In the identification of risk factors of knife offending, Silvestri et al. (2009) state that statistically Black and minority ethnic young people have a higher likelihood of involvement in 'knife crime'. However, it is also

cautioned that when the ethnic dimension of offending is considered in isolation it leads to dangerously misleading simplifications, given that *'race, social exclusion and community deprivation are correlated and compound each other'* (Silvestri et al. 2009:69). Similarly Squires (2011) asserts that racial discrimination combined with inequality produces a *'toxic mix of deprivation and social exclusion'* (Squires 2011:161) contributing to an overrepresentation of young Black people as both victims and perpetrators of interpersonal violence.

Whilst individual and relationship risk factors such as gender, ethnicity and the family context are frequently identified, environmental or societal influences are less common in 'knife crime' literature. Although it is acknowledged that there are strong correlates between social and economic inequality and violence amongst young people (WHO 2010), there is *'difficulty in demonstrating that a deprived neighbourhood 'causes' those living in it to commit crime; it is extremely difficult to isolate the various elements that combined together constitute environmental facilitators to offending'* (Silvestri et al. 2009:27). Thus the strong correlation between social and economic deprivation, and particularly high rates of unemployment, is a risk factor rarely targeted for intervention and mostly acknowledged only by critical researchers in the field (Silvestri et al. 2009, Eades et al. 2007, Squires 2011).



There are also influences in a young person's life that are widely considered by positivist criminologists to decrease the likelihood of violence and offending behaviours, these are referred to as 'protective factors':

Protective factors include positive relationship with parents, high academic achievement, positive friendships with non-delinquent peers, extracurricular school activities, belonging to smaller (in terms of numbers of children) families, good problem solving skills and empathetic skills (Silvestri et al. 2009:17).

Many young people who are exposed to a variety of risk factors do not manifest violent or criminal behaviours. It is thought that these young people have access to protective factors that reduce or negate the impact of their risks, and this is referred to within the field of research as 'resilience' (Ibid.).

Research that seeks to identify protective factors that provide a resilience specifically to 'knife crime' have offered several suggestions. '*Deterring [young people] from carrying knives requires decreasing fear of crime, and giving them alternative strategies to build self-esteem...*' (Gilga 2008:20). Quantifying and reducing 'the fear of crime' is an abstract factor to attempt to influence. But it is suggested that news media have increased the fear of crime thus contributing to the risks for young people:

[T]he way crime is covered by the media could be a source of disinformation and in consequence, create excessive fear of 'knife crime'... it is desirable that media presentation of news be more factual and less sensationalist (Gilga 2008:21).

This sentiment was reiterated by other researchers who advised that the *'possible role of media amplification in reinforcing a sense of fear seems an area worth exploring, especially in relation to the carrying of knives'* (Silvestri et al. 2009:68)

Other recommendations include a wide spread call for targeted and earlier intervention. This includes education in schools about the dangers of knife carrying (Kinsella 2011, Lemos and Crane 2004). The 'Tackling Knife Crime Together' review states *'knife crime is now such a big issue, embedded in their culture... if all schools had some kind of knife crime programme, just as they all have sexual health and drug awareness programmes, this would help overcome the problem'* (Kinsella 2011:23). Other recommendations include targeted programmes for those calculated to be 'at risk' of knife offences (Kinsella 2011:28), 'gang reduction projects' (Lemos and Crane 2004:23) and public awareness advertising campaigns to demonstrate the health and legal implications of knife carrying (Lemos and Crane 2004:28)

However, there are some concerning contradictions between risk factors and prevention strategies that demonstrate the limitations of a positivist approach. Increasing the visibility of 'knife crime' through school assemblies and billboard posters would also increase the fear of 'knife crime'; an identified risk factor for violence. It is also problematic that the recommended 'widening of the net' to facilitate early intervention would bring more young people in contact with the criminal justice system;

encounters that are themselves identified as risk factors for violence in a young person's life (Silvestri et al. 2009:69).

In spite of these dilemmas the pursuit of proactive prevention remains the compelling attribute of positivism that continues to hold high regard in mainstream criminology. Its on-going commitment to answering the 'why' questions satisfies the urgent demand for answers that concern over 'knife crime' incites. But this relentless endeavour has been accused by some in the discipline of fundamentally restricting the criminological imagination for over a century (Brown 2005) and its influence through 'knife crime' has been severely limiting.

Whilst academic literature draws attention to the lack of reliable data and the harm of sensationalist constructions of 'knife crime' in the media (Gilga 2008), the commitment to identifying risk and protective factors in 'knife crime' research preserves the validity of the label and its assumed parameters for preventative action. Common phrases such as 'becoming involved in knife crime' or 'a culture of knife crime' (Lemos 2009:4) reinforce an idea of 'knife crime' as a distinct form of criminality; an autonomous 'new thing' that exists outside of the actions of young people and has influence on them. Through this uncritical approach positivist criminology reproduces particular propositions concerning 'knife crime' as if they are universal criminological 'truths'. This is especially significant

when we consider the subjective interpretation of crime data that has historically defined the concept.

### **Misrepresentation and Over-representation; The Problem With 'Knife Crime'**

#### **Data**

The positivist tradition in criminology is widely criticised for its *'failure to look beyond the official statistics of recorded crime or beyond legal definitions of crime'* (Muncie 2009:114). In the case of 'knife crime' this has resulted in the transferal of crime data that includes broad definitions and contexts of knife enabled crime to contribute to a response that is directed at a specific demographic or group of interest. The details of this misrepresentation will be discussed here along with how existing approaches have interpreted overrepresentation of particular groups within 'knife crime' statistics.

Available data of violent crime is recognised as particularly susceptible to changes in police recoding practices (Brown 2005). In the case of 'knife crime', data related to offences committed with knives only began to be reported by the Met police from 2003 onwards, and nationally from 2007 (Squires, Silvestri, Grimshaw and Solomon 2008). This lack of statistical accuracy greatly limited the ability of researchers to evaluate the scale of the perceived problem as the media panic unfolded (Squires et al. 2008).

However, crime data that was available provided no justification for the public's 'unprecedented concern' (Squires 2009:127) in 2007.

Homicide rates have steadily increased year on year since the 1950's, but within these figures the method of killing with a sharp instrument remained at a relatively constant proportion of all homicides over the decade in which the panic over 'knife crime' emerged (Eades et al. 2007). Looking at offensive knife use as a percentage of all violent offences from 1997 to 2007 it remained between 5% and 8% throughout the first alleged 'knife crime epidemic' (Eades et al. 2007:18). Figures that extend to cover the most recent concern over 'knife crime' reveal the same representation; knife use in offences from 2007 to 2017 also remained between 5% and 8% of all violent offences (Allen and Audickas 2018). Referencing rising knife homicide and violent crime figures in isolation from the proportional representation of the total is one way in which 'knife crime' data is commonly misrepresented.

Data collected and reported on knife related offences by police also presents difficulties in interpretation. Legally the knife in 'knife crime' is defined as 'any article which has a blade or is sharply pointed' (Allen and Audickas 2018:5). Along with knives, recorded offences in 'knife crime' data include possession or use of bottles, glass, screwdrivers, scissors or sharp sticks. There is also no distinction between age or context of the offences recorded as knife enabled (Allen and Audickas 2018), leading to the

presentation of 'knife crime' data that includes confounding proportions of domestic violence and adult violence in the home, along with instances of ill mental health, suicide threats/attempts, homeless violence, prison violence, bar brawls and unwitting possession offences of small penknives or screwdrivers that were thought to be legal by the carrier (Eades et al. 2007).

On average two women are killed by a partner or former partner every week in England and Wales (ONS 2016), and statistically children are far more likely to be killed by a parent than another young person (Silvestri et al. 2009). But despite adult violence in the home (where knives and sharp instruments are readily available) producing a large amount of 'knife crime' data, it is not separated statistically in police records (Allen and Audickas 2018), and is not considered a dominant context for positivist 'knife crime' research.

The 2018 House of Commons briefing paper on 'Knife Crime in England and Wales' (Ibid.) makes clear from the opening paragraph that crime with sharp instruments is a national concern 'especially as it impacts particularly upon young people' (Allen and Audickas 2018:5). But seven pages of adult inclusive police knife data follow this statement of a youth focus, before a brief and limited presentation of crime survey data with children (Allen and Audickas 2018:6-12). In the few places where age analysis is possible this discrepancy of youth centred concern is further

exemplified. The records of disposals given for possession of a knife or offensive weapon reveal the vast majority of offenders are aged over 18 (79%), and that under-18s represent a minority of 16.3% of admissions to hospital for assault by sharp object. The use of adult knife offence data from broad contexts to present 'knife crime' as a particular youth phenomenon has become common in official statistics and is reflected in the parameters of positivist research.

Due to the breadth and lack of specificity in police data some researchers look to MORI youth surveys (Gilga 2008) and hospital admission data of knife injuries (Maxwell et al. 2007, Gilga 2008) to track changes in the rate of knife injury and provide age specific data. But the reliability of these sources have also been challenged, given that MORI significantly rephrased questions year by year, responding to growing attention to youth knife carrying (Eades et al. 2007) and that medical staff were under increasing pressure to record knife injuries thus exaggerating the figures as they gradually conformed to government guidelines (Maxwell et al. 2007, Morris 2009, Finch 2019).

As with hospital records, the increased attention and proactive policing responses towards the phenomenon impacts on the data that is then used to measure the problem. The police themselves have acknowledged that increases in stop and search can inflate official knife offence figures (Squires et al. 2008:20) and the toughening and extension of possession

laws targeting knife carrying increases the likelihood of knife offences being committed (Eades et al. 2007). This is particularly significant when considering the impact of racial disproportionality in stop and search and targeted policing (Tiratelli, Quinton and Bradford 2018, McCandless et al. 2016) on a statistical contribution to knife crime data that informs the calculation of risk in positivist approaches.

It has long been recognised that as consequence of ‘over-policing’ and the imbalance of scrutiny of particular crimes the assumption of data as ‘fact’ reproduces the idea that crime is disproportionately committed by young, Black, urban, males (Bowling and Phillips 2002). By assuming the category of ‘knife crime’ as fact, despite the lack of accurate data in the context the label describes, positivist approaches contribute to the construction of the phenomenon as a criminality located amongst young, Black, inner-city males. There are a few notable exceptions in the existing field of ‘knife crime’ research that push against the dominance of positivism. Critical analysis of these alternative understandings will lead to a discussion of the theoretical positioning of this thesis.

### **Alternative Approaches; Challenging ‘Knife Crime’ as Pathology**

Contextualising interpersonal violence between young people in order to ‘make sense’ of ‘knife crime’ could be seen as one critical approach, but existing research that attempts this is also fundamentally limited. In the



texts *'Why Carry a Weapon?'* (Marfleet 2008), and *'The Reality Behind the 'Knife Crime' Debate'* (Wood 2010) the authors present an understanding of the realities represented by the label by focusing on explaining and contextualising the deviant acts of young people in their everyday lives. Whilst this resists the pathologising impulse of positivism, the youth focused approach remains within the parameters of the phenomenon defined by the label. Within this, racial disproportionately in knife data is explained through the over-representation of Black children in deprived areas (Marfleet 2008, Wood 2010), without confronting the racialisation of criminality within 'knife crime' itself and the broader social functions of these racisms.

Centring exclusion and marginalisation in the understanding of 'knife crime', an article with the title *'Teenagers Under the Knife: a Decivilising Process'* (Clement 2010) draws on the sociological work of Norbert Elias (1978) and Loic Wacquant (2004) to produce a critical response to the phenomenon. Pushing against the positivist isolation of individual and social factors in cause and effect relationships, Clement (2010) presents 'knife crime' as an inevitable outcome of the decivilising and inhumane conditions of neoliberal late capitalism:

Where Marginality, social exclusions or sectarianism emerges, the sense of empathy for the other and the mutual restraint on behaviour which are built by frequent social interaction are absent, This tendency should... be understood as a structural property of social systems where social polarization and inequality are present or deepening and not as a property of pathological individuals. In other words, antisocial behaviour is at its worst where functional

democratization is at its weakest (Rodger 2006: p.129, cited in Clement 2010:443)

Clement (2010) argues that apparent increases in the severity of interpersonal violence, such as in the case of 'knife crime', signal that inequality and its de-civilising effect have extended and worsened. Considering the realities of the contemporary conditions marginalised teenagers must survive in, Clement (2010) concludes that our incredulity and shock should not be that a number of young people commit knife offences, but that so many of them do not - despite the increasing brutality of their daily lives.

This contribution stands alone in its focus on structural antecedents as an intentional, designed outcome of neoliberal social and economic policy and its direct rebuttal of 'knife crime' as youth pathology. Building on this position this thesis gives greater attention to the specific historical events of a response to criminality that came to be understood as 'knife crime'. This crucial shift from contextualising the *acts* of knife violence, to analysing the *response* to violence understood as 'knife crime' reflects an approach taken by Squires (2009) in the article '*The Knife Crime 'Epidemic' and British Politics*'.

In this unique contribution to 'knife crime' research, Squires (2009) contextualises the response to 'knife crime' politically rather than through understanding the actions of young people. He describes how a complex

set of issues and reasoning have been concealed by the 'simple' message of rising youth violence promoted through the lurid reporting of what has come to known as 'the knife crime 'epidemic"' (Squires 2009:127). Unlike other commentators Squires (2009) draws attention to the timing of the emergence of 'knife crime' in relation to British politics, noting how this response *'coincided with a series of youth justice policy measures being rolled out by the government, and significantly influenced them'* (Ibid.).

Whilst Squires (2009) recognises that many of the new policies did involve some preventative and supportive measures, he also draws attention to the toughening of sentencing, populist hostility towards young people and robust policing; *'Above all, the police have mounted their specialist operations and deployed new search technologies. This is tough policing upfront, followed by public reassurance, and tougher sentences'* (Squires 2009: 151). Sentences for knife offences doubled, and the presumption in favour of custody for knife crimes strengthened during the rise of 'knife crime' panic (Squires 2009). Squires concludes; *'This is still 'policing the crisis', we have undoubtedly been here before'* (squires 2009,152).

Here Squires (2009) makes a significant connection that is fundamental in the approach of this thesis. In referencing the continuation of 'Policing the Crisis' he evokes Stuart Hall et al. (1978) and their seminal book on the response to 'mugging' in the 1970s. Squires (2009) propositions that 'knife crime' represents a pattern of response to crime that has been documented

before. The following detailed review of *Policing the Crisis* (1978) and its findings will provide the foundation of a comparison between ‘mugging’ in the 1970s and ‘knife crime’ in the 2000s that underpins this research and justifies the radical positioning of this contribution.

### **Revisiting Policing the Crisis**

In *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978) the authors depict and analyse the emergence of ‘mugging’ as a moral panic in the 1970s and provide an in-depth explanation of the political and social function of this process. The task of dismantling the crisis of ‘mugging’ became urgent after the unprecedented and extreme sentences of ten and twenty years were given to three boys of mixed ethnic background for a violent robbery in Handsworth, Birmingham.

It was clear to Hall et al. (1978) that the severe sentences in the ‘Handsworth mugging’ were not a response to the individual actions of these particular three boys, but rather to what ‘mugging’ had come to mean. It was:

[A] sentence intended to have a social as well as a punitive impact; it was, also, the fears and anxieties which the sentence aimed at allaying. It was the *massive* press coverage, the reactions of local people, experts and commentators, the prophecies of doom which accompanied it, the mobilisation of the police against certain sectors of the population in the ‘mugging’ areas. *All this* was the ‘Handsworth mugging’ (Hall et al. 1978:viii)

From this starting point Hall *et al.* (1978) argue that ‘mugging’ should no longer be seen as a fact but rather as a relation – ‘the relation between crime and the reaction to crime’ (Ibid.).

Producing a chronological break down of the emergence and use of the term ‘mugging’ in Britain, their account demonstrates the formative role of policing and reporting in the amplification of particular crimes and the creation of new phenomena such as ‘mugging’. Contrary to the common sense ideas of how ‘mugging’ arose, the process can be seen to occur in two distinct stages. The first is a period of preparation for ‘the war on mugging’, this is a pre-public phase of intense police mobilisation towards particular people in targeted areas ‘– *above all, groups of black youths*’ (Hall et al. 1978:43). It is this phase of increasingly intensive police reaction based on an institutional definition of ‘mugging’ that then produces the second and public stage; ‘*cases in court, editorials in the papers, official Home Office enquiries about ‘mugging’, a publicly engaged campaign, open warfare*’ (Ibid.).

Since the first stage predates the public panic it is largely unnoticed, it is also obscured from public view as it mostly takes place within the ‘closed institutional world of the police’ (Ibid.). Once these two stages have been identified it is evident that in order to understand how and why ‘mugging’ emerged it is not just the second stage that requires attention, but also the pre-history of police reaction in the first stage of its emergence (Ibid.). For

what reason and purpose did the police begin this prior institutional mobilisation? Hall et al. (1978) argue that it is in this question that the origins of the panic lie buried.

With reference to Stanley Cohen's (1972) *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Hall et al. (1978) unravel the construction of mugging within the context of maintaining social order through moral consensus and public consent, despite the paradoxical inequality of social classes. The state's powerful innovation of the mugger as folk devil takes place at a crucial historic moment at which a national crisis in hegemony occurs.

Hegemony, or 'cultural hegemony' is a political theory developed by Gramsci (1926) that refers to the way in which the contradictions of class inequality are maintained through a dominant culture that presents the interests of the powerful as inevitable social norms. By 'winning them over' hegemony exerts control over citizens without the need for direct force (Gramsci 1926). However, the fragility of this coercion is prone to crisis and the management of hegemony requires constant adjustment.

Developing a Marxist and Gramscian analysis of hegemonic crisis in the 1960s, Hall et al. (1978) identify a major structural shift in the mechanisms of state intervention; 'the shift from a 'consensual' to a more 'coercive' management of the class struggle by the capitalist state' (Ibid.). The political decision made in the 1960s to commit Britain to prosperity

through corporate neoliberal capitalism would guarantee the economic demise of the working class. Increasing the rate of exploitation and extending the existing inequality would threaten the stability of class relations. To manage this challenge to hegemony the state had two main strategies. The first was to subsume 'everyone into the 'higher' ideological unity of the national interest' (Hall et al. 1978: 236). This would combine the interests of labour and capital together as the interests of the state, making a social contract for 'the national good', thus the corporate strategy could be seen as in the interests of everyone (Ibid.).

The second strategy involved the mobilisation of law and order into the spheres of civil society as the state of 'exception'; a transition 'from the 'moment of consent' through to the 'moment of force' (Hall et al. 1978:239). The exceptional form of state intervention is the open recruitment of the law in the defence of class interests for the benefit of the bourgeoisie class. But this involves a great deal of risk for hegemony. By '*making the "invisible" inequality of the real relationship between workers and capitalists manifestly apparent... it risks exposing the central ideological mystification of the system, on which the consent of the masses to the reign of capital rests*' (Hall et al. 1978:303). Hall et al. (1978) argue that it is only by thinking within this particular historical moment that we can begin to understand the emergence of 'mugging' as a particular interaction between crime and control.

When the ‘mugging’ panic first makes its appearance in 1972 it simultaneously deals with the rupture of contradictions on several fronts. The ‘common sense’ response expressed through moral outrage contributes to social management through consensus across classes. *‘complex ideologies of crime provide the basis, in certain moments, for cross-class alliances in support of ‘authority’*” (Hall et al. 1978:177). This response in turn provides public consent to the increasingly violent state intervention needed to enforce social order as the political-economic changes threaten to expose the exceptional state.

It is the argument of *Policing the Crisis* (1978) that the crucial aspect of the response that enables this social function to be performed through ‘mugging’ is that it came to be ‘unambiguously assigned as a black crime’ (Hall et al. 1978: 328). The construction of ‘mugging’ as a ‘Black crime’ happens through the amplification of incidents that fit this criteria and through targeted police mobilisation that geographically and ethnically locates the crime as ‘peculiar to black youth in the inner-city ‘ghettos’” (Hall et al. 1978:329). Once assigned as a ‘Black crime’ the police maintain consent whilst using increasingly authoritative policing to preserve the class relations amid crisis.

This constructionist approach implemented by Hall *et al.* (1978) is crucially missing from our current understanding of ‘knife crime’ and its political function as symbol of ‘Black criminality’. With the exception of Squires



(2009) existing literature on 'knife crime' all respond to the public stage of the phenomenon when the construction of the label has already taken place and pay little attention to the mobilisation that preceded the use of the phrase. When Eades et al. (2007) identify the non-existence of compiled 'knife crime' data prior to 2003 this is seen as an obstruction to quantifying the extent of the problem, rather than evidence of the temporality and subjectivity of the category itself.

The case of 'mugging' demonstrated that the targeting of 'Black crime' provides an opportunity to deal with the paradoxes of capitalism;

[R]ace has come to provide objective correlative of crisis – the arena in which complex fears, tensions and anxieties, generated by the impact of the totality of the crisis as a whole on the whole society, can be most conveniently and explicitly projected and, as the euphemistic phrase runs, 'worked through' (Hall et al. 1978:333).

However, the syntax of British racism is complex and ever changing (Gilroy 1987, Solomos and Back 1996), producing symbolic representations of difference that evade scrutiny through everyday use and sensibility. The similarities between the rise of racially defined moral panic in 'mugging' in the 1970s and 'knife crime in the 2000's, along with the political scrutiny provided by Squires (2009), suggests there is much to be learnt from an investigation of the pre-public mobilisation towards knives and the interaction of these events with the political conjuncture of their enactment.

### **Radical Criminology; the Sociology of Deviance**

When Hall challenged the existence of 'mugging' as a category of crime in the late 1970s it was through the culmination of sociological approaches developed by the radical criminologists during this period. This influential new school of thought shook the positivist foundation of orthodox criminology. It became much more concerned with the processes of criminalisation itself than those who had been assigned deviant status. Terms such as 'moral panic' (Young 1971, Cohen 1972) 'deviancy amplification' (Wilkins 1964) and 'Labelling' (Becker 1963) had emerged within the critique of the sociology of deviance, drawing attention to the construction of crime and its political interests.

Radical criminologists working in the 1960's, through to the 1980's, drew attention to the fact that only once a category of criminality is constructed does it then become a subject of interest for positivist study (Becker 1963). Therefore the very contours of the research have been ascribed by the dominant discourses of the powerful in defining that group. Whilst it is acknowledged here that the intention of criminological research is often to lessen the moral judgment of actions by contextualizing 'deviant' behaviours; by failing to call into question the processes that have labelled those particular behaviours as deviant in the first instance these studies are at best limited.

Radical criminology shifts the sociological gaze from the 'deviant group' to the authority of the response that defined the group as deviant in the first instance. By bringing the response into question orthodox criminology is challenged and its validity questioned; exposed as '*a mere plaything of the categorizations, statistics and political needs of those whose levity towards the lives of others had elevated them to transcendental power*' (Sumner 1994:300). This radical perspective provides an approach to deviance that contests the current consensus on 'knife crime'.

In popular use and academic research alike, the label 'knife crime' collapses the distinction between the deviant acts of young people and the response that defines these, assuming they can be understood as one and explained through attention solely to the former. A radical criminological approach refuses to accept this, in recognition that deviance is defined in two parts; '*the nature of the act (that is, whether it violates some rule), and what other people do about it*' (Becker 1973:14).

Rather than entering the debate at a point that reduces criminology to the reproduction of contradictions, radical criminology refuses to assume the morality of the powerful. The '*critique of the sociology of deviance and orthodox criminology demonstrated, time and again, that the roots of disapproval and censure rarely lay in altruism alone*' (Sumner 1994:300). Exposing processes of social control and the interests of the powerful in deviancy labelling process reveals the underlying administrative functions

performed during responses to crime. Indeed, as Hall et al. (1978) demonstrate, it is possible that the societal reaction to a crime category precedes the appearance of a pattern of crimes altogether.

This is an aspect of 'knife crime' that has been widely overlooked in current literature. Once we acknowledge that deviance takes place in the interaction between the act and the response to the act our line of enquiry must then move from the persons and behaviours labelled as deviant, to the historical processes of rule making and enforcement that produced the labelling of that act as deviant in the first place. Any research that defines the field of deviance as the study of those who have violated rules assumes the superordinate order by exempting the creators and enforcers of those rules from study. Thus radical criminology must insist that all parties involved are fit objects of study. In the case of 'knife crime' an understanding of the interaction between policing and the response to the crime is crucially missing from current literature.

### **Constructing a 'Criminal Other'; Racialisation and Race**

Becker (1973) highlights the importance of rule enforcement as a vital site for sociological study when considering a labelled deviance. It is evident within the policing of this phenomenon that acts that are defined as 'knife crime' have a temporal and situational relationship; some events involving knives are not considered 'knife crime' whilst others that didn't involve a

knife, are. This discretion of the enforcers is formative in the construction of deviance. The study of deviance has demonstrated that the sequence of historical events through which a general societal moral value becomes a specific act of enforcement is neither automatic nor inevitable (Becker 1972, Cohen 1972, Wilkins 1964). For this reason Becker (1972) argues that great attention must be given to the entrepreneurs and enforcers who ensure that this development takes place.

Gilroy and Sim (1985) agree, stating that this has been a fundamental mistake in the study of law and order issues. Research concerning the criminal justice system has falsely excluded enforcement through policing from the field of study. In their critical article *Law, order and the state of the left* (1985) they suggest that the political left undermines its own position and colludes in the maintenance of social order by continuing to approach criminality as something that exists separate to its enforcement (Gilroy and Sim 1985). This perpetuates the idea that policing is primarily concerned with the prevention and detection of crime when policing practice suggests its purpose is essentially symbolic rather than instrumental; *'for police, the maintenance of social order has always taken priority over the pursuit of criminals'* (Gilroy & Sim 1985:16).

With attention to police crime-work, Jefferson (1993) argues that all available evidence, historical and contemporary, is only compatible with the notion that policing *'consists, essentially, of reproducing a criminal*

*Other utilising a discourse of criminality rooted in notions of differential crime proneness'* (Jefferson 1993:27). Radical criminology acknowledges the 'criminal Other' as an ideological construct of a deviant group. It exists not as an empirical social category, but rather as an imagined set of properties *'which fix and legitimate real positions of social domination or subordination in terms of ascriptions of delinquency and law abidingness'* (Ibid.).

Moving through various groups since the birth of modern policing in 1829, the 'criminal Other' has been periodically defined and redefined through class, ethnicity, age and gender (Jefferson 1993, Pearson 1983). The roots of British policing are deep in the foundations of capitalism, stemming from the problems of social order caused by the industrial growth of towns and cities, and the subsequent demise of the paternalist feudal system (Jefferson 1993).

Policing was founded with the intention of preventing the labouring classes from becoming the dangerous classes and in order to perform this function the 'criminal Other' emerges a transient ideological group that becomes continuously reproduced to best meet this objective (Jefferson 1993). Whilst the most recent of these groups is that of young Black males, Jefferson (1993) warns that a narrow focus on ethnicity may obscure the underlying function performed by this criminal Othering; *'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'* (Jefferson 1993:31).

In recognition of this, a critical approach to 'knife crime' must be cautious not to be reduced to an either/or argument; 'either 'knife crime' *really is* disproportionately committed by Black males or the police are racist'. Whilst the discussion of excessive policing of Black children leading to an over representation in crime statistics is important, this over-simplified interpretation of racism in crime management misses the broader hegemonic function of shifting popular racisms that have defined the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

In defining race it is widely acknowledged that '*race is a historically and politically contingent construction that has changing meanings over time*' (Murji 2017:21). In this research the term 'race' and the signifiers 'Black' and 'White' are defined as both social constructs and lived realities. In recognition that;

'On the one hand... race is not real – it does not exist as an empirical object in nature...But, on the other hand, race is a powerful normative idea that is believed to be real and acted upon as real and, as such, has practical effects and consequences. Therefore, to all intents and purposes, race *is* real (St Louis 2015:117)

Thus, the framework through which race is understood in this thesis is not as a static social 'fact', but rather as a fluid process of 'making race' or 'racialization' (Soo-Jin Lee 2015:37). However, it is also recognised that whilst constructs of race change and shift over time, there are also

common issues that seem unchanging, such as discriminatory over-policing and inequality in public policy (Murji 2017). Through this understanding the development of 'knife crime' is contextualised within this thesis as both a recent racialisation through policing, but also as the latest manifestation of a long-established history of constructing race through ideas of criminality and civility.

Previous research has detailed the process through which criminality became symbolically tied to 'Black youth' in British discourse, revealing the underlying social purpose of racism in post-war Britain (Gilroy 1987). The hostility towards Black migrants, invited to Britain from the Commonwealth in the 1940s to rebuild a country in recession, took many forms. However, in the 1960's a particular expression of anxiety over criminality became the dominant narrative of racist rhetoric (Gilroy 1987:104). Whilst the criminalisation of 'Black youth' was not the first construction of racial difference to be established in this period, it has been one of the most resilient and adaptable folk racisms that remains powerfully in use today.

To understand why it has been such a powerful construction it must first be recognised that law has always been constitutive of the idea of nation, long before the emergence of racialised crime labels;

'The ability of law and the ideology of legality to express and represent the nation state and national unity precedes the identification of racially distinct crime and criminals... Law is



primarily a national institution, and adherence to its rule symbolizes the imagined community of the nation and expresses the fundamental unity and equality of its citizens' (Gilroy 1987:87,88)

Britain historically has had particular regard for its law and constitution as an important and unique cultural achievement, the perceived superiority of 'British civility' was fundamental to the implementation of colonisation and empire. But it is in the melancholia of de-colonisation and the crisis of the post-war recession that Britain finds solace in a renewed commitment to 'law and order' (Gilroy 1987). Central to the rise of Thatcherism in the 1970s was the articulation of a core national identity through a focus on legality in popular politics (Ibid.).

Racially defined moral panics produce representations of the 'criminal Other' that are inherently bound up in the crisis of national decline and loss of identity:

They provide at a visceral level contradictory, common-sense explanations, symbols and signs which render the shock of Britain's loss of status intelligible and enable it to be lived out in 'racial' terms. The fundamental process of fragmentation and chaos engendered by the crisis are contained in the images of a disorderly and criminal black population (Gilroy 1987:88).

Hall et al (1978) depicted this process in great detail for the image of 'mugging' but Gilroy (1987) describes how these representations take several different forms, changing overtime to produce patterns of '*new racism for which the link between crime and blackness has become absolutely integral*' (Gilroy 1987:89).

Beyond the debates of racial disproportionality in knife offences and the discussion of sub-cultural risk factors, there is a crucial absence of conjunctural or crisis critique in the study of 'knife crime'. As a phrase that has embodied the common-sense 'folk racism' of 'Black criminality' with dominant popular politics of law or order for nearly two decades, this lack of analysis is in urgent need of academic attention. Considering the similarities between 'mugging' and 'knife crime' in the punitive and policing response recognised by Squires (2009), the absence of radical criminological contribution to the field is confounding. This apparent lack in existing research can be partly explained by the dominance of left realism in contemporary criminological endeavour.

#### **'Knife Crime' After 'Policing the Crisis' – the Rise of Left Realism.**

Many social theorists believed that *Policing the Crisis*, along with other radical works of the time, signalled the end of an orthodox tradition in criminology and the study of deviance. Sumner (1994) goes as far as to provocatively claim that criminology died in 1975 and that another conceptualisation of the field began to emerge after this, most notably in the work of Stuart Hall (Sumner 1994:302). And yet in the decades that followed it is evident that this shift is not as recognisable as many thought it would be.

Regardless of the stark similarities with ‘mugging’, the emergence of ‘knife crime’ as category of crime at the start of the millennium triggered a law and order response with cross-party consensus and the same moral outcry that Hall et al. (1978) detailed in the 1970’s. It gave rise to public consent for increased police powers and severe custodial sentences, endorsed by positivist crime prevention theories that failed to challenge ‘knife crime’ as a category in any significant way.

Despite the notoriety of *Policing the Crisis* (1978) the vast majority of literature on ‘knife crime’ written three decades later makes no mention of policing or policy measures that preceded the emergence of the term ‘knife crime’ in the press. Even though positivist criminology fails to produce any scientific certainty on the reliability of data or recommendations, we cannot deny the continuing appeal it maintains amongst political, popular and (some) academic audiences (Muncie 2009:113). The political left’s renewed commitment to a realist discourse on crime prevention over the past thirty years can help to explain the attachment to positivist methods in recent research and its influence on our understanding of ‘knife crime’.

The prevalence and prosperity of ‘knife crime’ as a term of reference can be understood as the consequence of the political left’s commitment to realism in contemporary crime discourse. The left realist approach to crime emerged in the 1980’s as a response to those on the political right

who were benefitting during elections in the UK because of their tough stance on dealing with criminals (Young 1991:146). In order to be more in touch with those most affected by crime *'[l]eft realism accepts that crime, particularly street crimes against person and property, is a real problem'* (Hughes 1998:118).

This movement to 'take crime seriously' (Ibid.) repositioned the liberal political left from a previously more radical interpretation of crime to a position that responded directly to the fears and concerns of the general public; *"Realist' criminologies... are primarily concerned with developing responses to a perceived intensity in the public's fear of crime'* (Muncie 2009:140). This involves the heavy use of social surveys to respond to the demands of the public (Young 1991:148). Left realism is grounded in crime prevention, the belief that pro-active responses can and must *do something* about crime. In order to prevent crime left realism sets about 'reversing the retreat from causality' (Ibid.). In other words, it heralded the left's return and renewed commitment to the positivist cause and effect approaches discussed above.

In promoting left realism to liberal left criminologists, Young (1991) writes:

It is of vital importance that we face up to the problem of crime in our inner cities. To do this will involve social crime prevention, better design, public involvement and more effective policing. Two tasks face us: our first is to re-open the question of the causes of crime... What is needed are resources directed at the likely offenders, frequently adolescent boys, in terms of anti-crime education in schools, massively greater youth employment possibilities, and better

leisure facilities...Our second task must be to stress that the prime role of the police is to fight crime... And, in order to fight crime, they must gain public support, for this is the lifeline of effective policing (Young 1991:154,154).

This crucial shift of the left to a realist position can clearly be seen in the response to 'knife crime' and the common consensus in literature produced. A heavy emphasis on causation and intervention in order to prevent knife carrying and use, coupled with policing strategies that target those considered 'likely offenders'. 'Knife crime' presented an opportune political arena for realist strategies in its response; many of the actions defined as 'knife crime' involve the death or serious injury of young people and children and thus incur emotive and powerful responses from communities affected. After heightened media coverage through the label 'knife crime' this stimulates wider public involvement and national concern. Thus 'knife crime' can be seen to powerfully bring together the concerns of everyday people, their demand for 'something to be done' and provide a platform to gain public support through a pro-active, realist, political response.

'Knife crime' also uniquely provides a physical justification for pro-active policing. It has in a material sense given enforcers *something* to look for. Through press releases and public events police gain public support for their tactics by displaying knives 'recovered'. Critics of stop and search find it hard to argue with tables laden with knives, albeit kitchen knives, found through extensive search operations. Such displays are accompanied by

realist claims from police commissioners reinforcing the idea that; *'It is incumbent on us to recognise that every one of these knives recovered represents a tragedy averted and a life saved'* (Glendinning 2008).

Left Realism was intended to respond to the political right's monopoly on law or order. It was a reaction to a particular political moment and its intentions are arguably justified with this context (Lea 2016) but the neglect of radical constructivism by the political left would have lasting consequences. The continued dominance of realism in criminology has allowed 'knife crime' to establish itself as an organising feature of intervention and policing practice with little critique or scrutiny. Left realism presents several very real risks that are exemplified in the case of 'knife crime'.

### **The Risk of Left Realism**

The left conceded to the right's law and order policies resulting in a cross-political response to 'knife crime' that began from a starting point that adopts a common model of response. This normalised position makes three core assumption; Firstly, that knife related criminality is pathological and can be corrected by the accurate identification of the individual or environmental factors that are causing the social malfunction. Secondly, that understanding 'knife crime' involves scrutinising the actions of young people in isolation from the society reaction that defined the category. And

thirdly, that policing and enforcement hold authority on what to do and how to do it, when it comes to 'knife crime' prevention.

In a bid to be seen as taking crime seriously and 'in touch' with the real experiences and concerns of communities both the left and the right supported robust policing measures and extensive youth justice intervention. This consensus on crime is what Hall et al. (1978) referred to as the 'common sense' response through moral outrage. It provides an ideology on crime that supports and consents to authoritarian control (Hall et al. 1978:177). Within this popular concern for the 'real' impacts of crime, left realists have neglected to observe the 'real' risks of a political appeasement that neglects structural critique.

The criticism of approaches that seek to contextualise the labelling of deviance within broader structures is that these processes are insensitive and dismissive of the real harm caused by violence. This thesis presents an argument to the contrary; that radical criminology is *especially* concerned with the real harm caused by violence – but not only the physical interpersonal violence that is made visible through moral panic. Adopting a language and a conceptualisation of 'knife crime' as a particular cultural pathology, abstracts '*everyday violence*' (Scheper-Hughes 1992) from the contradictory social conditions of '*structural violence*' (Galtung 1969) and '*symbolic violence*' (Bourdieu 1992) that normalise brutality at the micro-level. The consequences of such labelling are both physical and ideological

- increasing the state's capacity for '*political violence*' (Bourgois 2001) whilst maintaining and extending inequality and the structural violence enacted on groups. As much as there are very real risks to young people's lives within the crime category 'knife crime', there are also very real consequences to the processing of this violence through the label 'knife crime'.

However, it is not only young people at risk. Hall et al. (1978) exposed the symbiotic dependency between authoritarianism and racism and the neglect of this analysis in contemporary manifestations facilitates an increasing shift towards exceptionalism; the continuing justification of political violence through ever adapting forms of 'Black criminality'. This legitimate state force will be used, as and when required, to protect the interests of advanced neoliberal capitalism - whether that be through authoritarian occupation of communities, or the physical suppression of political protests and social uprisings. The dominance of left realist criminology has negated the application of radical interpretations of deviant categories such as 'knife crime' from voices on the left and this has been to all of our detriment. There is much to be learnt from the application of existing, and highly relevant, radical literature on deviance and crime to the case of 'knife crime'.



## **Conclusions**

In a post 'Policing the Crisis' world, the emergence of 'knife crime' as a particular category of crime is a significant moment. Through the culmination of various criminological traditions, the public and political response to youth violence since the 2000s has produced a highly compelling narrative of 'knife crime' as a young, Black, male, pathology. This has been an important achievement for the state and the law and order society. Allowing, yet again, for increasingly authoritarian policing strategies to be rolled out with public consent and moral consensus.

The work of radical criminologists in the study of deviance in the 1970s provided ample evidence of the limitations and harm caused by positivist criminological perspectives that assume the category of deviance as fact. But the liberal left's reorientation on crime in the 1980s, to appear as tough on crime as those on the political right, resulted in cross party consensus to realist crime prevention.

It is clear from the available literature on 'knife crime' that radical perspectives on deviance have all but ceased to be applied in contemporary issues. Excluding a few notable exceptions, the dominant endeavour of 'knife crime' research is to identify 'risk and protective factors' in the lives of those assumed to be the problematic group. The impotence of the 'youth pathology' approach is exemplified by prevention

recommendations that aim to increase teenagers' 'resilience' to the social conditions of inequality instead of eradicating the conditions themselves.

The increased visibility of everyday violence, facilitated by a moral panic over 'knife crime', has produced a moralistic approach to the problem that obscures the structural context. To interrupt this harmful process, the 'knife crime' label is in urgent need of political and historical deconstruction. Reflecting the framework of Hall et al.'s (1978) systematic analysis of 'mugging' this must begin not with the mobilisation in response to the 'crime wave', but the events that pre-date the public definition of the label.

'Knife crime' does not exist as a criminological *fact*, but as a specific response to crime in a long and documented history of constructing criminality in the management of society. From this starting point the important intervention needed now is to understand what particular social functions the label 'knife crime' has performed and its specific interaction with the political moment or its emergence. The following chapter will discuss how this task was confronted within this thesis, detailing the methodological considerations of this research.

## **Chapter Two.**

### **The Case for Constructivism; A Critical Methodology**

## Introduction

The review of existing approaches in chapter one demonstrated the radical approaches that are currently absent in the discussion of 'knife crime'. It was the intention of this project to apply theories of deviance labelling as social management to the case of 'knife crime' as a continuation of the analysis provided in *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978). The research questions posed by this thesis were; How can the label 'knife crime' be understood as a particular societal reaction to crime? And to what extent can the response to 'knife crime' be considered a continuation of *Policing the Crisis* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

To meet this objective and answer these questions the methodological considerations of this study faced several practical challenges. Not least of which was how to document the history of a crime label that traverses two decades, with a scale of events that spans from global politics to national policy and individual cases. Along with the practicalities of such a task, there were personal and professional dilemmas that were confronted during this project that challenged the neutrality and detachment of the social constructionist approach.

Working in and through the tensions of this field this methodology details the design of three discrete research components that approached the same overall objective through different methods of data collection and analysis. The first unit of research was concerned with reconstructing the

historical events that pre-empted and defined the label 'knife crime' as a category of crime in England and Wales. The second task considered the empirical experiences of the emergence of 'knife crime' as a distinct category of crime and the targeted prevention that followed its definition. Whilst the third component looked at the contemporary representation and communication network that produce and reproduce 'knife crime' meaning in everyday use.

The composition and structure of these three approaches within this thesis will be discussed as a variation of a case study methodology. This chapter will define this method and its ability to respond the research questions of this project. The individual units of this case study will be detailed here along with the design and justification of the methods of data collection and analysis for each component part. As tools in the researcher's toolbox, a broad variety of qualitative methods were used to best meet the objectives of each stage of analysis. However, it is hoped that the clear structure described here demonstrates the connecting thread of intention that runs throughout - building a new understanding of the 'knife crime' phenomenon and its effects.

### **Positioning the Researcher; Personal Loss and Professional Dilemmas**

This research follows the reflexive tradition of modern critical theory (Gray 2009, Brannick and Coghlan 2007, Coffey 1999). Within the methods

described it is recognised that my own position and experiences as researcher are 'implicated in the construction of knowledge' (Gray 2009:498). I acknowledge that the decisions made during the collection of data and my analysis reflects my own epistemology and relative social position. Whilst I am cautious to avoid a level of self-introspection that would detract from the study itself (Weber 2003), I am also keen to locate myself as researcher within 'the dynamic of the research process' (Gray 2009:499), by sharing details of my individual, social and professional positioning.

I grew up in the southwest of England; raised with the social privileges of the rural White middle classes. I had an interest in filmmaking and moved to London as a teenager in 2004 to study and work. Soon after, I found a job with a youth organisation, leading media projects and co-creating films with young people in the south London area I lived in. This extended time spent speaking with and listening to young Londoners revealed to me the limits of my own knowledge and the particularity of my lived experience. Whilst this could not be described as orthodox ethnography, it certainly provided a depth of insight into the lived realities that would eventually underpin the broader research intentions of this project.

Since moving to London my professional practice, personal life and academic development have all been rooted in southeast London, and this has increasingly connected me to this area and its communities in

meaningful ways. There are many aspects of this 'closeness' that became apparent in the research processes of this project and caused me to reflect on the subjectivity of my position. My lack of 'critical distance' (Hayward and Cassell 2018) was particularly exposed in the spring of 2016, as elements of my work, personal life and research collided in the tragic death of a young family friend.

This was not the first time a young person I knew had been stabbed - the precariousness of the young lives I encountered in youth crime prevention had been brutally apparent for some time. But this *was* the first time a child of a close friend had been killed, and the first time I experienced the processing of grief and injustice at an intimate and personal level. I had watched this child grow from primary school through secondary school, and at seventeen years old he had so much life ahead of him. We were all so proud of the young man he was becoming.

The post-mortem report found five stab wounds to his leg, one had hit a major artery. Three teenagers were charged with his murder. The anger and sadness is indescribable and in the emotions of this moment I found myself asking all the questions I condemned in the past; *What is wrong with these kids? Why are they stabbing each other over nothing? How could they do something so evil?* It was also clear amongst various groups I spoke to that despite how devastating this event was to his family and friends – for many, a young Black male killed in south London was hardly news

worthy. This was an infuriating indignation on top of an already unbearable injustice.

I began to reflect on the value of my research and the limits of its impact. As Hall (1996) so powerfully put it; ‘... *against the urgency of people dying in the streets, what in god’s name is the point in cultural studies?*’ (Hall 1996:272). There is a palpable urgency in the wake of tragedy. In my own grief I recognised the deep desire to affect change on the variables that seem within reach; the knives, the boys, the fights - what could be done *right now* to stop these immediate threats to our loved ones?

This urgency presented a personal conflict in my research and my commitment to a social constructionist understanding of ‘knife crime’ was fundamentally challenged. I was unsure what value the extensive conjunctural analysis of my research could bring and how it would contribute to the changes so desperately needed. Cultural theorists often feel the tension of limited impact when acknowledging ‘how little we’ve been able to change anything or get anybody to do anything’ (Hall 1996:272). But Hall (1996) urged researchers to work through this, stating:

Unless we operate in this tension, we don’t know what cultural studies can do, cant, can never do; but also what it has to do, what it alone has a privileged capacity to do. It has to analyse certain things and the constitutive and political nature of representation itself, about its complexities, about the effects of language, about textuality as a site of life and death. Those are the things cultural studies can address (Hall 1996:272,273).



Working in this tension required reconciliation between the slower pace of abstraction and critique with the immediacy of the problem; recognising that it is through this slower analytical consideration of the 'textuality' of the problem that community action can be informed and effective. I devised ways within my methodology (discussed in detail later in this chapter) to include the experiences and responses of practitioners and young people, incorporating democratic processes that recognise the urgency of community inclusion whilst insisting that 'knife crime' is reframed as a social construction.

The death of a loved one in the context labelled as 'knife crime' has undeniably impacted my position as researcher. It deepened my comprehension of the actions within the response to violence and revealed tension that required working through in the critical approach of this thesis. Along with the processing of this personal event, there have been on-going professional connections to the institutional response to 'knife crime' that impacted on the neutrality of my analytical position. I will reflect here on the ways that my community work roles often contradicted my theoretical positioning in this research and how I have overcome these dilemmas of authenticity.

It was never my intention to become part of the 'knife crime' response. I have always been keen to distance myself from those who stake a claim in understanding 'knife crime' in any positivist criminological sense.

However, through my work and research the label has proved to be particularly 'sticky' and the reputation of my specialism often precedes the explanation of my approach. One example of this occurred in 2015 when, amid fears of a perceived rise in 'knife offences', the Chair of a Metropolitan Police Independent Advisory Group (IAG) in south London approached me. The email I received requested my attendance at the community engagement group in the capacity of a 'knife crime specialist'.

My initial reply declined the invitation. I explained that my expertise in 'knife crime' was likely not what the group expected, that my approach was a radical critique of the processes that define 'knife crime', more concerned with the actions of the police themselves than that of young people. And yet the Chair persisted, saying a new perspective on the issue was exactly what they needed and that my input would be greatly valued. With undeniable curiosity I joined the group and since then I have met regularly with various Borough Commanders in the meeting rooms of police stations and local Town Halls, and occasionally at New Scotland Yard - feeding into special task forces such as Trident Gang Crime Command.

This example demonstrates two interconnected dilemmas I have faced throughout this research. Firstly, when I describe the project to colleagues or members of my professional network the bit that sticks and carries meaning is the 'knife crime'. Secondly, and as a result of this, my attendance and participation in community working groups becomes a

complicit act, contributing to the perpetuation of the label and its response. In respect of this, the dilemma of placing myself within this arena has always been; *at what cost?* Can the concept of 'knife crime' be truly challenged by those still engaged in its institutionalised response?

Unlike Hall *et al.* (1978), Becker (1973) and Cohen (1972), I am not only reflecting *on* but also reflecting *within* the panic I wish to analyse. I have been self-consciously aware of the incongruity this situation poses both as consultant and critic of 'knife crime', but I have also found it unavoidable in the present condition. The opportunity to engage with this topic currently only exists within the parameters that assume the label as fact. But it is only through this engagement that an informed critique of its processes can challenge its assumed status. My on-going engagement with various groups has enabled me to contextualise my findings within the heart of 'knife crime' response, maintaining an interactionist approach; 'to insist that all parties involved are fit objects for study' (Becker 1973:196).

My active engagement with community monitoring groups and police consultation, along with personal loss, indicate that my research position in relation to 'knife crime' is complex. The threat of violence with knives impacts directly on my family and friends and my work has been invested in preventative practices for over a decade. In the interest of transparency and reflexivity this intimacy with the topic is not concealed within my methods. Rather, the methods described below will demonstrate how the

incorporation of empirical methods reflect the practice informed position of the researcher and how incorporating this knowledge enhanced the impact of the social constructivism that defines my theoretical approach. The various component methods that make up this research collectively represent a bounded, in depth, case study. The details and structure of this are detailed below, along with a critical discussion of the limitations and challenges during these methods.

### **A bounded Case Study**

The argument presented in chapter one identified the ways in which previous methods of analysis and measurement of 'knife crime' have restricted the criminological imagination. Quantitative methods of crime data analysis are not only limited by the inaccuracy of crime records but also the extent to which such measurements can critique the labelling process or find 'meaning' in the actions they investigate (Bryman 2008). However, it was also demonstrated that existing methods of interviews, surveys and qualitative policy review on the topic of 'knife crime' often begin with the assumptions of the label preserved, directing analysis at the actions of young people or the evaluation of targeted youth intervention alone. For this reason it was important to make a significant methodological break with these previous approaches; reversing the gaze of inquiry from that which is contained by the label, to the label itself. A case study method provided the flexibility required to ensure that the

phenomenon *itself* was the object of the research, allowing versatility in the methods of data collection and analysis designed to best meet this task.

Case studies are a commonly used method in the social sciences particularly in interpretive qualitative research (Yazan 2015). The case study methodology is a process where '*one case (or perhaps a small number of cases) will be studied in detail, using whatever methods seem appropriate*' (Punch 1998:150). Within this endeavour there will be a variety of research questions that respond to specific purposes, but the overriding objective remains the same; 'to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible' (Ibid.).

There are many forms of cases that are studied; from schools or hospitals of interest, to particular groups of people or individuals (Silverman 2010). In this thesis I adapt the idea of a 'case' to mean the crime label 'knife crime'. Whilst an unconventional use of the case study method, studying 'knife crime' fits the criteria of an 'instrumental case study' (Stake 2000:438), defined as '*a case examined mainly to provide insight into an issue... Although the case is studied in depth, the main focus is on something else*' (Stake 2000:438). In this case, the label 'knife crime' is analysed closely but the objective is to understand the interaction of politics and culture within this conjuncture.

Qualitative case studies have been criticised by the quantitative focused, positivist tradition for their lack of generalizability, interpretive methods and limited representative capacity (Silverman 1993). In response some researchers have attempted to standardise and fix the procedures of case studies to increase control through tight design (Yin 1994, Punch 1998). Others have rejected this criticism, arguing that quantitative positivist and qualitative interpretivist approaches are rooted in opposing epistemologies and thus cannot be judged on each other's credentials (Stake 1995, Merriam 1998)

It is the argument of this thesis that positivist criminology is unable to provide a meaningful understanding of the phenomenon beyond that which is dictated by the term 'knife crime' and its criminalisations. For this reason a flexible qualitative case study approach is used, beginning from a position that recognises 'facts' as socially constructed (Silverman 2010). From a constructionist perspective a fixed definition of the case and its study are not always compatible with the approach itself, given that it is the purpose of the research to challenge existing frameworks of knowledge on the topic of interest (Stake 1995).

However, there are aspects of the procedural design for case studies as defined by Yin (1994) and Punch (1998) that have been incorporated into this methodological design to increase validity and reliability without compromising the values of social constructivism. Firstly, the boundaries

of the case can be identified clearly at this early stage of the research (Punch 1998), and secondly, the methods are designed to include multiple units of analysis of the same case (Yin 1994), providing increased reliability through triangulation (Stake 1995).

Regarding the temporal boundaries of the case, this study follows the label 'knife crime' from the pre-public mobilisation towards the crime category, which is bound by the political event of the New Labour Government commencing in 1997. The chronological analysis of the emergence of 'knife crime' follows significant events related to the case up until the announcement of the 'war on knife crime' in 2008. Later chapters consider contemporary use of the phrase 'knife crime' and the action of practitioners and services from 2008 to 2019.

The spatial parameters of 'knife crime' within this case study are defined by the boundaries of England and Wales. Although the term 'knife crime' was first used to speak about crime trends in Scotland, once transported south of the border the label takes on a distinctively new meaning. The devolution of Scottish Parliament from 1999 onwards also separates the cases in terms of response and state actions. For this reason, events in Scotland are not included in the boundaries of this analysis - except when related to the case in England and Wales.

Following the methodological procedures of a case study defined by Yin (1994) this research is compiled of three units of analysis that use different methods to analyse the same case. This framework is organised thus:

| Unit                  | Chapter                                 | Data                               | Analysis            | Conclusion   |
|-----------------------|---|------------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Conjunctural Analysis | Chapter Three (Pre public mobilisation) | Document and Archive               | Conjunctural        | Triangulation (reaching new understanding by combined methods of analysis) |
|                       | Chapter Four (Public definition)        | Document and Archive               | Conjunctural        |  |
|                       | Chapter Five (Moral Panic)              | Document and Archive               | Conjunctural        |  |
| Empirical Inquiry     | Chapter six                             | Interviews and Focus Groups        | Discourse, Thematic |  |
| Content Analysis      | Chapter Seven                           | Document And Archive (Twitter.com) | Content, Discourse, |  |

The table above depicts the organisation of methods that comprise of the units of analysis in this case study of the label 'knife crime'. The first unit represents the conjunctural analysis of the next three chapters and is composed of the chronological 'mapping out' of the events that defined the pre-public mobilisation towards 'knife crime' (chapter three), the public emergence of the term (chapter four) and the moral panic that followed (chapter five). The second unit of analysis is the empirical inquiry that includes thematic and discourse analysis from interviews with practitioners and focus groups with young people (chapter six). The third



unit is a phase of the research that conducted contemporary content analysis of 'knife crime' communications online, along with discourse analysis of 'knife crime tweets' during one month on twitter (chapter seven).

The method of using '*two or more aspects of research to strengthen the design to increase the ability to interpret the findings*' (Thurmond 2001:253) is known as triangulation. Using this method it is intended that the potential weaknesses or bias in the individual units of analysis in this thesis are counterbalanced by the strength of consistent themes and evidence across multiple data sources, at various times and amongst different groups of actors (Thurmond 2001, Mitchel 1983). This chapter will discuss the design and challenges of each unit of analysis in turn, detailing the methodological decisions made during the research process and how the three units contributed towards reaching the final conclusions.

### **Reading the News**

The methods used in *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978) begin with a chronological account of the history of 'mugging' and the pre-public mobilisation towards a new crime label. This historical analysis becomes the blueprint for understanding the label in relation to the political conjuncture of its making. Replicating this in the millennial context and

for the case of 'knife crime', the initial task of this analysis was to retrace the pre-history and history of the label.

The source of data for this first stage of analysis was documents and archives, using secondary data from existing news reports, policy and legislation documents, transcripts of political speeches and images that are recorded and placed in time during the history and pre-history of 'knife crime'. Bryman (2012) defines documents in research as:

Something which can be 'read'; Have been produced for some other purpose than for social research; Preserved and available for analysis; Relevant to the topic being studied (Bryman, 2012:543).

Early investigation was open and broad. Based on the history 'mugging' (Hall et al. 1978) there was an idea that there might have been a period of police mobilisation that preceded the public use of the phrase 'knife crime' but before researching this period it was unclear what this would look like or what evidence (if any) would exist of this. Extensive document and archive research provided a base knowledge that then allowed further questions to be formulated and investigated (Bowen 2009), and enabled the tracking of changes that would be vital to the retelling of the history of 'knife crime'.

Newspaper archives became an invaluable source of reliably authenticated, easily accessible, high quality data (Scott 1990). Using ProQuest for archives of printed national and regional papers, along with online news

archives, these sources signalled the release of relevant policy, changes or events in policing and the communication of popular opinion and party political commentary. From these initial signposts more accurate searches would uncover greater depth of knowledge, slowly building a comprehensive account of each stage of the label's history.

In this research news analysis not only provided dates and events in the mapping of 'knife crime's emergence, but it was also a valuable source of data for close textual analysis of key moments. Within this approach journalism, often referred to as the 'fourth estate', is recognised as containing great symbolic power:

The power is used to reproduce highly selected events, and to manufacture news as if these events were the centrally important events of that day. In short, one must see the news as reflecting not the events in the world 'out there', but as the manifestation of the collective cultural codes of those employed to do this selective and judgemental work for society (Beharrell et al. 1972:13,14).

Journalists are authorised members that 'tell the stories through which we make sense of our society' (Meikle and Redden 2011:10). They have claimed for themselves the definitive role of deciding *who* are the authorised knowers, and *what* are the authoritative versions of reality (Meikle and Redden 2011). As such news organisations and their archived data were central to an understanding how meaning and narrative was constructed through the representation of 'knife crime' news.

There was a risk during the analysis of news in this research that the power of journalism would be oversimplification, leading to inaccurate accusations of high or low conspiracy theories. The 'low conspiracy theory' sees influence in media representation as working in a very direct way, '*[i]t is assumed that orders are given that this shall be shown and this not, that telephone calls from high places decide what stresses there shall be and so on.*' (Beharrel 1972:xi). This research does not deny that there are sometimes these kinds of pressure on journalists, but that they are 'neither as frequent nor as important as some romantics would like to think' (Ibid.)

High conspiracy theories takes this argument further, claiming that '*the agenda is very tightly framed, in its inclusions, omissions and stresses, not by direct orders but by a number of more hidden forces*' (Ibid.). Such as controlled recruitment into the profession so that dissidents are excluded, or fixed agendas of how to deal with specific news types (such as race or strikes) that are so rigid in their control that direct pressure is never needed (Ibid.). The problem with both these theories is that they are ultimately restrictive to our understanding of the complexities of the processes of news production.

The relationships represented in news media are not as straightforwardly corrupt as conspiracy theorists would have us believe. Taking an interactionist approach to 'knife crime' meant paying close attention to these fluid relationships. The interests of people, politics and the press

change over time and crime reporting is a particularly interesting component within this interaction. A similar method of news analysis was practiced in *Policing the Crisis* (1978) where texts that secured the reproduction of dominant ideologies were seen to be 'the product of a set of *structural imperatives*, not of an open conspiracy with those in powerful positions' (Hall 1978:63). Nevertheless, great attention was given to the processes through which media outlets transform the raw materials of an event into a news story, which events were considered news worthy and how particular actions were defined.

Similarly in this project there are particular moments during the emergence of 'knife crime' where I adopt a more thorough method of news analysis, using news texts and a method of discourse analysis to document the ways in which knife incidents are, as Hall describes, 'coded by the media into a particular language form' (Hall 1978:63). One of these key moments in crime reporting of knife events takes place during 2003, during the reporting the death of Luke Walmsley in Lincolnshire. In chapter four I explore how this high profile case very quickly develops into broader discussions of 'knife crime' as it is repeatedly reported on in newspapers of the time. By closely reading news texts during this case I explore how an incident between two young White males in rural England results in police action in London that predominantly targets young Black males.

### **Mapping Changes; Timelines and Tables**

One of the biggest challenges of the data collection was how to record and conceptualise such a large quantity of documents, covering a broad timescale, and organise this data in a useful and meaningful way for analysis. There were two designed systems of data storage that were used during this stage of the research; the first was digital and physical timelines and the second was spreadsheets of annotated content.

As visual aids and a method of organising and connecting the various forms and sources of information, timelines became an important tool in retracing the making of the label; piecing together the history of 'knife crime' and the relationship between events as new data was discovered and included. At first this was conducted in digital format but as the project progressed the amount of information and length of time covered made it increasingly hard to conceptualise the events in their entirety. Instead I transformed one wall of my work area into a physical timeline, upon which I could pin and connect news reports with underlying party politics and policy reforms.

The timeline also revealed distinct phases in relation to the content and quantity of 'knife crime' reporting and the narratives represented by the label. This led to the identification of three stages of response, a similar pattern to that evidenced in *Policing the Crisis*; pre-public mobilisation, followed by a public definition, then a few years later a full-scale moral

panic; police on the streets. These stages became formative in the division of the content of chapters three, four and five which analyse the data of each phase with approaches characterised by the actions of each moment.

Along with timelines I used digital spreadsheets of data to record and compare all of the first uses of the phrase 'knife crime' in news articles, particularly in the second stage of the emergence of the term, analysed in Chapter Four. Notes on the defining aspects of news content were recorded on the table of data in the spreadsheet, such as the mention and phrasing of age, ethnicity, references to the city or type of image used to accompany articles (see Appendix A for example). For particularly high profile early 'knife crime' cases separate spreadsheets of data were created, comparing all reports of the same incident to see when and how the phrase 'knife crime' and references to the crime category were applied (see Appendix B for example).

This vast amount of secondary data, connected through its relation to the bounded case of 'knife crime', was analysed as an 'articulation' of the 'conjuncture'. *Conjuncture*, a theoretical term first used by Marx (1867) and expanded on by Gramsci (1957), was famously applied by Hall within the discipline of Cultural Studies. It refers to particular moments or epochs where there is a '*shifting balance of relations between different social forces in society*' (Hall 1996:415). Those who engage in conjunctural analysis are interested in how these moments of change are navigated and 'smoothed

over' through particular methods of crisis management. Paying close attention to *'politics, ideology of the state, the character of different types of political regimes, the importance of cultural and national-popular questions, and the role of civil society'* (Ibid.). Conjunctural analysis can locate moral responses to labelled acts such as 'knife crime' within the broader functions of the state at moments of crisis.

This method of analysis recognises the centrality of 'culture' as a fluid and formative organising feature of the political and economic:

Culture is constitutive of the 'political' and the 'economic' just as the 'political' and the 'economic' are, in turn, constitutive of, and set the limits for, culture. They are mutually constitutive of one another – which is another way of saying that they are articulated with each other (Hall 1997:226).

Studying this 'articulation' of culture *with* the political and the economic is method of analysing how various communications, practices and meanings are connected and tied to each other. The method of analysis in the first stage of this thesis is to reorganise the existing documents of 'knife crime' articulation and do the work of *'making, unmaking, and remaking relations and contexts, of establishing new relations out of old relations or non-relations, of drawing lines and mapping conventions'* (Grossberg 2010:10).

This complex process of mapping 'knife crime' as an evolving interaction between the economic conjuncture and the articulation of culture through policing, policy, public opinion and politics is presented over the next three chapters. The interpretive nature of this task made the analysis



susceptible to subjectivity of the research intentions. There are, of course, scholarly rules that were adhered to such as *'getting facts straight, consulting all the relevant source materials, providing adequate references, giving reliable summaries of factual minutiae, quoting accurately, and ensuring that quotations are not wrenched out of context'* (Fairburn 1999:7). But beyond this there is also recognition that ideas of the past are always discourse dependent, predetermined by the ideas we can articulate.

As the only researcher on this project there was a risk of interpreting events of the past in a way that supports the theory I wanted to find. Estimating the extent of influence this had on my findings is difficult to assess but every effort was made to ensure the impact was minimal and increase the validity of my conclusions. As Fairburn (1999) describes:

[T]he ways we see the past are shaped by preconceptions and that as a result total objectivity is impossible to achieve. But that does not mean that we should not strive to be objective, nor that everything is entirely a matter of opinion... although it is impossible to know the 'truth' about the social past in any absolute sense, we can nonetheless under certain conditions make propositions about it which are reliable to varying degrees (Fairburn 1999:6).

During my investigation I maintained a conscious endeavour to view events objectively. Where possible I validate interpretations of events with analysis from multiple sources of document data. The application of relevant social theory throughout is also a means of ensuring the validity of my findings in the broader work on power, policing, race and crime. Compiling a variety of various perspectives on events, applying existing

theory, and remaining conscious of the bias in my intention, have all contributed to the production of 'as objective' an account of the historical development of 'knife crime' as possible. Whilst I acknowledge a political intention in the representation of this research I contest the notion that authors on topic 'knife crime' from less radical or positivist traditions have any less political intention, just that theirs are more closely aligned with dominant interests of a mainstream criminology.

### **Empirical Inquiry; a Critical Realism**

The second unit of research within this thesis is a phase of empirical research including twenty interviews with practitioners who were involved in 'knife crime work' and ten focus groups with young people in south London. The details of the processes of sampling, questioning and the analysis of this data will be discussed in this chapter, but first it must be acknowledged that these methods represent a break from the traditional constructionist approach of Hall et al. (1978). It may appear that including empirical research contradicts the radical positioning already established in this thesis, but for several reasons this has not been the case. The decision to include empirical data will be explained here, in recognition of the particular position of the researcher and the perceived limits of constructionism.

In my research as much as my professional practice, I have always been acutely aware of the very real harm and suffering surrounding the actions represented by the label 'knife crime'. As a youth practitioner with extended family in south London I am familiar with the daily anxiety of the safety of the young people I know. The abstracted approach of constructivism can seem out of touch with these urgent realities and lacking in contribution to practical policy reform. However, the limitations of the impulse to 'take crime seriously' were discussed in chapter one and I was conscious in the design of my methods not to contribute to a Left Realist rhetoric on 'knife crime' that prescribed positivist explanations for the actions of young people and advised proactive prevention strategies.

As a radical criminologist and sociologist, living and working in south London for many years, with an extensive practice background in youth and community work, I reached a methodological dilemma in my design. From discussions with practitioners and young people in my work I knew there were important stories to be told and I was increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of a constructionism that did not also include a process of *listening*. The sociological endeavour, to '*pay attention to the fragments, the voices and stories that are otherwise passed over or ignored*' (Back 2007:1), should be crucial in the reconstruction of the events that defined 'knife crime'.

If the intention of realist questioning is to acknowledge and make sense of

the *reality of crime* the problem isn't that this motivation is incorrect, but that it is incomplete; limited by the questions asked and to whom they are posed. Recent critique of left realism has made similar observations (Matthews 2014, Lea 2016). Arguing that the shift of the left to realist approaches was a reaction to a specific political moment in the 1980s (See chapter one) but that since then conditions have changed and the discipline has failed to adapt in response (Lea 2016). It is acknowledged that either the core concepts of Left Realism require updating or new themes need to emerge, but that there is a continued usefulness in its political intentions (Ibid.):

[E]xpanding criminalities are the accompaniment to increasing global social inequality, social polarisation and economic crisis supervised by increasingly authoritarian neoliberal security states... It is clear that a new consolidation of radical criminology, attuned to these developments, is a pressing task to which a reinvigorated Left Realism can make a major contribution (Lea 2016:54).

The contribution from Left Realism to the methodology of this project has been a renewed commitment to its democratic approach to community inclusion. An understanding that '*the 'reality' of crime could only be the outcome of a democratic debate in which all sections of the community participated: a 'critical community'*' (Lea 2016). Although far from the Left Realist 'square' methodology of insisting the four corners of offender, victim, criminal justice and community are included (Lea 1992), the methods of interviews and focus groups within this thesis draw attention to the communities affected by the realities of violence and the current

restrictions to democratic processes of political engagement. Reinvigorating methods of 'critical realism' (Bashkar 2008) this thesis uses qualitative interviews to document ontological community realities *through* the epistemology of a constructionist understanding of 'knife crime'.

Critical realist methodology in criminology responds to the perceived lessening of impact and direction in radical/critical criminology today (Matthews 2014) by positing that 'real' crime trends and shifts in criminality can be explained and critiqued through critical theory that is both abstract and concrete (Matthews 2014, Lea 2016). Whilst there is an argument that this was the original intention of left realism, before criminologists 'softened their critique' (Akers and Sellers 2008:260), there is consensus that we have reached a political moment where both realism and radicalism in criminology require methodological reinvention to respond to the current crisis of criminology under the dominance of global neoliberalism (Matthews 2014, Lea 2016).

In designing the methodology of this research there was an opportunity to use the critical epistemology of radical critique to approach the 'realities' of 'knife crime' from a new empirical position. To use interview methods to ask questions that were designed to reveal and make sense of the 'real' and on-going harm caused by the processes of the response to 'knife crime', as well as the acts of 'knife crime' themselves. Thus in recognition of the

urgency of pragmatism under advanced neoliberalism, qualitative interviews and focus group were conducted and analysed within this thesis.

Recognising that radical and realist understandings of criminality are usually considered inherently contradictory, this thesis challenges the assumed dichotomy of these approaches. The combination of these two often opposing traditions within this research is justified on two grounds; Firstly, the realism here is not intended to reinforce a criminal fact, but rather, to document the *real* implications and influences of the socially constructed label, 'knife crime'. Secondly, a constructionist understanding of 'knife crime' is fundamentally limited if it does not also acknowledge and incorporate the *experiences* and *realities* of those working within and around the label and its application. For this reason, the research includes empirical methods of research with young people and 'knife crime' related professionals.

### **Interviews with Professionals**

As a method of research the interview format is deceptively familiar. Journalism, talk shows and documentaries have standardised the interview as a source of information; *'The face-to-face interview is presented as enabling a 'special insight' into subjectivity, voice and lived experience'* (Rapley 2004:15) But as a research method the interview has been more

accurately understood as a co-production of knowledge, seen as '*social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (and prospective) **accounts or versions** of their past (or future) actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts*' (Rapley 2004:16). Here both interviewer and interviewee are equal actors in the interview, shaping how the event of the interview takes place, the data collected and the analysis conducted.

In acknowledgment of my own influence of the data produced and the findings of my interviews I recognise that my actions during the process were influenced by three core research intentions; Firstly, to understand how work with young people was impacted by the emergence of 'knife crime' as an organising feature of crime intervention and early intervention strategies from 2009 onwards. Secondly, to reposition practitioner's experiences and observations in the context of sociological changes occurring beneath the label. And lastly, to assess more broadly the validity and relevance of the conjunctural analysis by applying this new knowledge to the empirical data of lived experience. Whilst the choices in the process of interviewing inevitably contain a degree of bias towards these intentions, I could not have anticipated the specific complexities and interactions described by participants and the new knowledge produced through the compelling data and analysis of interviews in chapter six.

The research required a sample of practitioners with specific experience of the impact of 'knife crime' labelling on the organisation of youth services. I

wanted to speak to youth justice workers, contracted 'knife crime' prevention staff, or closely affiliated professionals that had been working in the sector during and after the first peak of moral panic in 2008. To overcome issues of accessibility to this select target sample I used methods of snowball sampling (Bryman 2008). In this approach *'the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others'* (Bryman 2008:184). This initial group was a convenience sample (Bryman 2008) made up of people I met through my previous work with the youth offending service who I knew would trust me and be willing to talk openly about their experiences.

A total number of twenty interviews were conducted. The depth and quality of the extensive interview data collected during these encounters, along with the consistency of accounts between participants, led me to the decision that this sample size was sufficient to draw reliable conclusions (Baker and Edwards 2012). In line with ethical research standards (Bryman 2008) each participant received an information sheet, provided informed consent and were anonymised during transcription. Particular ethical consideration was given to the sensitivity of the subjects being discussed with practitioners, making sure participants felt comfortable recalling events and reminding them of their right to withdraw consent at any point (Gray 2009).



The interview combined semi-structured and un-structured questions in a logical progression in order to create a friendly atmosphere and allow the participants to provide a broad and detailed text for analysis (Kvale 2007). Because of the sensitivity of the subject matter (Roulston et al. 2003) the schedule of questions was designed to build rapport (Leary 2004, Oppenheim 1992, Bryman 2008), beginning with easier and fact based questions such as; *'when did you begin working at the youth offending service?'*. Gradually developing to deeper questions of personal experience such as: *'do you feel like public opinion on 'knife crime' influenced your practice with young people?'*

Although there was a detailed schedule of questions, the interviews also maintained a flexible and responsive style, asking further, spontaneous, 'probing questions' in response to what were seen as 'significant replies' (Bryman 2008:196). This reflected the constructionist approach and the fundamental aim to explore subjective understandings of 'knife crime' by allowing participants to expand on particular answers and divert the discussion into new and unknown areas. Whilst these topics were not originally included on the schedule they ultimately helped towards meeting the research objective and were thus important to include (Bryman 2008, Gray 2009). All interviews were audio recorded with participant consent and a transcription of the interaction was later provided for their approval. This data was later coded and analysed along

side the transcripts of the focus groups with young people, using methods described later in this chapter.

### **Focus Groups with Young People in South London**

The inclusion of young people in this second stage of the research was not a decision taken lightly. For a long time I grappled with conflicting ideas of to what extent young people should be part of this research. On the one hand, it was the intention of the project to shift attention from the acts of young people, to the response to these acts, and empirical data from young people risked undermining this. On the other hand, young people represent the group most directly and physically impacted by the response to violence through the label 'knife crime' and as such their experiences were crucial to our understanding of its impact.

With great thought to how the voices of young people could be incorporated within this research without contributing to the research of violence or criminality as 'youth centred' I developed methods that were more 'democratic' (Torrance 2012, Denzin and Lincoln 2008), designing an approach that researched 'with', not 'on', young people (Cahill 2007). The intention of research with young people was not to answer the 'why' questions, as had been the previous framework for 'knife crime' research, but the 'how' questions; How had the response to criminality labelled as 'knife crime' impacted on their daily lives?

However, as the language of separating 'knife crime acts' from the 'knife crime response' is currently absent, the young participants first need to be 'brought in' to the understanding developed in this first stage of this thesis. This led to the development of participatory research practices (Cahill 2007), using focus group research methods to present the findings of conjunctural analysis to groups of young people and document their responses and feedback to my findings.

As a method first used for conducting market research in the 1950s and later adapted for use by social scientists (Kitzinger 1994), focus groups are a well-established method of qualitative research:

Focus groups are group discussions organised to explore a specific set of issues... the group is 'focused' in the sense that it involves some kind of collective activity... Crucially, focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interviews by 'the explicit use of the group interaction' as research data (Kitzinger 1994:103).

In this research the collective activity that defined the focus group was a PowerPoint presentation delivered by myself to the group. Using images, text and diagrams the presentation activity had three core objectives for this communication: i) To understand the term 'knife crime' as a subjective label, ii) to introduce the idea of a construction of 'Black criminality' as crisis management using local histories as examples, iii) to consider various aspects of the response to 'knife crime' that they may have had

contact with. For example; stop and search, school assemblies, knife arches etc.

After arriving at the location of the focus group and setting up the presentation the young participants would often appear disinterested and disengaged with the research topic at this point (a pattern reflected on in more detail in the analysis of chapter six). As an icebreaker and to introduce a critical understanding of 'knife crime' as a subjective label the presentation began with an interactive quiz. I would describe a variety of incidents and situation and the young people would guess if they thought it would be included in police records as a 'knife enabled offence'.

I would begin with straight-forward and assumed 'knife crime' contexts such as 'a sixteen year old is found to be in possession of a penknife - would this be considered a 'knife crime' in police recorded data?' The response invariably, "of course!" Then gradually the contexts would become more questionable; 'A forty year old woman with a broken bottle in a bar fight...', 'A domestic violence incident with a pair of scissors...'. Their responses would become livelier as they debated their answers amongst the group. The quiz would finish with a summary that all of the incidents described could be included in police 'knife crime' data but when the data is reported in the press a very specific context and demographic is represented. At this point the PowerPoint showed a range of sensationalist

'knife crime' newspaper headlines, some referring to young people as 'thugs'.

Using data from my research and the findings of *The Guardian's* (Younge 2018) *Beyond the Blade* news analysis the presentation introduced the idea that 'knife crime' is a subjective label applied to young Black boys in inner-city areas. Following this, the presentation presented images from the protests and uprisings of the 1970s and 1980s in London to demonstrate that 'knife crime' is not the first label to be used in this way. I would explain how the 'sus law' was used in previous decades and discuss its similarities to the use of 'Section 60 searches', a category of stop and search most groups were already familiar with. Finally, the presentation finished by looking at the variety of criminal justice responses to 'knife crime', including images of knife arches at schools, youth incarceration rates for knife offences, and knife crime prevention projects.

After this group activity the group interaction that followed produced the research data (Kitzinger 1994). As much as possible I wanted the group to lead on the topics of discussion and responses but to increase standardisation I had three set conversation prompts that were used during focus group when need. These were:

1. What did you find most interesting during the presentation?
2. Considering local histories of racism, policing and resistance; What (if anything) do you think is different now compared to then?

3. Do you think there are any ways that the 'knife crime' label has impacted on you?

Aware of the inherent power dynamic between researcher and participant (Riley, Schouten and Cahill 2003), and the increased intensity of power dynamic between adult researcher and younger participant (Cahill 2007), the group context of young people's participation was very important. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable and to participate with democratic control of the interaction. For this reason I arranged the focus groups with groups of young people that were already familiar with one another. To increase validity through a variety of participants and experiences, five of the focus groups were conducted in mainstream settings (Sixth-form colleges and schools) whilst the other five were conducted in open access settings (youth clubs). All participants were between the ages of 16 and 20 and living in south London. This provided continuity between the interviewed practitioners who had all worked in the same areas of London that the young participants had experiences of.

Locating the focus groups in schools and youth centres where young people were familiar with having group discussions seemed to encourage openness and engagement. During the focus groups it was clear that the presentation content was not what they had expected from the 'knife crime' session advertised. For this reason I gave young people an explicit opportunity to remove consent at the end of the presentation and before

the group discussion began, given that at this point they were much better informed of what the research was about. I am extremely grateful for the generosity of young people who gave both their time and consideration during this stage of the research. Nearly all of the participants that observed the presentation went on to consent to be included in the research and their candid discussions proved to be an invaluable source of data and contextualisation within this thesis.

### **Thematic and Discourse Analysis**

Once the interview and focus group research had been transcribed this data was analysed through pragmatic steps of thematic and discourse analysis. Thematic analysis is a 'method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79) and was selected as a method in this research due to the unstructured questioning, broad discussion topics and open responses in the interviews and focus groups. Through multiple levels of fluid coding and a constant process of revision thematic analysis identified significant categories within the data that relate to the research objectives (Bryman 2012). These themes, drawn across and between the data from various participants, inform the theoretical understandings presented in the discussion of this stage of the research in Chapter Six.

The interview data in initial stages of coding revealed several dominant core themes that were then further coded into multiple sub-themes (Aronson 1995). For example, when questioning practitioners about the changing experiences of young people they worked with throughout the moral panic of 'knife crime' one of the reoccurring themes within interviews was '*fragmentation of communities*'. Within this broad theme were specific patterns of subthemes such as; 'gentrification', 'generational shifts', and 'changing informal markets'.

The themes identified in both the interviews and focus groups have been organised into a logical argument-led structure and are presented in Chapter Six, providing a discussion of the meaning and inferences drawn from this stage of the research. The discussions of the findings are framed through existing theory, providing supporting evidence and context for the propositions made. Using extracts of interactions from during the empirical process, I used methods of discourse analysis in order to analyse how language 'is actually used' (Griffin 2013:93) during the communication of 'knife crime'.

Discourse analysis recognises that language and the way it is used is not a neutral tool of communication (Ibid.), but rather, 'a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)' (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:1). Using this method as 'an explanatory critique' (Fairclough 2001: 235, 236) this research was concerned with how



the meaning of 'knife crime' is inscribed through its use and the how the lexicon of the label produces and reproduces particular frameworks of understanding.

Discourse analysis was used prominently when considering the data produced with young people, as focus groups enable researchers to '*observe how language and forms of speech may facilitate or inhibit communication*' (kitzinger 1994:115). Listening to young people discuss 'knife crime' amongst themselves in response to the presentation, both as crime and a response to crime, provided the opportunity to consider to what extent the label impacts on their communications of lived realities.

Whilst discourse analysis provides a framework for understanding how language creates subjective meaning, the approach within this thesis is more accurately described as critical discourse analysis (CDA), a method defined by 'the explicit sociopolitical stance' (Van Dijk 1993:249) of the analyst. This form of discourse analysis is characterised by its focus on how relations of power are maintained through the 'cognitive interface' of discourse models. It is the argument of CDA that; '*in order to relate discourse and society, and hence discourse and the reproduction of dominance and in- equality, we need to examine in detail the role of social representations in the minds of social actors*' (Van Dijk 1993:251). Adopting this approach this research considers the analysis of discourse as indicative

of how the individual and the social relate and reproduce at the micro and macro levels of social structure.

Considering the language and communicative patterns in the representation of 'knife crime' during focus groups with young people, Chapter Six presents critical analysis of the enactment of power in 'knife crime' discourse. In particular, the micro interpretations of interpersonal violence are analysed as discourses that protect and maintain the interests of macro neoliberal social structures. Analysis of the language and discourse through which 'knife crime' is communicated intends to reveal the role of the crime label in the subtle enactment of dominance and management within this conjuncture. Recognising that:

'Besides the elementary recourse to force to directly control action (as in police violence against demonstrators...), modern and often more effective power is mostly cognitive, and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation, among other strategic ways to change the mind of others in ones own interests. It is at this crucial point where discourse and critical discourse analysis come in: managing the mind of others is essentially a function of text and talk' (Van Dijk 1993:254).

In this phase of the research the intentions are not only to understand the empirical realities obscured by the law and order response to 'knife crime', but also to critically analyse 'knife crime' as a discursive strategy that enacts subtle social control in contemporary use. Recognising that in addition to the justification for direct control through exceptional policing, 'knife crime' as a cognitive framework also provides an indirect but powerful discursive manipulation. It is in these routine and everyday

reproductions and enactments of dominant discourse that critical and radical attention is needed (Fairclough 1985). Techniques of CDA are fitting for this task as a method of identifying the '*discursive strategies that legitimate control, or otherwise naturalize the social order, and especially relations of inequality*' (Van Dijk 1993:254).

As Chapters Three, Four and Five detail the history of the label as a subjective representation of crime that has never been factually defined, the understanding developed in Chapter Six crucially considers the meaning of 'knife crime' as conveyed through discursive use. This analysis of the 'fixing' of meaning through use by practitioners and young people is extended in Chapter Seven where the contemporary use of the term 'knife crime' is researched through online content analysis.

### **Content Analysis and Online Social Networks**

The final research component of this case study is presented in chapter seven using the analytical tools of content analysis to interpret data sourced from the online social network, Twitter. The intention of this phase of the study was to answer the research questions; What are the most frequent contexts in which the phrase 'knife crime' is used in contemporary online discourse? And what meaning is communicated in popular and everyday use of the term? Through organising and classifying the content of large quantities of texts into categories of similar or

common meanings (Weber 1990), content analysis enabled intense examination of texts to meet these objectives, producing a representation of both explicit and inferred (Hsieh and Shannon 2005) 'knife crime' communication.

As an analysis of public comment and opinion this stage of the research is a contemporary adaptation of the 'letters to the editor' methods used to analyse public opinion In *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978). Although subject to editorial printing decisions, for Hall et al. (1978) the letters provided evidence of reader's opinions 'in their least mediated form' (Hall 1978:120). The format of the submitted opinion enabled a public platform for viewpoints on controversial issues to surface and although these are not a representation of the public as a whole, they act as signposts to particular opinions that would otherwise not be publicly expressed:

A 'letter to the editor' marks an entry into the public arena: letters are public communications, coloured by 'public motives'. Their intention is not simply to tell the editor what they think, but to shape policy, influence opinion, swing the course of events, defend interests, advance causes. They occupy a mid-way position between the 'official statement' and the private communication; they are public communications. Whoever writes a letter to the editor means to cash, publicly, a position, a status or an experience. (Hall 1978:121).

Since the 1970s the spaces for public interaction with news and current affairs have changed dramatically. The growth of the Internet since the 1990s and the variety of digital communications and social media technology now available has changed the landscape of public interaction with crime news irrevocably. The 'letter to the editor' is no longer the

unique sounding board it once was, but in its place there is vast amount of easily accessible digital public comment and opinion available for analysis. For this reason, in Chapter Seven of this thesis, I undertake a process of analysing public communications that include the phrase 'knife crime' on Twitter using a bounded dataset.

The decision to use Twitter as a source of data despite its limitations was made for several reasons. Firstly, the scale and popularity of information sharing on Twitter makes it a fitting choice of platform for analysing contemporary communication of 'knife crime'. As of 2012 Twitter had over 500 million registered users producing over 340 million tweets daily (Zimmer and Proferes 2013) and the mixture of mundane and meaningful posts would ensure a variety of contexts and users in the data sample. It is also a platform that has become widely recognised for its influential impact on culture and politics and is increasingly used by researchers as '*a valuable resource for tapping into the zeitgeist of the internet, its users, and often beyond*' (Zimmer and Proferes 2013:250). The short length of Twitter posts (280 characters) also enabled the processing of a large sample of tweets, increasing the amount of data I was able to use and increasing the reliability of my results.

Unlike the 'letters to editors' the interaction between individuals, corporations and institutions constitutes a communication network that is constantly responding and reacting to events in real-time. Within this

network it was possible to analyse 'knife crime' not only as a topic for public opinion, but also as an organising feature that produces connections of cognitive frameworks that have intentions beyond the sharing of concern over crime rates. Perhaps the most explicit of these is the political commentary that accompanies 'knife crime tweets', but chapter seven also considers the representation of 'knife crime' content that serves commercial purposes; advertising services, business promotion, publicising entertainment and creative industries, etc. By analysing the categories of these contributions, and using text and image examples within the discussion, chapter seven considers the inferences of that can be drawn from the results of this content analysis.

As an unobtrusive method that is able to process large quantities of data with relative ease, content analysis is '*a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding*' (Stemler 2001:80). To produce reliable results and increase validity it was important to identify the coding rules, defining clear boundaries for the analysis and the processes of categorisation. In this research, all tweets during the month of March 2018 that contained the exact phrase 'knife crime' were included in the analysis. The reasons for this specific boundary, along with the classification rules used during coding, are discussed in detail in Chapter Seven - providing a depth of context to the design of this stage of the research.

More than just recording the frequency of particular content, the methods of content analysis used within this thesis are also concerned with 'the characteristics of language as communication' (Fairclough 2001:278); incorporating methods of critical discourse analysis as defined above. Whilst every effort was made to ensure analytic consistency, there is still a risk of researcher bias in the process of categorisation (Stemler 2001). There were also limitations of representation and a lack of generalizability from using an online sample. Although no longer susceptible to the bias of the editor's publication (Hall *et al.* 1978), the comments posted about 'knife crime' on Twitter are more likely to come from individuals who have an aptitude for technology and a desire to engage in public commentary on crime. It is acknowledged that these characteristics could have disproportionately impacted on the representation of particular categories of content identified in this research, but the volume and range of data easily accessible and searchable made this a rich site for communication analysis.

## **Conclusion**

Providing a new interpretation of secondary document evidence of the history of the label, triangulated with first hand empirical data and online content analysis, the methodology of this thesis enables an intervention of the response that is currently defined as 'knife crime'. The case for social constructivist methodologies and conjunctural analysis has been argued

here, along with a critical account of this approach's limitations and tensions. Positioning the researcher within the context of this work the decision to include practitioners and young people has been discussed as a reinvigoration of both radical and realist approaches.

Bringing together three distinct methodological approaches through which to analyse the same social phenomenon, the overall method of this project is best described as a qualitative, instructional, case study analysis. The first unit of this analysis is represented in the following three chapters that retrace the historical development of the crime category 'knife crime' through significant stages of chronological interactions. The data used in this phase of the research is secondary document and archives, particularly news reports, legislation and policy documents, through which the mobilisation and articulation of 'knife crime' within this conjuncture is analysed and represented.

The second unit of analysis includes the thematic analysis of first hand interview and focus group data, produced with practitioners and young people. Critical discourse analysis was also applied to data during this stage to provide in-depth analysis of language and communication as a framework through which 'knife crime' constructs meaning. The discussions of the results of this empirical research are presented in Chapter Six and present alternative realities based on the empirical experiences of communities and contemporary young people.



The final unit of the case study presents the results from a content analysis of 'knife crime' communication within one month on Twitter. Categorising content and quantifying frequency was one part of this analysis, but it also included critical discourse analysis of both text and images. Whilst the historical accounts of 'knife crime's development as a term of reference provide a critique of its authenticity and status as 'fact', it is this contemporary analysis of online communication that is able to reveal what *use* and *meaning* the phrase has within public discourse and commentary today.

By diverting from the abstraction of the constructionist approach to include empirical inquiry, the methodologies of this project confront dilemmas of both radicalism and realism in contemporary criminological research. The triangulation of analysis from different approaches within this case study presents a critical realist method, accounting for both the social construction of the phenomenon and the democratic inclusion of communities and young people. It is hoped that these unique methodologies provide a significant break from previous approaches, and present new understandings of the processes through which the label 'knife crime' was established and of the social consequences of its authoritative representation.

**Chapter Three.**  
**Guns, Gangs and Knives;**  
**Mobilised Policing and the ‘MacPherson Effect’**

## **Introduction**

This chapter is the first in a trilogy that will retrace the genesis of the label 'knife crime' over three distinct phases as defined by this research. In this 'pre-public' stage of the history of 'knife crime' the political and cultural context of an institutional mobilisation towards a new category of crime will be depicted. It will be argued that political shifts and cultural events at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were a catalyst for further racialisation in youth crime management and that the label 'knife crime' can be seen product of these particular interactions.

The shift towards the militarisation of policing, along with an increase in covert surveillance and pre-emptive and pro-active tactics, will be considered in relation to new racialised mechanics of intervention; such as the 'Gangs Matrix' and 'Trident Gang Crime Command'. This chapter will also consider how the strained balance of authoritarianism under New Labour is ultimately threatened by the timely publishing of the MacPherson report into the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence.

The disruption to the processes of racialisation caused by the publishing of the MacPherson Report will be discussed here, looking closely at the first official uses of the phrase 'knife crime' in the aftermath of the report and it's criticisms of stop and search. These first representations of 'knife crime' as a category of crime in England and Wales highlight the label's

constitutive interaction with stop and search and its inherent defence of proactive policing.

In chapter one of this thesis the historic construction of 'Black criminality' in the UK was considered in relation to *Policing the Crisis* (Hall *et al.* 1978). However, to understand the pre-public mobilisation towards a racially defined label it is important to recognise the particular forms of racialisation that are active and popular when this distinct crime category emerges. This chapter begins with an analysis of the ideology of New Labour's democratic authoritarianism and the impact of its inherent contradictions on ideas of race and 'race relations' at the turn of the century.

### **The dualism of New Labour; Racialisation in the Third Way**

Racialisation has been defined as '*the processes by which racial meanings are attached to particular issues - often treated as social problems - and with the manner in which race appears to be a, or often the, key factor in the ways they are defined and understood*' (Murji and Solomos 2005:3). In the case of 'knife crime' this project is concerned with the processes that came to understand violence between young people as racialised and how race became the key factor in the way interpersonal violence with knives was defined and understood.

The focus on processes of race-making and the construction of racial difference within racialisation recognises that these relations are not a static; *'it involves change and ongoing practices that attach racial meanings to people'* (Gonzalez-Sobrinio and Goss 2018:507). Within this approach it is understood that the interactions that defined 'mugging' as a 'Black crime' in the 1970's (Hall et al. 1978) were specific to their particular conjuncture and the processes of re-making 'race' must adapt and evolve to continue the work of racialisation in new ideological terrains. To understand how 'knife crime' became so proficient at this task, the distinct dualism of New Labour ideologies that define the era of the label's inception need to be closely considered.

From the landslide New Labour victory in 1997, through to the re-election of Tony Blair and the start of the new millennium, this is a particularly difficult conjuncture to politically 'pin down'. The political shift referred to by New Labour as 'the third way' defined a new centre ground in British politics from 1997 onwards, merging policies from both the left and the right. Crucially there was renewed commitment to Thatcher's neo-liberal project, but now it was repackaged as a 'revolutionary', socially democratic modernisation (Hall 2003). The tension in this contradiction would be formative, not only in the inventive methods of spin required, but also in the production of consent for the continuing conjuncture.

New Labour introduced a political strategy that Hall (2003) described as the *double shuffle*:

[I]t combines economic neo-liberalism with a commitment to 'active government'... New Labour is a hybrid regime, composed of two strands. However, one strand – the neo-liberal – is in the dominant position. The other strand – the social democratic – is subordinate (Hall 2003:19).

The subaltern programme makes the dominant project possible, not just by securing votes during elections, but also by constantly translating the needs of corporate capital as common-sense societal 'reforms' that are in the benefit of all. Thus the relationship between the two sides of New Labour is in constant flux, adapting to both the needs of the neoliberal economy and public sensibilities – a double shuffle.

During this time spin is not just surface level gloss but performed a much deeper function of 'rhetorical sleight-of-hand' (Hall 2003:23), able to represent the interests of global, corporate capital and the rich in ways that maintained popular consent and the support of the less-well-off (Ibid.). This was a hegemonic shift towards a managerial authoritarianism; a marketization ideology that transformed clients into consumers under the spin of modernisation, whilst simultaneously opening all doors to private investment in the public sector without resistance (Hall 2003).

Policies during this time enabled processes of devolution, passing responsibility to local authorities and onto communities themselves. This worked to distance government from the social consequences of

neoliberalism. Under New Labour the economic is 'disowned'...*the responsibility for progress is increasingly offloaded on to individuals, communities, cities or regions... 'individuals' become new objects within regimes of governmentality*' (Back et al. 2002:448). Within this framework, the visibility of localised responsibility was reinforced by increased language of 'civilised' behaviour (Back et al. 2002); If you weren't feeling the benefits of neoliberalism locally, you just weren't doing it right.

These 'two faces' of New Labour are also prominent in their contradictory race and immigration policies during this period. On the one hand there is a celebration of 'multiculturalism' and tolerance of difference as a signifier of globalisation and modernity; 'Race relations' became a new British concern and exposing and combatting institutionalised racism was on the agenda for the first time (Back et al. 2002). On the other hand, there is a renewed commitment to a nationalistic identity based on a protected 'Britishness', characterised by immigration control and assimilation rhetoric:

[A]t the heart of what has become the New Labour project lies an uncertainty about the challenge contemporary multiculturalism poses to the very constitution of the polity of the nation... ambivalence around the melancholic desire for an imperial past sits alongside the contradictions that surface in both liberal models of social inclusion and the attempt to define a social democratic model of national economic growth in a globalised economy (Back et al. :447).

Characterising this moment is a complex task, as New Labour flips between evoking the past and embracing the future; Blair is 'standing at

the threshold of the new century looking both ways at once' (Back et al. 2002:453). New Labour wants it both ways, oscillating between multicultural democracy and imperialist nationalism. Within this dualism racialisation must take on innovative forms, able to simultaneously evoke a nostalgic past and a progressive future in the construction of racial difference and the processing of social issues through race.

The ways in which 'knife crime' came to perform this task so efficiently will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters. Firstly however, the alignment of interests that led to the making of the label will be outlined below with particular attention to policing and enforcement as key initiators of a mobilisation towards 'knife enabled offences' at the beginning of the 2000's. Policing reforms and the slow creep of militarisation in UK policing present new arenas and debates in the public discourse on crime. These will be discussed below in relation to the substantial reforms in youth policy and youth justice that ran parallel to an increasing authoritarianism.

### **Institutionalisation of Youth Deviance**

Replicating the successes of Clinton's Democratic Party in the 1993 US election, '*Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime*' was one of New Labour's election sound bites in 1997. Once elected New Labour published the '*No More Excuses*' White Paper (Home Office 1997), policy reform that



epitomised the party's dual ethos of individual responsibility and government intervention. In this reform the government detailed a complete youth crime policy and policing overhaul; radical and systemic changes to the youth justice system and policing all with the core aim of 'tackling youth violence' with tough measures.

In a preface to the white paper the then home secretary Jack Straw described the changes thus:

Today's young offenders can too easily become tomorrow's hardened criminals. As a society we do ourselves no favours by failing to break the link between juvenile crime and disorder and the serial burglar of the future... An excuse culture has developed within the youth justice system... implying that they cannot help their behaviour because of their social circumstances... we will refocus resources and the talents of professionals on nipping offending in the bud, to prevent crime from becoming a way of life for so many young people. (Home Office 1997)

The mobilisation towards youth surveillance and control, from the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) through to the Police Reform Act (2002), extended the capacity of the state to intervene and increased the range of behaviours considered criminal during this period. Beyond election rhetoric, New Labour's reinvigorated law and order policies directly impacted on the daily realities of young people. Legislative changes in The Crime and Disorder Act (1998), The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act (1999) and The Powers of the Criminal Courts (sentencing) Act (2000), extend the powers of surveillance and early intervention. *Doli Incapax* is removed in 1998, a law that exempted those between the ages of ten and fourteen from

criminal responsibility. Electronic monitoring and pre-emptive tracking through 'tagging' of young people becomes legal, along with extended referral order for 'pre-criminal' acts through the introduction of 'Anti-social Behaviour Orders' (ASBOs).

The emphasis on 'pre-criminal' behaviour and the increasing ease of issue and proliferation of ASBOs during this period shifts the direction of policing, the justice system and youth services towards a younger and broader sample of children. In addition to this, the devolution of power to local authorities, youth offending services and housing associations increases the number of institutions involved in the management of youth behaviours and movement. The introduction of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) in 2000 and the annual National Policing Plan in 2002 links youth services, youth justice, community monitoring and policing into a multi-agency network with cross-institutional strategies to 'deal with' young people. A caution for delinquent behaviour was no longer a transient event during maturity. It now initiated a coordinated system of response that would integrate a child into the institutional mechanisms of intervention.

Referral orders with compulsory attendance drastically increased the contact time between children and the corrective institutions. With minimum orders of two years for an ASBO such interactions with state institutions could dominate a teenager's formative years. To put this in

perspective, the number of ASBOs issued in England and Wales increased from 104 in 1999 up to 4,122 in 2005 (Berman 2009). A total of 24,324 ASBOs were issued between 2000 and 2013. Around 58% of these ASBOs were breached at least once and of those breaches 53% received immediate custodial sentence (Home Office 2014). That is, 7503 custodial sentences (an average of five months in length) for behaviours that prior to 1997 may have fallen below the level that required police or criminal justice intervention. The assertion was that *something had to be done* to prevent the connection between anti-social behaviour and crime, but in reality 'rather than breaking links, New Labour was making them' (Squires and Stephen 2005:33).

Concern over youth delinquency and the construction of particular sub-groups of youths as 'criminal Other' has been a consistent feature of modern society. *'there has been a marked and recurring tendency to demonise certain categories of young people... This is especially so in respect of the working class youth and of ethnic minorities'* (Squires and Stephen 2005:29). But the introduction of ASBOs and referral orders, along with the removal of *Doli Incapax* for very young adolescents, reflects a political shift in the conceptualisation of the transient status of young delinquency. Unlike the home office report of 1988 that found; '[m]ost young offenders grow out of crime as they become more mature and responsible' (Home Office 1988:6, para.2.15 quoted in Squires and Stephen 2005:31), the New Labour of 1997 claimed 'today's young offenders can easily become

tomorrow's hardened criminals' (Home Office 1997a quoted in Squires and Stephen 2005:32).

This intensification of youth crime policy can be seen to reconcile the contradictions of New Labour's dual strategy, an arena in which societal anxieties over youth provide a popular individualistic authoritarianism combined with proactive state interventions. At a pragmatic level young people are an advantageous subject group to be acted upon; they can't vote, are a relatively voiceless group politically, and remain a reliable source of emotive concern amongst the electorate. But the symbolic potential of 'youth crime' in the hegemonic management of neoliberalism is exemplified in the 'no excuses' reform.

On the one hand the hardening of state response to disorder in the streets appeals to a colonial nationalism of the past; an imperialist imagination of 'Britishness' as a civilising force. On the other, it appeals to the ideology of modernisation; a youth justice reform that increases efficiency and coordinates services in a more productive way. Beyond this, the devolution of youth justice to local authorities and YOTs acted to distance government from economic accountability whilst increasing the capacity for localised authoritarianism and prolonged institutionalised intervention.

These reforms represent a significant shift in crime prevention in England and Wales. New Labour boasts intervention based on assessment and

scrutiny rather than proof of guilt, pre-empting crime by targeting the 'predictable criminal'. Now highly concerned with those 'nearly criminals' to be 'nipped in the bud' crime prevention is increasingly concerned with intelligence and surveillance, followed by intense and robust deterrent interventions. The power of the police to intervene proactively with brutal force is also extended throughout this period, justified through weaponised and racialised 'gang speech'.

### **Gangs, Guns and Total Policing**

The years that precede the emergence of the 'knife crime' label witness a creeping shift towards an increasingly militarised police service. The gradual extension of police powers in the 1990's accompanies a rise in the use of covert operations, surveillance and robust incapacitation in the policing of 'suspect communities' (Fekete 2013:72). Combining 'pre-emptive policing' with 'enforcement-led wars' the authoritarianism of UK police increasingly reflects the US model of 'total policing', 'zero tolerance' and 'escalating force' during this period (Ibid.).

Unlike the majority of police forces globally, the UK police are traditionally routinely *unarmed* (Squires and Kennison 2010:16). Arguments in favour of routinely arming British police have gradually increased in recent decades, reflecting concern over increased risk to police safety and the numbers of police killed while on duty (Squires and Kennison 2010:97). However, the

1990's saw growing defence for the need of lethal weapons by police particularly in inner cities (Squires and Kennison 2010:107,108). Within these discussions arguments can be seen to draw heavily on rhetoric of violence as culture, linking weaponisation and gangs with race in the urban context.

In 1993 and 1994 neighbourhoods in South London, Manchester and Liverpool began to gain a media propelled reputation for drug and gang related gun crime (Squires and Kennison 2010:108). Accompanied by racialised discourse of 'wild inner-city areas' and 'yardie-style gangsterism', growing anxiety over guns increasingly justified the use of armed police units and specialist operations against gangs (Squires and Kennison 2010:107,108).

Anxieties over an emergent 'gun culture' are particularly significant during this 'pre-knife crime' moment. The weaponisation of criminality along side 'cultural' explanations has many similarities in the case of both knives and guns. The ill defined notion that the UK had a new and evolving 'gun culture' in the 1990's has:

been used to convey a wide array of presumptions, preoccupations and prejudices... often drawing upon so-called 'lifestyle choices' rather than the socio-economic and 'environmental' influences more familiar to traditional criminology (squires and Kennison 2010:122).

The debates surrounding 'gun culture' have also been seen to centre on the significance of race and the symbolic value of firearms as fashion (Hales, Lewis and Silverstone 2006), a racialised discourse on music genres and style that is continued in discussions of an emergent 'knife culture' in the 2000's (Weathers 2005, 'Cameron Attacks...' 2006, UKPOL 2007).

Whilst criminal gangs have been a feature of criminological concern in urban sociology since the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Thrasher 1926), in the years leading up to the emergence of 'knife crime' there is a distinct re-imagining of the notion of a UK 'gang' that becomes influential in policy making at this time (Alexander 2000). Research continues to question the definition of a 'gang' in the UK context (Hallsworth and Young 2004, Pitts 2007, Smithson, Ralphs and Williams 2012, Williams 2015, Nijjar 2018) with particular attention to the notion of 'gangs' as a mythologizing rhetoric that imports vivid representations of criminality from America (Alexander 2008).

The racialisation of 'gangs' as a discursive tool in the explanation of violence and justification of proactive policing is a process that has been well documented in academic research (Alexander 2000, Alexander 2008, Fekete 2012, Williams 2015, Williams and Clarke 2016). The label 'gangs' itself has been likened to the moral panic of 'mugging' with particular attention to the extension of policing powers authorised in its response (Williams 2015). One such development in the authorisation of policing

powers that occurs in the years preceding the 'knife crime' label is the launch of Operation Trident in 1996.

Originally a specialist police intelligence unit in response to rising gun violence in London in the 1990's, Trident re-launched in July 2000 tasked specifically with reducing so called 'Black on Black' gun crime in London (Squires and Kennison 2010:118). Along with community consultancy, partnership work and public advertising campaigns, a key feature of specialist gang units such as Trident has been the development of gang-databases and the growing capacity of intelligence building and its use to inform policing and enforcement activity (Williams 2015:28). The application of the 'gang' label insinuates high risk and this 'intensifies levels of surveillance and justifies more stringent forms of intervention and monitoring' (Smithson et al. 2012).

Alongside this extension and intensification of policing powers, attention to 'gangs' has increased racialisation in targeted interventions. A recent report by Amnesty International (2018) into the use of the 'Gangs Matrix', a database system of measuring gang association used by the Met Police and its partner agencies since 2012, described it as form of digital profiling:

Many of the indicators used by the Metropolitan Police to identify 'gang members' simply reflect elements of urban youth culture and identity that have nothing to do with serious crime. This conflation of elements of urban youth culture with violent offending is heavily racialised. The result is that the matrix has taken on the form of digital profiling; 78 per cent of individuals on the Gangs Matrix are black, a number which is disproportionate both to the black



population of London (13 per cent of the whole) and the percentage of black people among those identified by the police as responsible for serious youth violence in London (27 per cent) (Amnesty International 2018:3).

In summary, in the years preceding the emergence of 'knife crime' the policing climate in the UK is increasingly robust and proactive. Specialist units were already mobilising towards notions of a gun and gang culture, with rhetoric and administration that was both implicitly and explicitly racialised. The growing authorisation of armed first response units, 'hard stops' and the use of lethal force is notable at the turn of the Century. Markedly, in the high profile police killings of several members of public; James Ashley (1998), Harry Stanley (1999) and Derek Bennet (2001), amongst others.

This increasingly militarised response to a perceived 'gun/gang culture' is a form of racialisation that will be continued through a mobilisation towards 'knife crime' in the new millennium. However, a cultural event in 1999 causes a significant disruption to the processes of 'race making' and the authority of proactive policing at this time. The publishing of the long awaited MacPherson Report (MacPherson 1999) into the murder of Stephen Lawrence (in 1993) brings racial disproportionality in policing under public scrutiny; becoming the first official acknowledgement of 'institutional racism' in the Met Police. The findings of this report and its political aftermath suggest the early articulation of a 'knife crime' problem

in the early 2000's was a timely development. The analysis of these events and the first representations of 'knife crime' in the printed press will be discussed here, presenting an argument of interacting influences at this time.

### **"Institutionally Racist"; A Challenge to Authoritarian Policing**

Six years after Stephen Lawrence was murdered by a group of White extremists in South London, New Labour answers the public's demand for a full-scale inquiry. It was one of the promises of the 1997 election and upon their victory they set about commissioning the estimated £3million report, selecting Sir William Macpherson as the leading Judge. In 1999 MacPherson publishes the inquiry that will change the racial politics of British policing forever.

The report is presented in two parts. The first part was a meticulous and detailed scrutiny of the events of the night, the actions of first responders and the debacle of the police investigation that followed. The second part was a consultation around the country, in Manchester, Bradford, Bristol, and Birmingham as well as London:

[T]he objective was to gather information and opinions from a broad cross-section of people to inform the recommendations which we would ultimately make, and to "take the temperature" of the community and of the Police and other agencies (MacPherson 1999: para 45.5).

It was this part of the inquiry that performed the crucial task of linking up the Lawrence case with the shared experiences of police racism and the failures of the justice system across the UK. It was this that enabled the report to conclude the following key points.

Firstly, the damning summary of the Stephen Lawrence case that unequivocally concludes the *'investigation was marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers'* (MacPherson 1999:para 46.1). The phrase 'intuitively racist' will become synonymous with the MacPherson report in the years to follow. The inquiry defines the term as:

[T]he collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (MacPherson 1999:para 6.34).

Secondly, the consultation around the country highlights the consistency of racism experienced in police stop and searches. In its conclusion the report gives specific recommendation; *'It is essential to obtain a true picture of the interactions between the police and minority ethnic communities in this context. All "stops" need to be recorded, and related self-defined "ethnic data" compiled'* (MacPherson 1999: para 46.31).

The report's criticism of stop and search, combined with the assertion of institutional racism within the police service, is a significant cultural

moment. The evidence and recommendations of the Macpherson report were material realities but beyond this there was a strong sense of symbolic retribution; the police were on the stand charged with racism and they were found guilty. *'it represented the Establishment's symbolic recognition that widespread racism in the organization existed'* (Henry and Smith 2007:80). In effect it validated the experiences that had been expressed by Black people in the UK for decades.

It was a historic recognition of racism in British politics, 'not only with racism's violent and hateful face but also its more genteel institutional quality' (Back 2010:457). Politically this exposure of inequality was inline with New Labour's image of a radical modernising government. Racism was now unfashionable and the coverage of the inquiry, along with the New Labour promotion of multiculturalism, would ensure that personal acts of overt racism were no longer publicly acceptable (Sayeed 2017:108).

Beneath the political spin however, New Labour's neoliberal economy simultaneously reinforced the inequality of which institutional racism is a constitutive feature. *'It seemed that the country had moved into a bright and shining era of liberal tolerance, and that obscured the survival of deep institutional racism. Britain was still racist, but in a modern way'* (Sayeed 2017:114). In a post-MacPherson Britain this presents a particular challenge for the law and order society; how can authoritarianism be maintained whilst condemning institutional racism? However, the reaction to the

report from critics and the social events that follow its publication reveal how its findings became gradually mitigated and the authority of proactive and disproportionate policing eventually restored.

### **Criticism of the report; The Macpherson Effect.**

In the aftermath of the inquiry the government promised judicial reforms and the report findings were celebrated as sign of political progress towards a fair modern society. However, the recognition of institutional racism stopped short of any structural change, and the concept was met with resistance from particular factions. The Institute for the Study of Civil Society (known as the think tank *Civitas*) published a paper with the title '*Racist Murder and Pressure Group Politics*' (Dennis, Erdos & Al-Shahi 2000) in which it discredits the validity of Macpherson's definition of 'institutional racism'. It states:

The Macpherson inquiry, unable to find evidence of racism, produced a definition of racism that at first glance absolved it from producing any... It switched attention, in the other direction, away from observable conduct, words or gestures and towards the police officer's 'unwitting' thoughts and conduct. But how could the Macpherson inquiry know what was in an officer's unconscious mind—except through the failure of the police to be effective in the investigation of a racist crime? This definition puts charges of racism outside the boundaries of proof or rebuttal (Dennis et al. 2000:xix,xx).

Dissecting the events of the inquiry the authors claim Macpherson's conclusions are the harmful consequence of '*the fateful meeting of the*

*stricken Lawrences, an unworldly High Court judge, a feckless social-affairs intelligentsia, and what is currently fashionable in political militancy* (Dennis et al. 2000:148). They argue that 'pressure group politics' promoted an approach to racial equality that was dangerously radical; *'the Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael model of victimhood, confrontation and separation'* (Ibid.). Furthermore, they believe that the 'unscientific' conclusions of the inquiry caused 'real harm' by putting restrictive measures on police work. They call this; 'The Macpherson effect'.

*The Macpherson Effect* develops as a term used by critics of the inquiry to refer to the increase in recorded crime in 1999 which they believe to be a direct consequence of labeling the police 'institutionally racist', criticizing stop and search and 'undermining their morale':

In August 1998, while the inquiry was going on, there were 27,300 searches by the MPS. In August 1999, six months after Macpherson reported, the figure was down to 13,600... The only group for which both recorded searches and arrests fell consistently across the MPS area over the year was the black group...

The graph of crime trends in the MPS area shows a sharp upturn of 'street crimes' from the time of the publication of the Macpherson report, from 2,800 a month to over 3,500 a month... nationally the number of crimes had increased 2.2 per cent to 5.2 million in the year October 1998 to September 1999. That increase, the first in six years, was largely due to increases in two police areas, London and the West Midlands, the areas with the highest concentrations of ethnic minorities (Dennis et al. 2000:29).

Ironically, this use of data to link reducing the disproportionate stops of Black people to an increase in crime in areas where ethnic minorities live, is in itself a form institutional racism. There is an assumption that 'street crimes' denote 'Black crimes', no analysis of the impact on arrest rates

when fewer Black people are stopped and searched, and no mention of how the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) may have distorted figures given that police were encouraged to detect and record more crime and anti-social behaviours became criminalised at this time.

The coining of the phrase 'the MacPherson Effect' is simultaneously a rejection of the legitimacy of the label 'institutional racism' and a warning of the perils of restricting police work. The retreat from stop and search in 1999 is a spontaneous policing response to the MacPherson report and not stipulated by any official policy change, and will come to be used as evidence in a reoccurring warning of the consequences of questioning police tactics.

This elective reduction in stop and search could be read as an act of resistance by the police; a refusal to function in the contradicting ideologies of this Government. Or perhaps the inquiry had caused a genuine interruption through the retraction of a public consensus. But whether from defiance or disruption it was clear that the authority of proactive policing policies that had dominated previous decades were now challenged. From the stop and search data now available we know this retreat was short lived. The frequency of stops, along with racial disproportionality, will increase dramatically from 2001 onwards, peaking in 2008/2009 with over 1.5 million searches in England and Wales, during which time Black people in some areas of the UK were up to 28 times more likely to be stopped (Dodd 2012a). How is it possible that despite the

political and social impact of the MacPherson report, stop and search powers are not only restored, but vastly extended with public consent? It will be argued within this thesis that this reversal is partly enabled through the emergence of a new crime label, 'knife crime'.

### **A Knife Code for a New Millennium**

At no point in the Crime and Disorder Act (1998), The MacPherson Inquiry (1999), the 'Blueprint for Reform' White Paper (2001), the first National Policing Plan (2002), The Policing Reform Act (2002) or any of the parliamentary acts of this period do the words "knife crime" appear. But behind the scenes movements are being made and there are early signs of a mobilisation specifically towards knives. The most recognisable change occurs in 2001 when a new policing 'feature code' is introduced to the police system of the Met Police to specifically register 'knife enabled offences' (KEO) on computerised crime records.

It is this subtle change in the way crimes involving knives are recorded, quantified and grouped together that crucially enables the category 'knife crime' to exist. Without this shift in approach the statistical reports of 'knife crime' in London that define the category a bounded criminality would never have been possible. It is unclear from available evidence if the police or the Home Office decided on this new direction of measurement.



Whilst the Police Act (1996) gave powers to the Home Secretary to specify the form in which crimes are recorded (HMICFRS 2017) the localised use of the new code in London rather than nationally suggests it was a movement specific to the Metropolitan police.

The process of recording a crime is subjective. How an incident is recorded often relies on the discretion of the responding police officer, but its worth noting that the Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) '*promote a victim-oriented approach to crime recording*' (Ibid.) in which how the victim describes or believes a crime has occurred is in most cases sufficient to registering it as a crime. Along with details of the incident and the individuals involved, officers are required to provide an 'opening code':

When recording an incident, staff allocate an "opening code" to the incident log. Opening codes indicate the nature of the incident, for example whether it relates to a road traffic accident or a burglary. Opening codes are important because they allow supervisors to see immediately what type of incidents are currently open and prioritise resources accordingly (Ibid.)

Prior to the feature code of 'knife enabled offence' being added, crimes that had included or intimated a knife would have been recorded and prioritised base on the intent referenced in the 'opening code'. For example; Burglary, theft, sexual assault, drugs or criminal damage would be the defining category of the offence. But after the feature code of KEO is added data analysts and police supervisors are able to extract crime figures from across different opening codes to prioritise those with a feature code for 'knife enabled'. For the first time it is possible to redact crime data

based on whether a 'knife' was present, used or intimated during various different crime contexts.

A report by the Metropolitan Police Authority in 2005 describes their analytical use of knife enabled feature code in this way:

Knife enabled crime is defined as any offence within the categories violence against the person, sexual offence, robbery or burglary that has been recorded on the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) crime recording system with a feature code that shows specifically that a knife was used during the commission of the offence... Knife enabled crime has been selected as the MPS measure of knife crime as it closely aligns with the PPAF (Policing Performance Assessment Framework) definition of gun enabled crime. This approach enables the MPS to monitor the impact of the use of weapons, particularly guns and knives, in a consistent way (Commissioner MPA 2005).

This explanation reveals several points. Firstly that data is drawn from different categories of criminal intent (violence, sexual offence, robbery or burglary) to collectively group knife enabled crime by the weapon used. Secondly, that there is a direct relation to the PPAF monitoring agenda in the decision to include 'knife enabled' as an extension of 'gun enabled' crimes. And thirdly, that the knife enabled code was selected by the MPS as a measure of 'knife crime' before any mention of 'knife crime' in official legislation or strategic partnership documents at this time. In other words, the mobilisation towards the category precedes a public definition of the label, just as with 'mugging' in 1970's (Hall et al. 1978).

As with the emergence of 'mugging' (Hall et al. 1978) there is high chance of an amplification of crime rates occurring when new recording practices

and categories are introduced (Cohen 1972). There is an increased likelihood of 'knife enabled' being selected as a feature code by police officers during the crime recording process as the 'knife crime' category receives growing public attention. Likewise, the public themselves are increasingly likely to believe a knife is present and/or report it as a crime as the label gathers momentum.

Despite these possibilities of confounding influences the data collected from the new crime code is used immediately as a reliable representation of a new crime category. As early as 2002 we begin to see the data collated through the feature code used to report on specific knife concern and on a few occasions the term 'knife crime' appears in police statements and press releases by police for newspapers (Alleyne 2002, Bamber 2002). How the problem is framed in these first 'knife crime' reports is indicative of what will follow in the succeeding decade and reveals the constitutive interaction of the concept with the political events of this moment. But before considering what is included it is also important to note what is absent.

Whilst the 'Macpherson effect' will become central in early discussions of 'knife crime', the murder of Stephen Lawrence itself will not - despite arguably being the most famous knife homicide of this era. A suggestion of why this might be is revealed within the *Civitas* critique of the MacPherson inquiry. The authors argue that the knife featured in Stephen Lawrence's

murder is significant; that this particular choice of weapon represents a foreign or primitive method of assault and that our questioning should focus on the preservation of English civility rather than the identification of institutional racism. They write:

Not long ago the use of knives in private quarrels or obsessions was as a matter of fact very unusual. As a matter of culture it was defined as something men from some countries might resort to in certain circumstances, but not English men in English civilian life... English culture had for long succeeded in inculcating an abhorrence of any violent use of knives. The murderous use of knives in private life, and above all the murderous use of knives on a complete stranger, a kind of running amok, was for centuries almost unknown... therefore, how had English society come to produce the young men who had killed him...? (Dennis, Erdos and Al-Shahi 2000:4,5).

This construction of violence with knives as something 'un-English' draws heavily on a colonial ideas of 'English civility' and is a pervasive image throughout the emergence of 'knife crime'. And whilst the brutality of the knife in the case of Stephen Lawrence suggests this murder would be central to early discussions of 'knife crime', it is evident during the emergence of the phenomenon that it does not fit the criteria of the category.

There are two news articles published in England and Wales with the exact phrase 'knife crime' in 2002, the earliest representations of this new crime category. The content of these formative mentions poignantly demonstrate the exclusion of Stephen Lawrence as a victim within the 'knife crime' category and the centrality of race and policing in the comprehension of knife related violence. The article in the Telegraph

reports selectively on the first 'knife crime' data produced through the new crime code, suggesting several causes for a perceived rise in knife offences:

Senior officers blame the huge increase in knife-carrying partly on the result of the Macpherson Report, following the murder of Stephen Lawrence, which curbed officers' use of stop and search on the streets... Crack-cocaine dealing by so-called Yardie gangs in the inner cities has also fuelled the carrying of knives. Many of the drug pushers come from Jamaica and openly carry knives there (Bamber 2002).

This astonishing claim attributed to senior officers, just three years after the publishing of the inquiry, demonstrates the dexterity and partiality of the 'knife crime' label even in its earliest public use. To blame apparent rising rates of violence with knives on the impact the MacPherson report on search rates, *and* Caribbean migrants, whilst ignoring Stephen Lawrence's victim status in this category is contemptible. However, set within the constitutive parameters of the 'knife crime' category (Discussed in greater detail in chapter four) these incongruities become naturalised assumptions as the label develops.

It is likely the knife code was introduced primarily as a performance-monitoring tool, under the guidelines of the PPAF and in response to government pressure to produce evidenced work and increase efficiency through digital technologies. However, the introduction of the knife enabled crime code and its subsequent reporting reveals three core aspects of the label; Firstly, defining 'knife crime' as a separate category to that of the criminal intention of the act (theft, sexual assault, robbery etc.) begins

with this code; Secondly, this happens before there is any public definition or explicit concern over a perceived 'knife crime' category; and thirdly, the data produced by this code is immediately used to defend stop and search by police in the press, referencing the Macpherson inquiry as a cause of increase knife violence along with migration. From its inception then, collectively grouping crimes with different criminal intentions as 'knife crime' has been a practice subsumed by the racialisation of crime, manufacturing consent and defending authoritarian policing at a moment of increased police scrutiny and performance pressure.

### **Conclusion**

Following the framework of *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978) this chapter has considered the context in which a mobilisation towards 'knife crime' occurred, before the label was publicly defined. The analysis of events and interactions during the years leading up to the introduction of the 'knife crime' label present three core points for discussion in conclusion.

Firstly, the New Labour government from 1997 onwards introduces an adapted neoliberal strategy, reworking the authoritarianism of the exceptional state to appear socially democratic, 'multicultural' and progressive. The result of this ideological shift is a growing reliance on political 'spin' to navigate the contradictions of the so-called 'double

shuffle'. This re-articulation of the law and order society focuses heavily on 'youth crime' and extending the powers of the state to intervene in 'pre-criminal' anti-social behaviours.

Secondly, it is clear that in the years preceding the moral panic of 'knife crime', that 'gun' and 'gang' speak had already begun a process of weaponised racialisation that justified intensive surveillance, increased militarisation and the use of 'hard stop' and robust proactive police tactics. Specialist mobilisations such as 'Trident Gang Command' and the 'gangs matrix' demonstrate how the rhetoric of 'crime as culture' acts as a broader racialising narrative of criminality at this time – into which 'knife crime' emerges at a significant moment.

This timely mobilisation towards 'knife crime' relates to the third aspect of the pre-public history of the crime label discussed in this chapter; the publication of the MacPherson report and the official recognition of institutional racism within the Met Police. This significant cultural moment interrupted the use of stop and search in 1999 and was a challenge to the legitimacy of policing. The assertion of a 'MacPherson effect' on crime rates, as discussed in this chapter, are formative in the early definitions of 'knife crime'; linking the restriction of racial profiling to increases in knife incidents.

In summary, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is marked by uncertainty and political dualism. New labour's social democratic authoritarianism presented new challenges for the legitimization of force within neoliberalism. Existing racialised discourse of 'gun culture' and 'gang culture' provide justifications for militarization and robustness in policing, along with extensive surveillance and early state intervention. It is on this foundation, following the cultural event of the MacPherson report, that a mobilisation towards 'knife crime' is built. Although there is no mention of 'knife crime' in any official documents at the turn of the 21 Century, there is evidence of shifting focus towards knives in crime recording practices. The introduction of the 'knife enabled' feature code in 2001 fundamentally changed the way crimes were categorised and reported, gradually leading to a public definition of 'knife crime' through police crime data that will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.



## **Chapter Four.**

### **A public Definition; The Making of 'Knife Crime'**

## Introduction

The second stage identified in the history of 'knife crime' is a period defined by the earliest public definitions and use of the term in news reports and the first interpretations of data collected through the 'knife enabled' feature code. This chapter is a close analysis of the events that constituted 'knife crime' in public use and how meaning was constructed in interaction with news values and shifting anxieties in the urban suburbs.

This chapter considers how the reporting of high profile cases defined as 'knife crime' became instrumental in the formation of the label's narrative; firstly through age and location, and later by social class and ethnicity. Drawing on analysis of 'knife crime' news throughout this period, the use of images, language and data in the making of 'knife crime' is discussed, leading to a new understanding of the 'knife crime' label as a particular response to criminality at this time. Retracing the increasing press attention from 2002 onwards, the discourse analysis of texts reveal the processes that transformed a relatively innocuous collective noun into an insidious adjective, synonymous with a dangerous youth culture and in need of proactive policing.

The previous chapter detailed the specific dualism of Tony Blair's New Labour Britain and the inherent contradictions of a law and order neoliberalism combined with a social democratic ideology. The emergence

of a new crime category within this context is understood here in interaction with these dilemmas. This account of events will demonstrate the constitutive relationship between 'knife crime' and stop and search policing strategies – arguing that the mobilisation of police as an occupying and hostile force in the urban suburbs precedes the justification of this action through the label 'knife crime'.

The analysis of this period will suggest that rather than stop and search returning in response to 'knife crime', 'knife crime' is established as a public concern in response to an already increasing stop and search agenda. Drawing parallels with the case of 'mugging' in the 1970's, this chapter will explore how the racialisation of 'knife crime' responded to specific sociologies of the city – equipping an occupying force in the former Black enclaves of the suburbs. To begin with however, a clear distinction will be made between the emerging category 'knife crime' in England and Wales at this time and the label previously limited to defining crimes located in Scotland.

#### **When 'Knife Crime' was a Scottish problem.**

British news articles during 2002 that use the phrase 'knife crime' are almost entirely concerned with Scotland. Scottish publications of the Daily Mail refer to "knife thugs" long before this kind of language is common south of the border (Mega and Grant 2004). Within this thesis the research

sets Scotland apart from England and Wales as having its own highly specific history of crime labelling and response to knives and bladed weapons. This decision was made for several reasons that will be discussed briefly here.

Firstly, the Scottish 'knife crime' label includes specific sharp instruments and bladed weapons that have their own localised social histories; such as the 'razor gangs' of the 1920s divided along religious lines (Davies 2013). Secondly, within the news from 2002, it is clear that age and ethnicity are not defining features of Scottish 'knife crime' in the way they are in the English version of the label. Whilst there is some concern in Scottish 'knife crime' reports about the age of victims and perpetrators ('McConnell pledge' 2003, 'At the Sharp End' 2003), none of the articles analysed during this period mention ethnicity as a defining feature of Scottish 'knife crime'. This is a crucial distinction that will come to fundamentally separate the term and its functionality in the two contexts.

Scotland's political separation is also significant. Since May 1999 Scotland has had its own parliament that brought many aspects of governance under national control. Policing, courts, housing, social work and education were all under Scotland's own jurisdiction during this time, meaning that the Scottish response to 'knife crime' has been notably different from that of England and Wales.

When Scotland conducts knife targeted weapon searches and home raids in the late 1990s as part of 'Operation Spotlight' it does so from within its own political context. For example, Critics have argued that Operation Spotlight was one element of a *'revanchist or vengeful approach to urban policy in Glasgow... in which attempts to improve the economic fortunes of the city involved the targeting of vulnerable groups like the homeless and prostitutes, who were viewed as detracting from attempts to revitalise the city centre'* (Donnelly and Scott 2005:116). Resulting 'knife crime' figures from this proactive approach would need to be contextualised in a specifically 'Scottish moment'.

This separation between Scotland and England is also evident in the way English news 'looks to' Scotland; as an area of exceptional violence in 2003 (Kelbie 2003), and then for advice on violence reduction in 2017 (Younge and Barr 2017). Scotland sets itself apart from the rest of the UK when it adopts a highly successful public health approach to 'knife crime' in 2005. This shift away from a criminal justice approach in Scotland at a time when England and Wales were heightening a policing and criminal justice response to 'knife crime' further separates the label's meaning and use on either side of the border.

Acknowledging the above, it would be inaccurate to conflate the 'knife crime' of Scotland in 2002 and the 'knife crime' that later becomes a moral panic in England and Wales. The labels are defined and operate in

different ways and the response to each have distinct histories. Whilst Scottish 'knife crime' is at peak concern in 2002, use of the term in relation to crime in England and Wales is very rare during this time. Other than a few uses as a collective noun, such as to announce that baton rounds that will be used to fight knife crime and riots ('Met's Baton Rounds...' 2002), and in reference to 'the Macpherson effect' as discussed in chapter three (Bamber 2002), there is a notable absence of 'knife crime' news concerning England and Wales in 2002. This is not to say that there were not occasional articles about knives and/or young people but that these were not yet under the umbrella of 'knife crime' news in the way that they will be in later years.

Events towards the end of 2003 begin to align language and discussion towards a narrative of 'knife crime' as a distinct type of criminality in England and Wales. Three combined factors are influential in this development. Firstly, the rural school setting of a teen murder in November 2003 will secure national interest and invigorate coverage of knife-related crimes within particular contexts. Secondly, high news value is sustained and cultivated for this emerging category by the focus on younger children and a broad range of authorised spokespeople. Thirdly, the narrative that links crime through the knife insinuates or openly identifies a criminogenic 'knife culture' amongst young people that becomes an argument for proactive interventions at this time.

## The Case of Luke Walmsley

On 4<sup>th</sup> November 2003, the murder of 14-year-old Luke Walmsley in a school corridor in rural Lincolnshire becomes a catalyst for a co-ordinated response to a perceived culture rising amongst young people across the country. The day following his death the case is given high news status in both national and regional papers. Headlines include:

‘BOY, 14, KILLED IN SCHOOL ATTACK: He ran .. then he fell ; PUPILS FLEE IN TERROR AS LUKE KNIFED ON HIS WAY TO LESSON’ (McComish et al., 2003) in *The Daily Mirror*

‘A scuffle, then panic grips children and staff at village school; Chief constable pledges support for community in shock’ (Laville 2003) in *The Daily Telegraph*.

‘Youngsters Caught in Tide of Horror’ (Barker 2003) in *The Sun*.

The tabloid language used to describe the incident, ‘terror’, ‘panic’ and ‘horror’, are embellishments that significantly sensationalise the coverage. Early reporting focuses heavily on school safety, seeking teacher’s opinions on pupil violence and their powers to prevent another event like this. In an effort to include the ‘teachers perspective’ and with no official statement from Luke Walmsley’s school yet, the coverage the day after the murder widely quotes a response made by David Hart, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers. The full quote reads:

My reaction is one of utter horror. To think a youngster can be stabbed to death in a school in a relatively quiet part of the country will send shockwaves through the school system. It does demonstrate very clearly the fact that although this level of violence is very rare, there are an incredible number of youngsters who are willing to sign

up to the knife culture and bring an offensive weapon into school (David Hart quoted in 'Classmates See...' 2003).

As the only official statement available, this immediate anecdotal connection made by Hart between the isolated incident of Luke Walmsley and a 'knife culture' with 'incredible numbers' or young people willingly 'signing up', instigates a public debate on what the national response to Luke's death should be. Within two days of Luke's murder the conversation shifts from the incident at a school in Lincolnshire to include knives and schools in general. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, The guardian reports 'Unions call for review of security' with representatives of teachers split on what the course of action should be.

The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) warned that crime involving weapons was 'spilling over from the streets into schools' and that a working party on school security should be assembled. Parent-teacher associations were equally pro-active, suggesting the installation of metal detectors in schools to stop students 'attempting to smuggle in knives and guns'. Police demonstrate their position with action, deploying 100 extra officers to 'patrol the playgrounds of British schools identified as breeding grounds for young offenders' (Goodchild 2003).

The evocative and metaphoric language used by reliable spokespeople at this time is widely reported and is indicative of a developing narrative - In which the knife is seen as an outside threat, based in the street, but



'spilling into' or being 'smuggled' in to the safe spaces of schools. The police describing schools as 'breeding grounds' for criminality is an early indication that the perceived threat of contagious influence from one type of young person will be formative in the response that will come to be defined as 'knife crime'.

Other public voices presented disagreement with the proactive measures taken and feared that the frequency of violence in schools was being exaggerated in the hastiness of the response. The then Schools Secretary Minister, David Miliband, was reported as cautioning against 'knee-jerk reactions' to the school-time incident, stating; *'the death of Luke Walmsley at his Lincolnshire school was not evidence of rising violence throughout the education system'* ('Call for Caution...' 2003). The general secretary of the National Union of Teachers concurred, saying *"This is an absolutely tragic incident, but there are 7.5 million children in our schools 190 days a year and our surveys show the number of weapons being brought into our schools is absolutely minuscule"* (Ibid.). The chairman of the Youth Justice Board warned that over-reacting could exasperate the issue saying; 'it's a great tragedy when you start making schools into fortresses. It creates a fear culture and this can beget even more problems.'(Goodchild 2003)

What is significantly absent in these debates on the urgency of the problem during this moment is supporting data. Although plenty of

anecdotal evidence is offered, the early reports lack any statistics that present knives as specifically a 'young' or 'school' problem. There is concerted effort by journalists across the country to produce valid evidence of the scale of the problem whilst public concern is still high. Birmingham city council announces their investigation to find out if violence is increasing in schools ('Call for Caution...' 2003). The Sunday Mirror runs their own experiments in Bristol, Cardiff, Birmingham, Newcastle and Liverpool; Sending children to buy knives at high-street shops and publishing the results (Ellam 2003). The BBC online publishes the article 'Is knife crime really getting worse' (2003) attempted to collate available data. Meanwhile, The Observer is conducting its own investigation and publishes its findings on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2003 (Townsend and Barnett 2003). This is the *first* news article reporting on Luke Walmsley that uses the phrase 'knife crime'.

Opting for the sensationalist headline: '*Scandal of pupils aged five carrying knives*' the findings of the *Observer* investigation consolidate the idea that Luke wasn't the victim of an isolated attack, but the latest casualty in a national 'epidemic' in which 'no where is safe' (Townsend and Barnett 2003). Amongst other shocking statistics the Observer lists four other young people involved in knife related news since Luke's death, two stabbings, one knife carrying in school and one court case currently at trial. The specific circumstances of these incidents are not described, the cases are not viewed in isolation but as one collective crime; 'knife crime'.

### **Violence and Children, The Gold Standard of News.**

In the chain of events from Luke Walmsley's death to the collective grouping of incidents as 'knife crime' what is striking is the constitutive power of 'youth' in the making of the label. It is the school setting and the notion of a threat to children that provides the initial momentum that will eventually link crimes together by virtue of age and type of weapon. Rather than acts of 'knife crime' being a phenomenon exclusive to youths, it is a group of actions only defined as phenomenal when connected to children and the exceptionality bestowed by their age. Were it not for the news value of children, in addition to violence, 'Knife crime' as a tangible collection of crime and behaviours would be inconceivable.

Exploring this aspect further it has been evidenced through media studies that violence continues to hold a dominant news value but not as much as it used to:

'The news value which is arguably most common to all media is that of 'violence' because it fulfils the media's desire to present dramatic events in the most graphic possible fashion... However, violence has become so ubiquitous that – although still considered newsworthy it is frequently reported in a routine, mundane manner with little follow-up or analysis. Unless a story involving violence conforms to several other news values or provides a suitable threshold to keep alive an existing set of stories, even the most serious acts of violence may be used as 'fillers' consigned to the inside pages of a newspaper (Jewkes 2015:63,64).

Many instances of non-fatal stabbings, threatening with knives, knife carrying and knife homicides were not considered to have news value before the emergence of 'knife crime'. But in the early stages of the phenomenon building, the age of the victims and perpetrators seems to get younger and younger and with this added value the breadth of actions considered newsworthy increases. Luke Walmsley was 14 and this was an alarming fact, but by the end of the same month headlines are connecting the case with 5 year olds carrying knives (Townsend and Barnett 2003). This pursuit of youth in the making of 'knife crime' reflects the evolving priorities, sensitivities and interests of media audiences and news reporting techniques as much as it does any changes in child crime.

It is this process of attaching children to the violence of knives, beginning with Luke Walmsley, that spirals the media and headlines into increasing hysteria. In the days following the stabbing news Headlines of national newspapers, in response to Luke Walmsley, focus on 'kids', 'children' and 'school' as they extrapolate from one case to a national crisis. Within one week the headlines included:

*'Kids carry knives and hammers: they have to look after themselves'*  
(Johnson 2003a)

*'Is your kid taking a knife to school?'* (Johnson 2003b)

*'Shops, stalls and web illegally sell knives to children' (Woolcock 2003)*

*'SOLD .. TO A 12-YR-OLD ; Shop charges £25 for this 12in blade. Boy of 14 is stabbed to death but stores still flout law on children buying knives.'*

(Ellam 2003)

*'Not even your school is safe' ('Not Even...' 2003)*

The additional value of the symbolic innocence and victim status of youth has been identified as a means of sustaining news value that has specifically developed over the last few decades:

[W]riting in 1978, Stuart Hall and his colleagues argued that any crime can be lifted into news visibility if violence becomes associated with it, but three decades later it might be said that any crime can be lifted into new visibility is children are associated with it... The focus on children means that deviant behaviour automatically crosses a higher threshold of victimization than would have been possible if adults alone had been involved... children who commit crimes have arguably become especially newsworthy (Jewkes 2015:66,67).

Whilst it is clear that age is a formative feature of the 'knife crime' category, it is not the only criteria. Consider for instance, that in the same month Luke Walmsley was killed, 18 year old Ronald Pattinson was given a life sentence for stabbing 12 year old Natalie Ruddick 25 times, murdering her in her home after a domestic dispute ('Teenager Guilty...' 2003). At no point during the 'knife culture' concern at the end of 2003 is this case included for discussion. Similarly, there is no mention of Pattinson's connection with the knife he used, or a desire for knife violence being a contributing factor to the tragedy.

Despite the young age of the victim and the brutality of the violence, the domestic location of this murder appears to exclude it from the 'knife crime' news reports at this time. 'Knife crime' has always been about the actions of particular groups and in particular settings and this inconsistency of knife concern grows as the label's subjectivity increases during its development. The parameters of the perceived problem evolve over time but in 2003 public concern is very much focused on knives in schools, the availability of knives to school aged children and what can be done to prevent the threat to school aged children.

### **Reporting the Knife Crime Report**

On 1<sup>st</sup> June 2004 the Met Police publish their first 'Knife Crime Report' containing a comprehensive breakdown of the statistics collated since the introduction of the 'knife enabled code' in 2001 – a significant shift in police crime recording as detailed in chapter three. The content of this report is greatly meaningful as the data will not only be used to evidence the scale of the 'epidemic' for an eager press, but also to provide the grounds and justification for targeted police mobilisation against young people announced in that same month; Operation Blunt. In this analysis the content of this report will be discussed in detail, followed by close scrutiny of how this data was reported in the press immediately following its release.

Considering the heightened media concern and growing public panic over knife offences in 2003 it is anticipated that this report would reveal shocking figures, but the data itself is somewhat underwhelming. In a table looking at the same period over three years the number of 'knife crime offences' defined within the report as 'all offences involving a knife except Possession of Offensive Weapon' shows a fluctuating total; the latest figures are higher than last year, but less than they were two years ago. 'Knife crime' as a percentage of Total Number of Offences (TNO) has remained at a relatively constant 1.6% - 1.7%.

Offences involving a knife for FY 04 are up 9.3% on FY 03.

Offence table

|                | Jun 01 to<br>Mar 02 | Jun 02 to<br>Mar 03 | Jun 03 to<br>Mar 04 | % change Jun<br>03-Mar 04 V<br>Jun 01-Mar 02 | % change Jun<br>03-Mar 04 V<br>Jun 02-Mar 03 |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--|--|
| Knife Offences | 14881               | 12454               | 14110               | -5.2%  | 13.3%  |

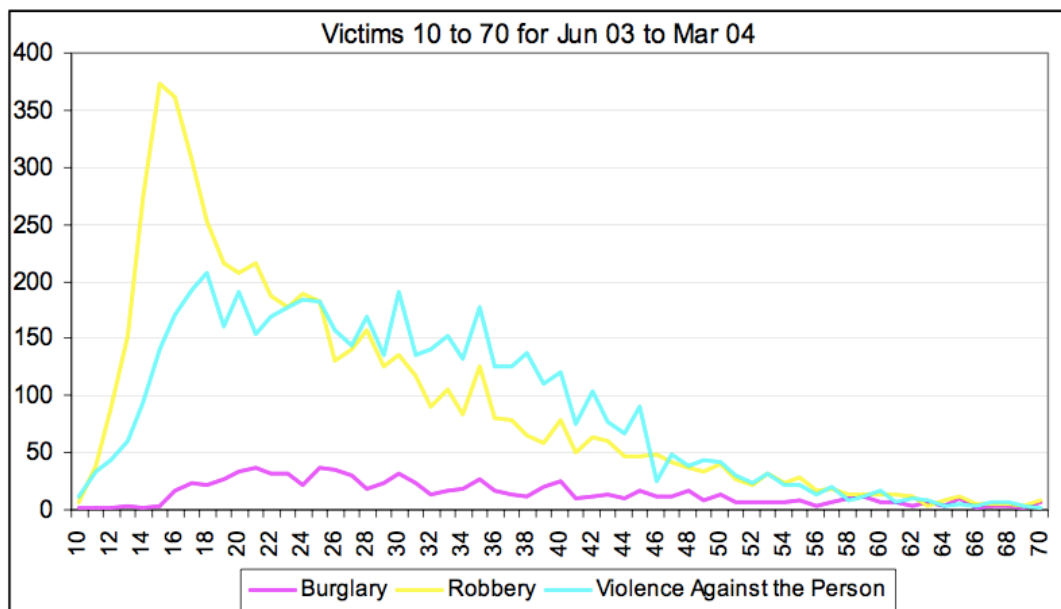
Knife crime as a percentage of TNO was 1.6% in Jun 03-Mar 04, a slight increase from last year but is down against two years ago when knife crime represented 1.7% of TNO.

(TPHQ 2004:3)

Reflecting public interest and media priorities, special consideration is taken to compare data by age, sex and ethnicity of offenders and victims. The highest victim group is reported to be white males between the ages of 14 and 21. The data shows a consistent peak victim age of 15-18 over the three years, but the breakdown of knife offences by offence type shows that

once 'robbery' is removed the victim levels stay relatively even in the 15- 35 range. Further analysis reveals that robbery has much lower rates of injury than Violence Against the Person, suggesting that although knife offences disproportionately affect younger age categories, these are representative of the less fatal kinds of offences than their adult counterparts.

If we take just the victims for Jun 03 to Mar 04 and split it into crime categories we see that it is victims of robbery that caused the large peak for 15-16 year olds. Violence Against the Person is at a fairly steady rate between the ages 15 to 35 this then steadily decreases



| Injury Degree | Total | Violence Against the Person | Robbery |
|---------------|-------|-----------------------------|---------|
| Fatal         | 0%    | 1%                          | 0%      |
| Serious       | 7%    | 16%                         | 2%      |
| Moderate      | 11%   | 22%                         | 5%      |
| Minor         | 20%   | 26%                         | 20%     |
| No Injury     | 48%   | 25%                         | 56%     |
| Threats Only  | 13%   | 11%                         | 17%     |

(TPHQ 2004:11,12)



Along with a borough-by-borough breakdown the report looks at the location codes relating to knife offences. One of the biggest percentage increases in the report is related to domestic violence; 'Domestic Knife crime has seen a 22% increase against both last year and a 23% increase against two years ago' (TPHQ 2004:9). The category of knife offences with the highest likelihood of serious or fatal injury is 'Violence Against a Person'. 53% of incidents within this category occur within the home and 'nearly 80% of domestic knife crime is violence against the person' (Ibid.). Despite this significant increase in the category with highest likelihood of serious harm, domestic violence is not mentioned in the reporting of this released data in press.

The report acknowledges the complexities of 'knife crime' data. It is cautionary of making assumptions and provides scrutiny in the form of comparative analysis; I.E. recognizing that Violence Against a Person, Robbery, Burglary and Domestic Violence are distinctly different offence types despite all contributing to 'knife crime' data. However, when the report is conveyed in the press, through the criteria of news value, a highly selective use of the data paints a very different picture. For example The Evening Standard under the misleading headline '*Increase in Knife Crime Led by Young*' (Davenport 2004) summarized the Knife Crime Report thus:

The scale of London's growing knife culture is revealed today. Figures show a crime involving a knife is committed once every 25 minutes in the capital.

An internal study carried out by the Metropolitan Police shows a total of 14,110 knife offences occurred between June 2003 and March - a rise of 13 per cent over the same period the previous year.

The figure excludes the offence of simply possessing a knife. The Met report also shows that 39 per cent of offenders are aged between 14 and 21.

The findings are revealed as the Met announced tough new measures to clamp down on knife crime under Operation Blunt. For the first time police are to routinely deploy a scanner which can see through people's clothes to detect hidden weapons...

Commander Simon Foy, head of the Met's anti-knife crime campaign, said: "The most worrying aspect of this report is that this is almost exclusively a young people's phenomenon (Davenport 2004).

Analysing the specific ways in which the knife crime report is translated in this article reveals how the 'knife crime' narrative during this moment is constructed through distortion of data for the benefit of increased news value. The Evening Standard begins with a high impact headline that simultaneously; a) assumes a 'knife crime' category as predefined b) selectively claims 'it' has increased and c) misleadingly blames young people. Acknowledging that 'youth plus violence' produces news value there is a clear incentive for this misleading representation of the report's findings.

The second sentence of the news article, '*Figures show a crime involving a knife is committed once every 25 minutes in the capital*' (Davenport 2004), is an example of a very common technique used to report knife related data with maximum effect. By transforming a static quantity into a temporal relation the emotional impact is greatly increased. In this case the number

14,110 without context is hard to conceptualise and therefore carries little meaning. But when communicated as one knife crime every twenty-five minutes this appears an urgent threat. Add to this the common yet erroneous assumption that every knife offence is a violent assault upon a young victim and this is now an alarming figure.

To dramatically state that knife offences have increased 13% from one year ago whilst omitting that current figures are a 5% decrease from two years ago and well within a consistent percentage of all offences, is a deliberate manipulation of the facts for higher news value. Distorting the data through selective journalism enables the misleading headline of 'Increase in knife crime' to be used despite the report providing a much broader and less worrying representation. The article insinuates further, that even these terrifying statistics do not include 'simply possessing a knife'; suggesting that the offences that *are* included are more violent than mere knife carrying. In fact, the report is very careful not to contribute to the assumption of injury from every offence, showing that 61% of all victims in the latest year of data were 'threat only' or 'no injury' (TPHQ 2004:12). There is no mention of this in the Evening Standard's summary.

This insinuated exaggeration of violence is then strategically followed by the claim that 39% of all offences are committed by young people in the 14 to 21 age range. Forming a dialectic link between extreme violence and youth by purposely omitting data from the report that contradicts this narrative. This includes; a) that the age of accused offenders is getting

older (TPHQ 2004:15). b) that this same 14 - 21 age bracket made up 47% of offences two years ago (Ibid.) and c) that younger offenders make up a much larger proportion of the less violent offences (TPHQ 2004:11,12).

Once the narrative of increasingly violent youth is laid out, *then* Operation Blunt is introduced; as 'tough new measures to clamp down on knife crime' (Davenport 2004). The article closes with a seal of approval from Police Commander Simon Foy, who, despite all the evidence to the contrary throughout the police report, remarkably claims the most worrying thing about 'knife crime' is it's 'exclusively' a youth phenomenon. With Foy's consolidation the manipulated representation of the data has replaced the actual data as a source of information on crime.

Operation Blunt, expanding from a three borough pilot project in 2004 to a London wide mobilisation in 2005, is targeted at young people in the city. This amplifies knife data amongst this group, with the Met police themselves later stating 'part of the rise in detected knife crime was a result of Operation Blunt' (Ross 2004). Operation Blunt also included educational projects visiting many of London's secondary schools, talking about 'knife crime' and showing images of knives. The increasing presence of knife imagery in campaigns, operations and reports becomes a defining feature in the making of 'knife crime' during this moment. For young people the images represent an imagined threat, and their heightened visibility increases fear as the 'knife crime' label gains attention.

### **Making 'knife crime' news**

The tabloidisation of 'knife crime' from its inception caused an increasing momentum of public concern and crime visibility in order to build and sustain news value. Shaped by the spectatorship of news consumers this influence manifests in particular representational techniques. Publishing images of confiscated knives and bladed weapons is a device used to represent both the scale and viciousness of the phenomenon. After a knife amnesty or stop and search operation there is a tendency to include an image of a table displaying the range and quantity of weapons found. There are also speculative examples of fascinating weapons that *could* be on the streets – images of concealed blades are displayed in one article that informs the reader that knives 'can be concealed in belt buckles' (Omaar 2004) or 'hidden in combs' (Ibid.) without any empirical evidence that they are.

The analysis of images accompanying 'knife crime' news throughout this defining period in the history of the label revealed reoccurring misalignment between the news content and the image displayed. In several articles reporting on search operations the image showed an array of weapons displayed but the written text reported one or two knives found ('College gets...' 2006, 'Rail Police...' 2006). Exploring this representational device further I closely analysed the reoccurring use of

one particularly powerful image of a collection of blades that seemed to accompany a range of 'knife crime' stories over a long period of time. The framing of this popular image is of interest. The photo doesn't allow perspective or include the edges of the table so one can only assume this image is one section of a larger sample:



There are a broad variety of blades on display in this one image but the machete is dominant and central. Along with a few kitchen knives, this is mostly a display of bladed weapons; a dagger, a hunting knife, a sword (alongside its sheath), and a flick knife are amongst the collection. The first time I saw this image it was attached to a BBC news article published in November 2003, the title of the piece was '*Warning Over More Weapons in Schools*' ('Warning of...' 2003) and the caption under the image read; 'Debate about whether there are more weapons in schools' (Ibid.). But the

earliest use of this photo found during this research, just like the term 'knife crime' itself, is found in Scotland and has no specific reference to young people or schools. First published in 1999 the image accompanies an article reporting on Strathclyde's policing operation 'Spotlight' with police stating that 'in the last five weeks of the force's latest Operation Spotlight crackdown, 500 offensive weapons had been seized' ('Knife Culture...' 1999).



(Image copied from 'Knife Culture...' (1999))

Operation Spotlight was a particularly heightened period of proactive policing in Scotland that included widespread stop and search along with home raids targeting drug dealers. Without more information its

impossible to know whether the knives and bladed weapons in this photo were found carried in the street or during raids inside people's homes, but certainly adults were included amongst the owners and all within the Strathclyde area of Scotland. In 2000 the photo is used twice again to refer to knife carrying in Scotland and Scottish murder rates, both uses apply indirect generalised captions and neither contain any youth-specific concern (see below).



(Image copied from 'Police Target Knife... 2000')



Friday, 3 March, 2000, 14:55 GMT

## Scotland tops murder league



Knives are a major factor in the number of murders  
The rate of murders in Scotland over a 10-year period was nearly twice the total in England and Wales, according to research.

(Image copied from *'Scotland Tops...'* (2000))

The image resurfaces south of the border in 2003 and was first signposted in my research when used in reference to knives in English schools during the increased sensitivity and interest following the death of Luke Walmsley. At a time when the public had heightened concern about school safety, the image of a table of offensive-looking weapons seized during a Scottish police operation that targeted adults and homes in 1999 is attached without clarification of its source to an article stating 'There is a growing problem of children bringing weapons to school' ('Warning of...' 2003). Misleading and irresponsible in its placement, the image has been disconnected from the 'fact' it originally claimed to represent.

In 2004, in more worrying misrepresentation, the photo appears on a children's news website under the headline 'Knife crime getting worse in UK' ('Knife crime getting...' 2004) with specific reference to 'young people' under the image. The Lemos and Crane Report (2004) released earlier that year recognised the fear of knives as one of the biggest contributing factors to knife carrying. And yet without accountability a five year old image that is particularly triggering but completely unrelated to the story is published on a children's news website.



(Image copied from 'Knife Crime Getting...' (2003))

Used again in reference to schools the photo appears in an article about schools being allowed to search students in 2004. With the caption ‘schools could get new search rights’ the inference is that *these* are the kinds of weapons that would, or indeed have, been found on students. Knowing the history of this photo, its selection for this article presents a clear editorial bias. Readers inaccurately assuming these weapons were found on students would be much more likely to support increased powers to search students.



(Image copied from ‘*Knife fears could...*’ 2004)

Similarly when the photo is used in 2006 to report that ‘Rail police mount knife crackdown’ (‘Rail Police Mount...’ 2006) in London, the image suggests an exaggeration of the facts. Despite the article stating that only two knives were found during the knife arch operation (size or style are not reported) the only photo of blades in the article is this table full of elaborate weapons taken seven years ago in Scotland.



(Image copied from ‘Rail police mount...’ 2006)

The most recent use of this image was in 2008. Nine years since its first use it is published, without reference to its origin, in an article ironically questioning whether the realities of ‘knife crime’ have been distorted through sensationalised reporting (Warren 2008).



(Image copied from Warren 2008 *Is Knife Crime Really Increasing?*)

Evidence that images are selected for being titillating to readers, regardless of their relevance to the facts they claim to represent, is both revealing and troubling. Especially considering 'it is the incorporation of images that most directly communicates the intended message' (Jewkes 2015:280) of news reports. As consumers, news audiences crave excitement from visual cues:

Looking at and judging the lives of others... harnesses a 'peculiar energy' bound up in the enduring human fixation on the traumatic and grotesque. In a similar way to passing the scene of an accident and feeling compelled to look, shocking images are a defining feature of spectatorship (Jewkes 2015:280).

The graphic images and powerfully conveyed visual communications in print or online ‘knife crime’ news reveal the dilemma of our moralistic desires.

In this dilemma of condemnation and entertainment consumers of ‘knife crime’ news are shocked yet fascinated, wanting first to *see* the weapons and then be disgusted. Such an enthusiasm for the lurid is cultivated by the press, willing to repetitively use a powerful image for nine years irrespective of its relevance to the content it’s attached to. The knife-enabled code may have enabled the grouping of ‘knife crime’ data, but it was spectatorship that defined ‘knife crime’ as we understand it today. Shocking images, along with evocative language, constructed an enthralling moral panic for audiences with ever increasing news value as concern grew. This response speaks opposite messages at the same time; “stop the knife crime – show us more knife crime”. Within this contradiction ‘knife crime’ rhetoric and imagery allows the public to moralistically condemn violence whilst simultaneously enthralled by the spectacle.

### **Making Knife Crime A ‘Black Crime’**

The case of Luke Walmsley in 2003 triggers a media response that brings authorized spokespeople (such as high ranking police officers and heads of

teaching associations) together towards a public definition of 'knife crime'. Sustaining news value the media utilizes photographic imagery and newly available crime data, propelled by proactive policing operations, to keep the story alive. At this stage in the history of the label it is predominantly young age and a public setting that defines the parameters of the category, but this begins to change significantly over the following years.

It is not until 2006 that 'knife crime' is frequently and openly defined through ethnicity and begins to be understood as a 'Black crime'. Earlier mentions of race were more likely to insinuate a racial dynamic such as; a think piece that centers on a youth project that specializes in working with Black adolescents (Lane and Wheeler 2003), describing a victim as a 'Somali boy' despite not including the nationality or ethnicity of others in the article (Johnston 2003), or criticizing Black music genres for promoting 'gangster' culture and glamourizing knives (Weathers 2005). But at the end of 2006 there are increasing discussions of 'knife crime' in relation to 'Black communities' within arguments for the reinstatement of stop and search to its pre-Macpherson freedoms.

The analysis of the articulation of 'knife crime' during 2006 suggests that one catalyst for this narrative shift is a growing social anxiety amongst suburban middle classes. This increasing concern is exemplified in the intensification of 'knife crime' news in response to a particular murder in London in January 2006. Tom Rhys Pryce was a wealthy White lawyer

killed by two working class Black teenagers near his home in north London. The disproportionate amount of coverage given to this case is so extreme at the time that the new police commissioner Ian Blair, evoking the language of the MacPherson inquiry, accuses the media press of 'institutional racism'. He Cites the deaths of several victims from ethnic minorities that happened on the same day that only 'got a paragraph on page 97' in comparison (Gibson and Dodd 2006).

The headlines of the Tom Rhys Pryce case could easily be confused with the sensationalist 'mugging' reports Hall et al. analysed in 1978. The police described the suspects as two Black males to the press in a request for witnesses following the incident. Below are the 'mugging' headlines that were published within 24 hours followed by how the article included the ethnicity of the suspects.

*The Evening Standard* 13<sup>th</sup> January 2006:

**'CITY LAWYER IS MURDERED BY MUGGERS ; Call to fiancée, then attack on way home'...**

'Police said members of the public witnessed the struggle between two black men and the victim' ('City lawyer...' 2006)

*Birmingham Post* 14<sup>th</sup> January 2006:

**'Muggers Brutally Murder Lawyer...'**

'Detectives believe he had been trying to defend himself when the two young black men launched their "ferocious" assault. They stabbed him in the head, torso and hands and left him dying on the pavement' (Dean and Marsden 2006)



*The Daily Mail 14<sup>th</sup> January 2006:*

**NO MERCY; Highflying young lawyer knifed to death outside his flat AFTER handing everything to muggers...**

Police said the lawyer was ambushed by two black men as he walked home from a local station after attending a social event with colleagues on Thursday night' (Wright & Koster 2006)

*The Daily Mirror 14<sup>th</sup> January 2006:*

**'HIS LIFE; He gave muggers all his possessions but they wanted more...'** Officers were yesterday retrieving CCTV footage from several cameras in the area in a bid to trace the killers - two black men thought to be in their 20s' (Edwards and Parry 2006)

*The Sun 14<sup>th</sup> January 2006:*

**'Mugged... and then stabbed to death...**

'Smartly-dressed Tom had been stabbed in the head, body and hands. He had been robbed of his wallet by two young black men as he walked to his home in Kensal Green, North West London, from the local Tube station. Police say the killing was unprovoked' (Sullivan 2006)

Only one of the papers references the ethnicity of the perpetrators in connection with the police investigation to find the killers (Edwards and Parry 2006) The others use 'Black' as part of the description of the incident – none of them mention the ethnicity of the victim, his Whiteness is assumed. Unlike the death of Luke Walmsley, where news value was increased by the young age of the victim and school setting, Tom Rhys

Pryce is front-page worthy because of the contrast between his social class and the setting of his death. It is more shocking (and thus more newsworthy) for a 'smartly-dressed', 'highflying', 'city lawyer' to die in a public rupture of violence given that the privileges of his class should protect from such scenarios (Gekowski, Gray and Adler 2012). But the middle classes in London were increasingly finding themselves confronted with the conditions of disadvantage on their doorstep. This murder is symbolic of particular anxiety and sociological dilemma during this moment.

Along with increasing the 'right to buy' initiative, New Labour 'regeneration' housing policies had extended the work that the Conservatives started in the late 1980s of transferring housing stock to private sector management. Known as state-led 'third-wave gentrification' this process is 'characterised by state encouragement of gentrification within previously hard-to-reach, deprived urban neighbourhoods including public housing estates' (Watt 2009). The combination of expecting Local Authorities to bring housing conditions to a decent standard whilst being refused money for this purpose, forced the sale or transfer of housing stock of areas that had since the post-war era been protected from competitive market forces (Ibid.).

Urban areas in conditions of 'managed decline' (Beaumont 2006), typified by 'intense and extensive deprivation of various kinds, run-down housing,

a poor image and a general air of neglect' (Watt 2009), were also areas with 'large black African/Caribbean population' (Ibid.). Once locations were targeted for regeneration the number of council owned properties rapidly decreased. Between 1981 and 2001 census the number of households in council owned properties in the Borough of Tower Hamlets reduced from 82% to 37.4%, whilst Lambeth dropped from 43.2% to 28.5% (Watt 2009).

The murder of Tom Rhys Pryce takes place in Kensal Green within the Borough of Brent, a district selected for state-led gentrification in 1999 under the New Deal for Communities (NDC) funded development scheme. Along with the performance indicators of house price increase (Batty, Beatty, Foden, Lawless, Pearson and Wilson 2010:24) the NDC measures its success through crime rate reduction (Ibid.). The privately and publicly funded project boasts 'an enhanced police service and neighbourhood warden scheme' (Batty et al. 2010:15) in its districts. Implementing a partnership with local police the NDC '*supplemented mainstream police budgets in order to fund more police and police community support officers, and to provide a flexible additional resource through which the police can respond to trouble 'hotspots'*' (Ibid.).

There are two articles in the Evening Standard on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2006 that recognise the gentrification context of the murder in Kensal Green but both to different effect. In language that conjures images of gentrifying as brave new settlers on the London's uncivilised frontiers, Gilligan writes:

*As the middle classes have pressed ever westward, the onward march into new territory has brought prosperous, professional London hard up against the toughest areas in the capital. For all the political flannel about inclusiveness and multiculturalism, London has some of Europe's most savage inequalities of status and wealth. Sandwiched between North Kensington and Harlesden, Kensal Green puts those inequalities side by side (Gilligan 2006).*

Gilligan goes on to point out that the area has always had violent stabbings, but without the 'men in suits [they] did not attract the attention of the media' (Ibid.). In contrast Paul Barker, writing in the same paper, suggests the presence of men in suits increases the frequency of jealous violent crime:

*Some social changes make confrontations more likely. Entire swathes of London - where once you'd have to scour around to find a single middleclass achiever - are busily being gentrified. This puts the well-off bang next door to the envious poor or the wholly criminal (Barker 2006).*

However, as Gilligan pointed out violent confrontations were not 'more likely', only *more likely* to involve the middle classes – and therefore more likely to be reported; both to the police and in the press. Barker goes further in this article, proposing the best solution for supressing the poor from attacking the wealthy is to 'Step up stop-and-search', on the basis that '*After the stabbing by muggers of lawyer Tom Rhys Pryce, we shouldn't be afraid to extend controversial police powers on our streets*' (Barker 2006) It is this latter response to crimes within areas in the process of gentrification that will gain momentum by the end of 2006, endorsed and additionally funded by private developers investing in these districts.

This is a significantly different moment in London's social history than that which Hall described in *Policing the Crisis* (1978), and yet here the continuations between 'mugging' and 'knife crime' are apparent. It is these same inner rings of London that are in contestation. These are the previously 'sub-standard and decaying' areas, the only spaces made available to the newly arrived Caribbean workforce invited to rebuild post-war Britain in the 1950s and 1960s (Hall 1978:342). Treated with such hostility and racism by the English these areas were transformed into enclosed safe spaces for black families and communities 'for a *West Indian Culture*' to take root and survive in Britain, it required a solid framework and a material base: the construction of a West Indian enclave community – the birth of colony society' (Hall 1978:344). The 'colonisation' of streets, neighbourhoods, markets and cafes in the 1960's suburbs were features of a community defending itself from the public racism on the outside.

In the story of 'mugging' this collective capacity for a Black social and cultural existence is considered by the powerful to be a dangerous consolidation of class and race, geographically facilitated by 'colony life' into a revolutionary 'militant consciousness' (Hall 1978:326). It is this anxiety for which the label 'mugging' became a means of justification, proving a reason to enter, supervise and brutalise young Black people in these communities (Hall 1978:351).

Thirty years later these culturally rich urban areas, with colourful markets and lively high-streets, now become attractive to the commuter-class looking for large family homes within a short train ride from the city centre. Under the new label 'knife crime', police re-enter the former-Black colonies on behalf of the new White settlers, facilitating the occupation through interrupting and hassling young Black men in the street and searching their bodies in ritual humiliation. To some extent 'knife crime' has always represented an anxiety about the control of public spaces, but the resurgence of stop and search in *these* areas at *this* time is a clear performance of who is welcome and who is not, who is citizen and who is 'Other'.

The reporting of the case of Tom Rhys Pryce is a pivotal moment in 'knife crime's social history, in which the ethnicity of the assailant becomes formative in the explanation of the crime. It will be further argued here that it is this crucial shift towards 'knife crime' as a racialised crime category that increases its functional capacity as a deviance label. Not only does it divert the discussion from class to culture in the dilemmas of the suburbs, but it will also produce a common-sense rhetoric on stop and search that will nullify the findings of the MacPherson report and its restraints on policing.

### **Stop and Search – “For Their Own Good”**

Once ethnicity is established as a defining feature of ‘knife crime’ discriminatory police practices are once again justified and regain public support. Over the course of 2006 the growing demand for stop and search hinges on the idea that whilst the findings of the MacPherson report were correct, if ‘knife crime’ is a ‘Black crime’ then it is young Black people who stand to gain the most from stop and search returning. This argument is strengthened through the increased visibility of so called ‘Black on Black’ murders at this time. The separate cases of 15 year olds Kiyon Prince and Alex Kamondo killed within one month of each other in 2006 are a particular example of how ethnicity becomes amplified in news reporting at this time.

When news breaks of Kiyon Prince’s death in May 2006 the papers immediately centre both the victim and the perpetrators ethnicity. The guardian reports; *‘Kiyon Prince, who was 15 and a member of Queens Park Rangers’ youth team, was attacked after an argument with another black teenager outside a block of flats’* (Jones 2006). The assumption in this statement is that the ethnicity of the individuals is an important detail in the comprehension of the event. In a report of the same incident *The Daily Mail* makes a much more laboured connection to ‘ethnic minorities’ and ‘Somalian youth’. In the absence of statistical evidence they rely on anecdotal ‘proof’ from local residents:

Residents said there had been a series of fights between local youths, many from ethnic minorities, 'trying to establish their territory', as one put it. Graffiti and 'tag names' are sprayed on several walls. One tenant said she saw a Somalian youth brandishing a machete last month (Harris 2006).

A month later in June 2006 Alex Kamondo lost his life in Lambeth. When asked what was the motive was for his murder the police are reported as replying; "Other than to say a fight between two groups of black youths, we don't know" (Vasagar 2006). Phrasing as 'other than to say' implies that the ethnicity as a feature of the fight is in part an explanation of the motive. The Telegraph reports the same police statement as; 'Police have described simply as a "fight between two groups of black youths"(Condron 2006). By now, race is established a component of the incident, formative in the understanding of the violent event.

In addition to centering the ethnicity of victims and perpetrators in crime news, the construction of 'knife crime' as rooted in black culture is enacted in more direct ways. In criticism of knife amnesties an article is published with the title, *'Hand Over his Knife? No Rude Boy Will do That? ('Hand In...'* 2006). This article contains a mocking phonetic impression of a young persons response to an amnesty, written as; *'Yeah man, I gotta go down the cop shop and ditch me shank, innit. Gotta do the right fing an' that'* (Ibid.). The use of a self-described 'Jamaican-inflected cockney accent' (Ibid.) is later justified by the author stating:

I don't think it's divisive to associate Afro-Caribbean youths with knife crime... Just as with gun crime, black lads are disproportionately responsible for knife crimes - and



disproportionately its tragic victims. Furthermore, the type of the "rude boy" is what all of London's malcontents black, white or brown - aspire to ('Hand in...' 2006).

This idea that 'knife crime' is a fashion, made cool through Black culture is pervasive notion. Looking back at the response to Luke Walmsley's death in 2003 there was an immediate articulation of an outside threat from the streets that was spreading, being smuggled and spilling into schools, but there was no explicit language of what that dangerous culture was. Three years later it is proudly pronounced – with stop and search centred as in the best interest for Black children

One article at this time explains; *'The objection that the stop-and-search policy was racist is misguided. It is young black people who would be the biggest beneficiaries of proactive policing, because they are the people who are most likely to be attacked'* (Bailey 2006). This opinion is not validated with evidence either of the benefits of Stop and Search to Black people or the disproportionate representation within the victim group, which in fact the 2004 Knife Crime Report found young white men to make up the largest part of (NCHQ 2004). But within the language and selective visibility of 'knife crime' in 2006 this idea becomes increasingly matter-of-fact.

Seemingly oblivious to historic anti-racist campaigns against stop and search, The Evening Standard suggests ethnic minority parents have two

options; either accept that your sons will be racially profiled or allow them to become victims of 'knife crime':

Some in the black community have complained in the past that they are unfairly targeted, and that has rightly been a point of concern. Yet today many ethnic minority parents may prefer their law-abiding sons to be stopped occasionally by police than see them fall victim to knife crime. Both the police and the courts must now respond more decisively to this exceptionally dangerous street trend ('Knife Crackdown...' 2006).

Whilst news press in 2006 demand the *return* of stop and search with overtly racialised justification, data from the Met Police demonstrate that stop and search had already *been* significantly increasing since 2002 (MPA 2004, EHRC 2010), enabled and in many areas additionally funded by the Street Crimes Initiative 2002, and the private-public schemes of the NDC. Some of this increase can be attributed to the criminalisation of young Asians in the UK in the wake of the US terrorist attack, 9/11 (Jefferson 2013:391). But along with Asian youths, Black young people are increasingly over policed during this period; '*between 1998-9 and 2001-2, the use of section 60 search powers nearly tripled, with black people 28 times and Asians 18 times more likely to be stopped than white people*' (Jefferson 2013:391).

The social impacts of this increase were already being experienced and resisted by Black Brixton residents who stated during a community consultation by the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) in 2004:

“We are at war!”

“We are being terrorised!”

“We are being oppressed by an invading army!”

“We cannot accept stop and search! If we refuse to be stopped and searched it will be victory!”

“How do we turn the tables? How do we take control?”

“Things today are out of control. This is ‘sus’ by the back door!”

“We are bashing our faces against the politics of White supremacy!”

(MPA 2004:43)

The timeline of events during this moment is highly important; when news media in 2006 demands that we ‘*bring back stop and search*’, stop and search is already back. Described by Black residents in London’s suburbs two years earlier as ‘terrorising’ and ‘harassing’, ‘sus by the backdoor’. The mobilisation against Black youths in London’s suburbs predates the racialisation of ‘knife crime’ in the news. This challenges the purpose of the interaction; stop and search is not responding to ‘knife crime’, ‘knife crime’ responds to stop and search, providing a justification for the increasing harassment of young Black people in the spaces of the city targeted for regeneration.

## **Conclusion.**

In the previous chapter it was argued that the change in police crime codes and a mobilisation towards knives at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century amplified knife data and enabled the conception of the label. In this chapter the close analysis of early public uses of the phrase 'knife crime' have demonstrated the central role of news media in the communication of the phenomenon as a public mobilisation. It is news media that enables and defines the response during this moment, with increasing momentum and amplification through the combined impact of children, violence, race and knives.

Dictated by the demands of its consumers, news producers consider violence that involves children and knives in public spaces to have particularly high news value. But the news analysis in this chapter suggests that in order to maintain the interest of 'knife crime' spectators the label moves through several stages of development. First the children in 'knife crime' headlines get younger and there is a focus on schools; language, images and manipulated data are used to increasingly shock audiences. Until eventually 'knife crime' meaning comes to rest on its most impactful representation; the dangerous threat of a 'criminal Other' , namely young black males in the inner London suburbs.

When PC Foy tells the press in 2004 that ‘knife crime is almost exclusively a young people’s phenomenon’, in some respects he’s right. Without the news value of youth, used exclusively to define knife data through selective reporting, there would be no phenomenon of which to speak. The exclusion of domestic violence in the discussion of ‘knife crime’, despite the high incidence of injury and statistical contribution of crimes within this setting, demonstrates the subjectivity in the construction of the ‘knife crime’ label. The label can be seen to respond to demands of spectatorship; ‘knife crime’ came to represent what audiences desired.

If there is a ‘knife culture’ in Britain it is surely most powerfully manifest in news reports that relish in images of bladed weapons, lurid details, and the spectacle of knife violence. The vast majority of the public will only experience violence with knives through marketed crime news, as an audience simultaneously entertained and disgusted, consuming and condemning. In turn this moralistic judgement leads to proactive responses; “no excuses”, “mandatory sentences”, “stop and search”.

As ethnicity becomes a defining feature of the label in news reporting, the construct of ‘knife crime youth’ becomes increasingly racialised. The findings of this chapter suggest that during a time of state-led gentrification of the suburbs, anxiety over ‘knife crime’ justified policing powers to occupy the contested spaces of the city. Stop and search increases to beyond its pre-MacPherson (1999) status during this time,

justified through 'knife crime' as a tactic benefitting young Black men the most. The analysis of defining events during this period present a new understanding of 'knife crime' as a specific response to particular crimes, reflecting the anxieties of mainstream society and the pragmatic priorities of the reporting press and proactive policing at this time.

## **Chapter Five.**

### **A Moral Panic; The 'War on Knife Crime'**

## **Introduction**

In chapter three it was argued that the mobilisation towards knife-enabled crime took place at a significant moment in the history of policing and the politics of New Labour's ideological hybridity. Chapter four retraced the increasing specificity of the public definition of 'knife crime', constructing a criminality located geographically and ethnically amongst inner city Black youths. In this third phase of the chronological re-telling of the origins of 'knife crime' the analysis considers the events that led to a large-scale moral panic in 2007/2008 and an expansion of police powers and discrimination with public consent.

It will be argued here that this criminalisation and 'Othering' of Black teens mirrors that of the 'mugging' response in the 1970s, legitimizing exceptional force throughout the economic uncertainty of the global financial crisis and its aftermath. Looking closely at the cultural causes and societal impacts of the collapse of the markets, this chapter presents the political focus on 'knife crime' at this moment as a functional construct during a crisis in the hegemonic management of the state.

Three decades separate the mobilisation that defined 'mugging' and the concept of 'knife crime'. In that time the neoliberal conjuncture has deepened and extended the logic of its ideologies. Post-industrialism, financial crisis, and austerity produce an evolving political terrain and expressions of crime and criminality adapt to cultural changes. Whilst the



similarities in the continuing conjuncture will be drawn out through this analysis, this research is also concerned with what is different. This chapter looks at how the language and articulation 'knife crime' is distinctly suited to the politics of this moment and how this has contributed to subduing of political resistance and unrest.

Finally, this chapter presents tentative analysis of 'knife crime's recent return to the headlines drawing attention to the interaction between the extension of police powers and the political uncertainty during Britain's referendum on European membership. Although it is too early to fully comprehend the broader function of this renewed attention to 'knife crime' this research presents cautionary speculation - reflecting on what can be learnt from the processes that defined the first 'knife crime' moral panic. To begin with, this analysis will look closely at the response to knife homicides rates in 2007, retracing the events that led to significant changes in policing in 2008.

### **A Spike in 'Knife Crime'?**

It is widely acknowledged that 2007 and 2008 witnessed unusually high levels of violence between young people and came to represent a 'spike' on the charts of knife homicides in London (Wood 2010). There were twenty-six teenage deaths in 2007 compared to the previous stable average of seventeen a year since 2000 (Wood 2010:97). This figure increased to thirty

teenage deaths in the capital in 2008, twenty-four of which killed by knives (Barr 2017), before returning to the lower level of thirteen in 2009 (Wood 2010). The data does not specify the age of the perpetrator or the individual context of the teen deaths in 2008 but news reports from this period demonstrate a variety of settings; fights in a nightclubs/pubs, domestic violence cases, one stalker and a racially aggravated murder of a 17 year old by a 31 year old man, are included in this figure (BBC 2008).

Caution should be taken when inferring a 'spike' in criminality from relatively small numbers - a few unusual events can appear dramatic on this scale - but there are aspects of the statistical representation that cause valid concern. Teen-on-teen homicides made up a larger proportion of youth deaths in London in 2008 when compared to the rest of the country; half of the young people killed in the capital were killed by other teenagers compared with a third of youth homicides outside of the city (Wood 2010:99). Empirical evidence from youth practitioners in London at that time also describe an increasing intensity of violence between young people during this period, an observation that will be returned to in greater detail in chapter six.

The analysis of the phenomenon in this thesis so far has challenged the authenticity of the label's constitution, detailing the manipulation of data and images to produce artificial increases and induce news value, propelled by the law and order agenda of New Labour and defence of proactive

policing. However, it is important to reinforce at this intersection in the history of the label, when a newly defined crime category transitions into a full societal moral panic, that the reality of violence between children and its devastating consequences at this time is not denied. Just as Cohen (1972) and Hall et al. (1978) were clear, the analysis of a moral panic does not refute the reality of the acts – but rather, draws attention to the ‘particular character of the social reaction’ (Squires 2009:129).

Recognising the concerning rates of teen homicides in 2007 and 2008 this research supports the need for increased visibility and public attention to the harm of inter-personal violence between teens. However, through critique of the particular forms that the response takes during this moment, it will be argued that the articulation of this violence through the pre-defined category ‘knife crime’ had detrimental consequences for young people. Not only did the established parameters and discourse of the label dictate what was included in the reporting of cases, but also what was crucially left out.

Previous chapters have detailed the processes through which ‘knife crime’ came to be understood as a criminal youth culture that was ethnically defined. By attaching the label ‘knife crime’ to Black victims of violence at this time any disproportionate representation of this demographic is considered in isolation from socio-economic factors, in favour of cultural explanations. Aside from culture - economic and social influences could

have provided a compelling explanation for the representation of Black children in violent crime at this time.

Housing statistics for England show that 8.7% of the white population live in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods, compared to 19.6% of the black population (Gov.uk 2018c). In London in 2007, 40% of people from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds lived in low-income households, compared to 20% of the white population (MacInnes & Kenway 2009:61). Living in deprived areas inarguably increases the probability of encountering everyday violence - with knives a particular risk in these conditions; *'members of those communities are more likely to experience violent crime, and muggings in particular, which involve a high proportion of knife usage'* (Eades 2007:24).

It is also known that death by sharp instrument is proportionally twice as common a method of homicide in poor areas than in wealthy parts of Britain (Eades 2007) and that London has the highest rates of child poverty compared to other regions (Wood 2010). Despite the correlation between homicide methods, poverty, and the disproportionate representation of Black and minority ethnic groups living in deprived neighbourhoods, social and economic inequality is not discussed during the heightened reporting of three Black teenagers stabbed to death in February 2007.

Centring culture as cause and punitive action as the solution, Tony Blair's comments on youth homicides in early 2007 characterises the reaction that will dominate the following years. Speaking at an event in Cardiff in April 2007 he states:

In respect of knife and gun gangs, the laws need to be significantly toughened. There needs to be an intensive police focus, on these groups. The ring-leaders need to be identified and taken out of circulation; if very young, as some are, put in secure accommodation. The black community – the vast majority of whom in these communities are decent, law-abiding people horrified at what is happening – need to be mobilised 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. (Tony Blair cited in UKPOL 2007)

The explicit abstraction of 'Black kids' and the 'Black community' in the framing of these deaths has been a process of articulation that has been gradually building over the preceding years. New Labour's 'tough on crime' rhetoric in the late 1990s was not overtly racialised but the development of a distinct and 'new' criminality understood as 'knife crime' in the 2000's increasingly normalised a discourse that centred race and culture in both the identification of cause and the proposed solutions. This shift in language will be followed closely in this chapter, presenting an argument that these new forms of racism become crucial in the coordination of exceptional force and hegemonic management during this moment.

### **‘Knife Crime’ as Culture; Slippery Racism**

In chapter three the social and political implications of the MacPherson report (MacPherson 1999) were discussed in detail, along with the particular ideologies of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘race relations’ that defined the language of social policy and political rhetoric at the turn of the century. Whilst overt racism and discrimination were no longer publicly acceptable, a decade later expressions of racism can be seen to have shifted and taken on new discrete forms, enabling their continued communication in this new political context; *‘Casual talk of “black youth” had been replaced by superficially anodyne, technical disquisitions on “antisocial behaviour” and the quantifiable perils of ungovernable gang culture’* (Gilroy 2013:np). The notion of inherent racial difference was preserved through shifting to socially acceptable forms of ‘cultural racism’ (Gilroy 1987), or ‘new racism’ (Barker 1981). Under this new paradigm difference is attributed to culture rather than biology but the same racially defined hierarchy remains (Grosfoguel 1999).

This ability of racist ideologies of white supremacy to produce new socially acceptable forms is reliant on the adaptability of its concepts, remaining fluid in expression but consistent in meaning:

[W]hat is really interesting about racism as a set of ideas and political practices is that it is able to provide images of the ‘other’ which are simple and unchanging and at the same time to adapt to the changing social and political environment. Thus contemporary racist ideas are able to maintain a link with the mystical values of classical racism and to adopt and use cultural and political symbols that are part of contemporary society’ (Solomos and Back 1996:210)

Within the new terrains of contemporary politics the racism communicated through 'knife crime' is not *new*, but the articulation of racism through the label adopts new symbolic forms, epitomising what has been called 'the slippery nature of contemporary racisms' (Solomos and Back 1996:213). The accumulating rhetoric of 'knife crime' as a 'trend' or 'dangerous culture' is accompanied by an assortment of racist stereotypes; gangsters (Weathers 2005), absent Black fathers (Wintour, Watt and Topping 2008), dysfunctional families (Weathers 2005) and hip-hop music ('Cameron Attacks...' 2006) all surreptitiously make an appearance. Whether race is explicitly mentioned or not, the construction of the label has ensured that the phrase 'knife crime' comes to stand for a criminality that is distinctly 'other' – a threat stemming from outside of English civility.

Racism like a 'scavenger ideology' (Solomos and Back 1996:213) is constantly morphing in order to fit the changing politics of each moment. Analysis of this period concludes that 'knife crime' is a particularly effective articulation for this age, embodying both the old imagination of a violent and primitive 'other' and the new language of crime as 'culture'. A report by the Runnymede Trust published in 2008 found that the incidence of 'culture' as a discursive device in the media coverage of crime related to 'gangs', guns and knives is a relatively contemporary phenomenon. Plotting the frequency of 'gang culture', 'gun culture' and 'knife culture' in

national newspapers, the report demonstrated that this discourse became established from 2000 onwards, with 'knife culture' emerging from 2003 onwards.



(Graph copied from Sveinsson 2007:6)

Looking at *how* 'culture' was used within reporting of violent crime the report found that it navigated respectable forms of racism whilst simultaneously negating structural analysis in the discussion of crime and violence:

[S]tating 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 population, and is unrelated to the structure of British society and the experience of black people within it' (Sveinsson 2007:6,7).

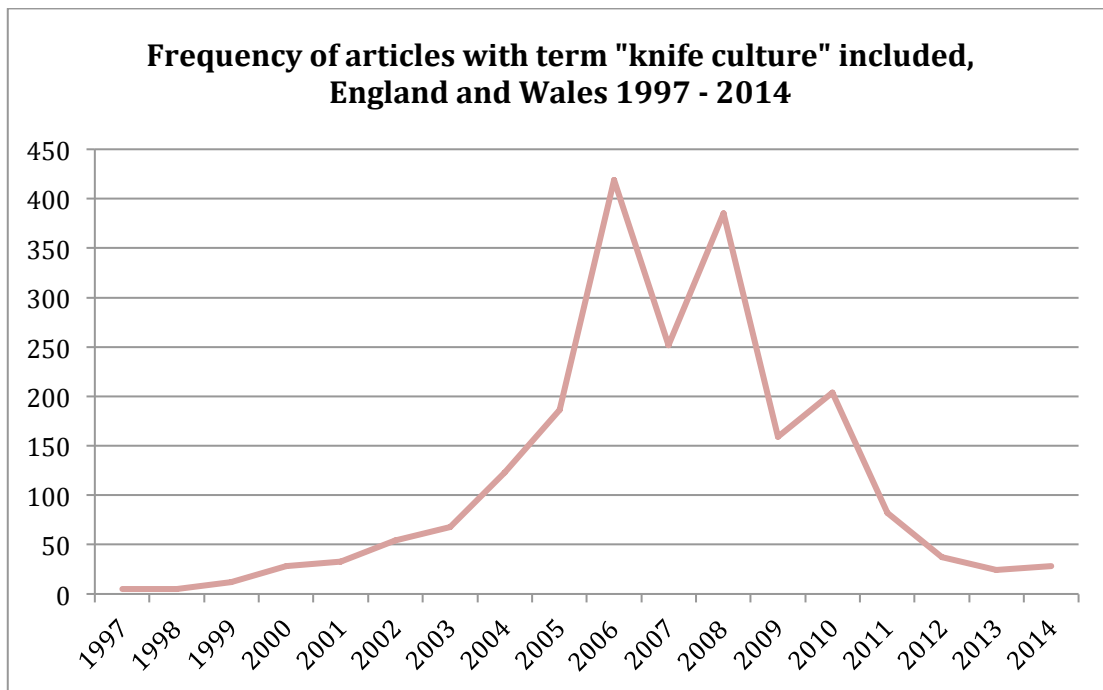
The attachment of 'knife crime' with a 'knife culture' since its inception has enabled the category to perform this dual function with incredible influence. The narrative of 'culture' largely excludes the white population;



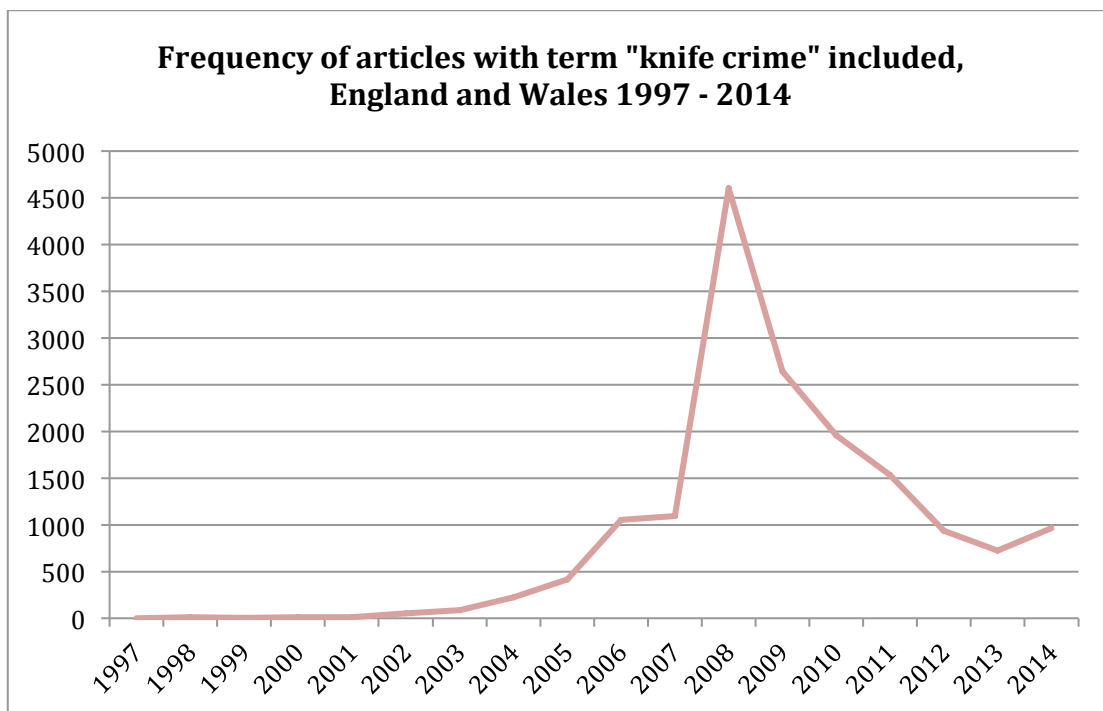
*“Culture’ and ‘community’ are seldom evoked when speaking about white Britons. White middle-class England is not thought of as a ‘community’ in itself, and to be English is not considered a ‘cultural’ trait’ (Sveinsson 2007:3). Thus ‘Knife crime’, through a rhetoric of ‘culture’, inherently excludes white children from its implied meaning - negating societal responsibility for interpersonal youth violence by blaming Black children for their own disadvantage; ‘Fascinating tales of gangs, murder and mayhem become part of insisting that culture is once again the key to seeing how blacks have been the primary authors of their own urban misfortune’ (Gilroy 2010:22).*

Looking at the occurrence of ‘knife culture’ in the graph above its representation reflects the social history of ‘knife crime’ retraced in previous chapters; a term used publicly from 2003 but becoming prominent in 2006. In 2007 it appears that ‘gun culture’ and ‘gang culture’ replace ‘knife culture’ as the most frequently mentioned in news reporting. Applying similar analysis to news coverage beyond 2007 this research has produced two further graphs. Graph A shows that the incidence of “knife culture” in news reports peaked again in 2008 reflecting the substantial surge in “knife crime” news as depicted in Graph B.

Graph A



Graph B



(Graphs prepared using data from ProQuest – National and regional papers in England and Wales)

As the media respond to the increase in youth violence in 2007 and 2008 the interpretation of the problem through the lens of ‘knife crime’ also becomes its justification. Now publicly recognised as an established crime category ‘knife crime’ at this time is regarded as *causa sui* - the label stands as reason for the violence in itself. The significance of reporting the increased violence as ‘knife crime’ in 2007 is not limited to the realm of representation. The discursive influence of the language of ‘knife crime’ shapes public perception and, in turn, government policy. Social policies and government-led initiatives that assume ‘Black culture’ as criminogenic, or insist that the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in high-crime areas is caused by inherent inferiority, are likely to be flawed and harmful from the start. Furthermore, as the events of 2008 demonstrate, cultural racism through ‘knife crime’ becomes a fundamental component of the state of exception, providing public consent for the extension of police powers during the uncertainty of the financial crisis.

### **The War on ‘Knife Crime’**

Following reports of increase teen deaths in 2007 and early 2008 the societal reaction to ‘knife crime’ will take a significant turn when

Conservative MP Boris Johnson becomes Mayor of London in May 2008. Elected on a law and order manifesto, its not long before Johnson makes his mark. Within 10 days of his appointment, On the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2008, The Met Police with Johnson declare 'war on knife crime gangs' (Edwards et al. 2008) launching 'a fight-back against knife crime' (Ibid.).

Using additional funding from the Mayor's budget the Met police commence 'Operation Blunt 2'. This response includes the formation of a specialist taskforce of one hundred and fifty uniformed officers, working in ten units of fifteen officers, targeting ten boroughs to conduct unlimited stop and search through Section 60 searches. The authorisation of this specific law to target 'knife crime' is a significant political development that will have lasting and destructive consequences on police-community relations.

There are several legislative police powers through which searches of vehicles and cars can be legally carried out. Section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984; '*PACE provides the police with the power to stop and search any person or vehicle when the officer has reasonable grounds for suspecting that stolen or prohibited articles will be found*' (MPA 2004:17). Similarly Section 47 of the Fire Arms Act 1968 allows officers to search persons when there is 'reasonable suspicion' of a firearms offence. However, Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, along with Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000, are distinctly

different in that they *do not* require reasonable grounds for searches. Both these powers were intended to cover particular areas enabling swift policing for a limited time in a specific locality (MPA 2004).

Prior to 2008 Section 60 searches were rare, as they required pre-authorization by a senior officer with a designation of particular area. The legislation was commonly used to police football matches to combat 'hooliganism' where the date and location of the Section 60 could be planned in advance. As a reinvention of this policing power the Met police assign Section 60 as a 'knife crime' reduction tactic in 2008 to be used across all of London with authorisation for a rolling, blanket coverage. At the launch of Operation Blunt 2, Assistant Commissioner Tim Goodwin admitted the use of Section 60 in this way was a 'sensitive issue' describing it as 'not politically correct' and 'fairly in your face policing' (Edwards et al. 2008). But went on to confirm the Met's commitment to it saying, "*I see this going on for the long term because we really, really have to do something about it.*" (Edwards et al. 2008). Comparing Met police stop and search data by legislative power from twelve months prior to, and twelve months after the declaration of 'war on knife crime', the prominence of Section 60 in this response is evident.

| Weapons related S&S<br>May 2007 – April 2008 |                 |            |        | Weapons related S&S<br>June 2008 – May 2009 |                  |            |                      |
|--|-----------------|------------|--------|---|------------------|------------|----------------------|
| Section 1                                    | Section 60      | Section 47 | Total  | Section 1                                   | Section 60       | Section 47 | Total<br>(%increase) |
| 47,256<br>(67%)                              | 18,355<br>(26%) | 4767 (7%)  | 70,378 | 80,060<br>(39%)                             | 121,221<br>(59%) | 4423 (2%)  | 205,704 (292%)       |

(Data from Metropolitan police cited in McCandless et al. 2016:2)

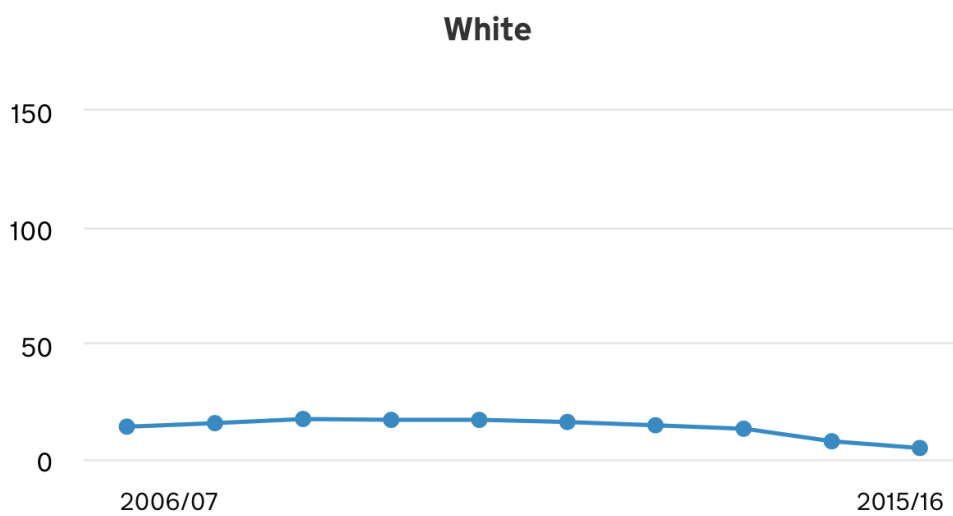
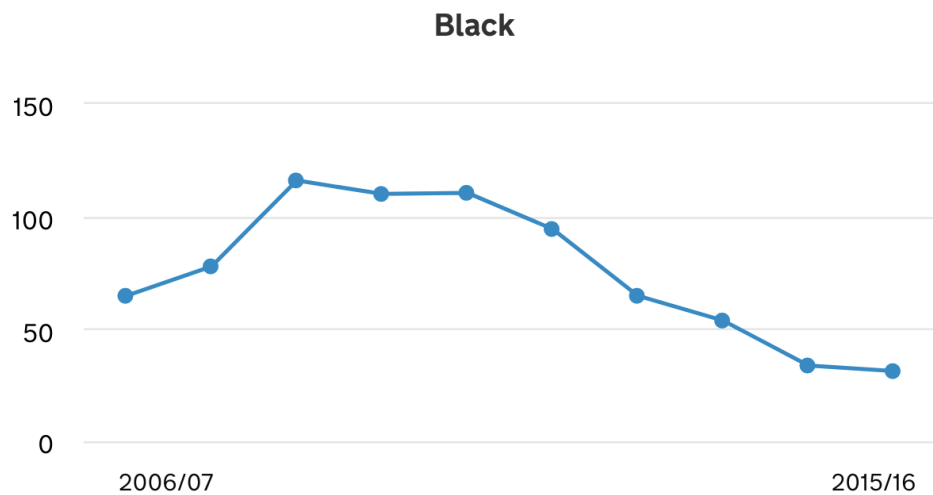
The total number of searches in London increased by 292% in 2008 with the proportion of Section 60 searches increasing from 26% to 59% of weapon related searches. At the same time the arrest rate halved from 4% to 2% per cent and stayed at 2% for the three years that the Operation Blunt 2 was in action (McCandless et al. 2016). The arrest rate for dangerous weapons was lower still, retrieving less than one ‘offensive weapon’ per two hundred searches (Shiner 2015).

The argument that this hostile police tactic was urgently required in order to reduce ‘knife crime’ was compromised when it was revealed that the ‘war on knife crime’ had no impact on recorded knife offences or crime figures in general. One report on the effectiveness of Operation Blunt 2 compared statistics from boroughs that weren’t targeted with those that were and found increased search rates had no effect on recorded crime - In

fact, ambulance calls were found to have fallen faster in boroughs with smaller increases in search rates (McCandless 2016).

In a comprehensive statistical study of ten years of police stop and search data in London Tiratelli et al. (2018) scrutinised and tested for significant negative correlations between each type of search power against specific offences and general recorded crime rates. This included specific attention the impact of the dramatic increase in section 60 searches in 2008 in relation to recorded crime before and after Operation Blunt 2. In summary of their findings Tiratelli et al. (2018) state; 'We struggled to find evidence of an effect of S&S on violent crime.'(Tiratelli et al. 2018:12)

Whilst there is no evidence that the increase in stop and search impacted on violent crime or knife offences, there is strong evidence that the extension of this power significantly increased racial discrimination. Comparing the rate of searches in London per thousand of the population disproportionality peaks to 116 Black people per 1000 of the Black population searched in 2008/2009, this is a sharp increase from 78 per 1000 the year before. In contrast the chart of White proportionality demonstrates very little change throughout the 'war on knife crime', increasingly only slightly in 2008 from 15.5 to 17.3 out of every 1000 of the population (Home Office 2017).



(Charts copied from Home Office 2017)

The disproportionality between white and black searches more than doubled during this moment. In 2007 Black people were 4.1 times more likely to be searched in London than White people, but by 2008 they were 9.7 times more likely to be stopped (EHRC 2012:24,25). There are some critics that argue disproportionality in stop and search data can be explained and seen as proportionate when understood through analysis of the 'available population' (Miller, Bland and Quinton 2002, Waddington et al. 2004).



This theory suggests that because stop and search targets particular areas at specific times, proportionately should be calculated on the *available* population (those that frequent public spaces) rather than the *resident* population provided by the census. A study that undertook this approach in Reading and Slough found '*Racial minorities are proportionately no more likely, and often less, to attract the suspicions of patrolling police officers than are members of the white population*' (Waddington et al. 2004:911). Police as proof of their impartiality often herald this conclusion and the 'availability argument' has certainly been discussed in many of the community-police meetings I have attended.

However, there are particular problems with the 'availability' argument here described. Firstly, the situational limitations of this study should be considered, given that disproportionality in London doubled from 2004 to 2008, arrest rates halved, and the methods of Waddington et al. were not replicated in this condition. Secondly, the methods of this particular study were to investigate two districts, Reading and Slough, observing available populations in '*areas where stop and search was prevalent*' (Waddington et al. 2004:895). Herein lies the paradox of crime amplification; the evidence that prevalent areas of stop and search are racially proportionate because the available population is less white, is also verification that less white areas are disproportionately policed.

This idea of indiscriminate policing of *criminal areas* carries through in the defense of stop and search in 2008 but the argument is not supported by research:

While small independent efforts may have been implemented at some times and places, we have no reason to believe that S&S activity was actively being targeted towards crime hotspots in a systematic and consistent manner across the police force area. Indeed, evidence suggests that it is people, not places, that are most commonly 'targeted' by officers for S&S (Tiratelli et al. 2018:5).

Whilst Operation Blunt 2 claimed to be targeting areas police had identified as 'knife crime' hot spots, the evidence suggests the real target was young Black people. The public argument to justify this disproportionality this had been established for sometime and stop and search had been gradually increasing since 2002, but there are particular characteristics of policing powers in 2008 that set this period apart.

The 2008 'war on knife crime' announced by the Met police in response to the increase in teen homicides was a distinct shift in policing. Not only in terms of frequency of stop and search in the capital, but also a dramatic change in legislative powers being operationalized in the street. Section 60 legally and symbolically authorized confrontational policing of young people, the vast majority of whom were found to be carrying nothing offensive. The blanket authorization, increased disproportionality and the antagonism of this response, resulted in thousands of additional children experiencing the subjugation and social marginalization of being publicly

searched. The continuation of Operation Blunt 2 for three years, in spite of its negative impact on arrest rates and inability to reduce knife offences, suggest this display of state power and extension of force was not just about 'knife crime'.

The lessons of *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978) demonstrate that the articulation of law and order and exceptional use of force through race and racism take place in interaction with hegemonic crisis and the management of consent. The three years from 2008 that are marked by extended stop and search powers and increased police mobilisation in London's streets are also defined by a global economic event that threatens to expose the deep contradictions of neoliberal corporate capitalism. An analysis of the events of the financial crash and its aftermath, along with particular attention to the impact on young people will be provided here. Leading to an argument that the response to increased youth homicides in 2007/2008 performed multiple social functions in the management of crisis at this time.

### **Economic Uncertainty and Hegemonic Crisis**

The collapse of the global financial markets in the 2000's is an event that has become known as 'the financial crisis'. *'The worldwide financial turmoil that began in 2007 triggered the first run on a British bank since 1866 and a near meltdown in the banking system 12 months later'* (Hodson and

Mabbett 2009:1041). It is widely acknowledged that the cause of the crash was reckless macro-economic speculation in the greedy pursuit of profit under neoliberal corporate capitalism. The liberated global financial institutions had amassed to a dangerous fiscal culture of excessive credit and liquidity risk - spurred by staff bonuses, deregulation of the market and the lack of effective risk management in corporate governance frameworks (Ashby et al. 2010, Hodson and Mabbett 2009,).

This risky deregulation of the market had been extended under New Labour since 1997, used as a bargaining chip for the support of the financial institutions whilst promising the public that the resulting economic growth would be invested in public services (Hodson and Mabbett 2009:1058). This lack of fiscal discipline not only enabled unsustainable speculation, but the investments in public services were also funded by Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), which were themselves tied up in risky global debt markets.

The crash of the market immediately impacted negatively on PPP funded public sector projects. 'The decline was largest in the United Kingdom, falling from over 60 projects in 2008 valued at about £8.4 billion to 25 projects valued at £1.6 billion in 2009' (Loxley 2012:10). The illusion that corporate capitalism was in everyone's interest was greatly exposed during the financial crisis and yet a social rejection of neoliberalism was avoided.

To contextualize the use of excessive force in the streets during this period it is important to note the events and political decisions that took place in the aftermath of the global crash and how the ideological reworking of a national deficit came to disproportionately impact on young people and their day-to-day safety.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2008 the New Labour government, now under the leadership of Gordon Brown, announced a rescue package to the value of £500 Billion. This was a huge sum of public funds considering the entire annual government spend in Britain is just under £600 Billion. The bailout was presented to the public as a necessary investment that would bring financial return through bonds. Brown insisted '*for every family in the country, the stability of the banking system matters*' (Swain 2008), whilst Alistair Darling, Chancellor of the Exchequer promised '*the Government would get taxpayers' money back within three years*' (Ibid.).

Such an extraordinary state intervention in the free market was in direct contradiction of neoliberal logic. Despite this exposure of fiscal instability and unsustainability, there was no paradigm change in economic policy. New Labour's political bargain with the banks may have been 'profoundly shaken' by the crash but the relationship between government and finance did not change (Hodson and Mabbett 2009:1058). Furthermore, we now know that this sharp increase in borrowing to lend to the banks would not be returned in three years and that the bonds were eventually sold back at

a public loss (Berry 2016). This deficit then became the justification for a prolonged period of ‘austerity measures’ – a brutal roll back of the state with devastating cuts to public services and welfare, deepening conditions of deprivation and increasing inequality.

The politics of austerity at the end of the 2000s involved a distinct ideological reworking of neoliberal crisis into a social responsibility agenda. Whilst in opposition in 2009 the Conservatives began to construct a moralistic argument for austerity. By evoking post-war nostalgia of ‘tightening our belts’ and ‘living within our means’ the banker’s deficit was translated into an issue of irresponsible public spending (Berry 2016). Reinforcing the neoliberal ideology of economic nationalism, sacrifice and restraint became a form of social cohesion, encapsulated by David Cameron’s austerity catch phrase: “We’re all in this together” (Brady and Dugan 2012).

With a hung parliament election result in the 2010 elections the Conservative in coalition with the Liberal Democrats were able to enact their austerity agenda. Once in government, Conservative chancellor George Osborne put the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) into action, systematically retrenching the welfare state and public services whilst touting a theme of national obligation. Along with a downward pressure on pay and working conditions for those ‘grateful’ for employment in the service sector (Berry 2016:51), this ideological assault on welfare was

enacted in crude cuts to a range of benefits.

Most notably this included; the benefit cap (a maximum total of benefits received by one household generally set at £26,000), the 'bedroom tax' (a withdrawal of benefits for people with unused bedrooms in their homes) cuts and increased scrutiny of disability benefits and the use of out-of-work 'sanctions' (withholding benefits from those claiming Job Seekers Allowance for not meeting ever increasing conditions). In terms of expenditure reduction, the hostile treatment and punishment of individual benefit recipients had a relatively small budget impact (Berry 2016). The effect was more symbolic than fiscal; linking the national economy to the culture and responsibility of the individual within the ideology of austerity.

As this chapter discusses events that have become defined by the violent acts of young people, it is significant the violence of austerity impacted on youth with particular ferocity. Youth services, schools and early years provision suffered some of the largest reductions of state funding – with many services left struggling to function under the severe and rapid withdrawal of the local council budgets that sustained their work. In six years youth services lost £387m, forcing 603 youth centers to close and a loss of 3,652 youth workers in the UK.

#### **Total cuts in youth service spending, 2010-2016**

| 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 | 2015/16 | <b>TOTAL</b> |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------------|
| £62m    | £137m   | £41m    | £24m    | £85m    | £38m    | <b>£387m</b> |

(Table copied from Unison 2016:4)

#### **The collapse of youth services in the UK**

|                             | 2012-14 | 2014-16 | <b>Total 2012-16</b> |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|----------------------|
| Youth work jobs lost        | 1,991   | 1,661   | <b>3,652</b>         |
| Youth centres closed        | 359     | 244     | <b>603</b>           |
| Places for young people cut | 40,989  | 97,909  | <b>138,898</b>       |

(Table copied from Unison 2016:5)

Although the coalition government promised that schools would be protected from the cuts, in reality the impact was inevitable. Many school schemes such as, one-to-one teaching programmes, breakfast clubs, outdoor education, music services, school psychologists and speech therapists were funded through local council welfare support and services. Schools either had to cut these provisions or reallocate money from the pupil premium causing a knock-on effect on other budgets (Granoulhac 2017:437). The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was also axed – a scheme that provided £30 a week to help college students from low-income families.



Using the agenda of austerity, primary and secondary schools were also under increasing pressure to convert into 'academies' through a systematic reformation that aimed to completely privatize state education by 2020 (Granoulhac 2017). Many schools that were considered to be 'underachieving', required financial assistance or in need of building works were forced to academise against the wishes of teachers and parents (Granoulhac 2017).

Investigations by TES and LSE both found significantly higher rates of permanent exclusion at academised secondary schools (Bloom 2017, Machin and Sandi 2018). This was attributed to greater autonomy in management (Bloom 2017), reduction in pastoral staff to save money (Bloom 2017), and a culture of 'no excuses' that attempted to raise attainment through punitive measures (Machin and Sandi 2018). In 2016/17 Black and mixed ethnicity pupils had the highest rates of both temporary and permanent exclusions, with black Caribbean pupils permanently excluded at nearly 3 times the rate of white British pupils (Gov.uk 2020).

If it can be agreed that young people living in disadvantaged areas had demonstrated increased levels of violence in 2007 and 2008, the state's response to that through austerity was to actively disenfranchise and further marginalise the groups most at risk of everyday violence. The removal of the EMA and increase in permanent exclusion reduced access to education and employment, whilst the collapse of youth services and early

years provisions removed the minimal safeguards and support available for those experiencing extreme marginalisation.

Austerity was an ideological project that successfully manufactured public consent for a colossal withdrawal of the welfare state and dramatic increases in deprivation and inequality - despite the exposure of capitalist contradiction during the global financial crash that preceded it. Although the economic events from 2007 onwards remain in the same neoliberal conjuncture that was established in the 1960s, the recession caused by the deficit to bail the banks out and the increased intensity of inequality under austerity measures represents a distinct political moment. Just as Hall et al. (1978) describe of the 1970s recession, this political and economic commitment to structurally violent social policy required significant 'working through'.

It is within this familiar context that the established racism of 'knife crime' is put to work within the management of hegemony, providing consent for increased police powers at a time of potential social unrest. As in the 1980s, this toxic combination of extreme deprivation, increased marginalization and excessive policing will lead to a rupture of widespread uprising amongst young people in 2011. However, in comparing the social and political response to the 'youth riots' of early 2010s with the reaction to the 'race riots' of early 1980's, it will be argued that the discursive shift to cultural racism through concepts of criminality such as 'knife crime' has

made the articulation of resistance against the dominant ideology particularly challenging.

### **Political Response and Public Resistance.**

By 2010 the extensive and hostile policing sanctioned since 2008 is increasingly under fire from organised groups and communities. The return to pre-Macpherson policing was recognised by the Liberty Human Rights Organisation at this time as being ‘as if Lawrence never happened’ (Liberty 2010) and evidence was emerging of police being told to discriminate in stop and search (Ibid.). A review by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in 2010 concluded that stop and search powers were being used in a ‘discriminatory and unlawful way’ (EHRC 2010:58), whilst the EU Court found the Met Police through Section 44 searches were ‘violating individual freedoms and acting illegally’ (‘Terror Stop...’ 2010).

Increasing legal scrutiny forced the scaling back of stop and search in 2010, with the number of Section 44 searches in England and Wales dropping from 210,013 in 2008-2009 to 91,567 in 2009-2010 before being scrapped completely when ruled to be illegal in July 2010 (Dodd 2012b). During the same period Section 60 Searches decreased from 150,174 in 2008-2009 to 60,180 by 2010-2011 (Ibid.). A leaked letter from the Deputy Met Police

Commissioner later revealed that this reduction was made in anticipation of a similar legal challenge of the 'no suspicion' powers of Section 44 being made against Section 60 (Ibid.). However, the biggest response to illegal policing would come in the form of young people's resistance to the use of stop and search; witnessed individually during police encounters and collectively in the youth uprising of 2011.

When the Met police shot and killed 29-year-old unarmed Mark Duggan on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 2011 in North London it was the spark in the tinderbox of discontent amongst large sections of young people in England. The subsequent uprising would last three days, span across several cities with 15,000 young people thought to have participated. The cost to the state was estimated at £300 million and five deaths would be linked to the events during the unrest.

In scenes reminiscent of 1981 large swathes of young people rejected the authority of state law and the symbolic power of the police; cars and buildings were set alight, shops smashed and looted, and police attacked. The hostile and disproportionate use of Section 60 stop and search had contributed to a similar animosity and anger amongst young people as the 'Sus' law had in the 1980s; a law used to disproportionately and unjustly charge young black males of being 'a suspected person' that was repealed under pressure from campaigners in 1981 (Greaves 1984:66). The failure of the police in 2011 to demonstrate adequate concern for Mark Duggan's life

and to communicate with his family in the immediate aftermath of his death, became a tipping point much like the Deptford fire had in 1981 – when police failed to adequately investigate a suspected arson that killed thirteen Black people in south London (Benyon 1984:3).

In 2011, as in 1981, politicians denounced the violence in official statements, but in 1980s this was accompanied by an attempt to ‘explain but not excuse’ the events that took place (Benyon 1984:8). The Scarman Report (1982), commissioned by government, officially acknowledged injustices experienced by Black people at the hands of the police in the explanation of the unrest in 1981. Despite its limitations the report was an important social document that ‘generated an avalanche of reaction’ (Benyon 1984:8). It did not go as far as MacPherson (1999) would later in acknowledging ‘institutional racism’ in policing but it acted as an official recognition of discrimination and police brutality.

Many of the recommendations were introduced with considerable publicity and whilst the impact of their application was less convincing (Benyon 1984:11) it was undoubtedly a political exposure of racism at that time. In 2011 however, the assumption of criminality as the primary cause of unrest is immediate and persistent. The emphasis on looting gave rise to a narrative of opportunist thieves with some academic commentators also dismissing the actions as that of ‘defective consumers’ (Bauman 2011) in a

'post-political present' (Winlow, Hall, Treadwell and Briggs 2015). Without political justification the subsequent criminal justice response was excessively harsh with custodial sentences up to two or three times longer than the normal term (Bawdon 2011).

Despite its similarities with events thirty years previous, there was no such investigation into the causes of the 2011 unrest. David Cameron told parliament in 2011; *'this was not political protest, or a riot about politics. It was common or garden thieving, robbing and looting. And we don't need an inquiry to tell us that'* (cited in Platts-Fowler 2013:18). However, research from several sources found a clear connection between stop and search, deprivation and anger towards the politics of recent economic decisions.

The Riots Communities and Victims Panel, established by the Deputy Prime Minister, concluded that 'stop and search was a major factor' in the cause of the unrest, with many young people frequently citing a 'lack of courtesy' during stop and search in the explanation of their actions. Research by The Guardian with the London School of Economics (LSE) conducted interviews with 270 people who had participated in the disorder and found *'the most important causes of the riots were cited by 86 per cent as poverty and 85 per cent as policing'* (Lewis et al. 2011). 73% of people interviewed in the study had been stopped and searched at least once in the past year and participants across the country described a similar sense of harassment, experiences of physical and verbal assault by officers, and

described harboring great resentment and hatred towards the police (Ibid.).

The consistency between individual explanations that made reference to 'justice' being sought against the police, the government's economic decisions, and employment opportunities, is argument for an underlying desire for structural change from young people at this time. If the definition of political violence is 'politically motivated violence outside of state control' (O'Neil 2015:210) then surely this prolonged period of country-wide unrest would be considered a significant political event. Instead however, the uprising was branded as opportunistic 'riots' and a political script of 'moral breakdown', 'broken Britain' and 'feral children' dominated the media coverage (Benyon 2012, Platts-Fowler 2013, Solomos 2011). In this way, the same narratives that justified police harassment and brutal austerity policies were put to work to once again in order to depoliticize the consequences of their harm.

This re-working is particularly apparent in the immediate use of 'gangs' in discussions of the unrest by politicians and media despite there being no evidence of 'gang' organization or influence (Lewis et al. 2012). In fact the Guardian and LSE research found that gangs functioned atypically during the uprising, with territorial disputes suspended for the duration of the event. Loaded terms such as 'gangs', 'youth violence' and 'youth culture'

were able to tap into well-established responsibility rhetoric that had been consistently depoliticizing interpersonal violence in the previous decade.

The articulation of race in each moment is significantly different in expression. The unrest of 1981 is widely referred to as 'race riots' whilst 2011 is described as 'London riots' or 'youth riots' but both uprisings had similar multi racial representation (Gilroy 2013). Despite the shift to non-racial language the construction of race and racism remained formative in the interpretation of events in 2011. Language and stereotypes that had come to stand in place of race were put to work. Pre-constructed racialised concepts of criminality such as 'gangs', 'youth culture', 'absent fathers', 'dysfunctional families' and 'knife crime' produced forms of racism in the response to the riots that were particularly hard to pin down as racist. The chicanery of contemporary racism enables a crucial contradiction; the 2011 unrest was simultaneously not about race whilst 'black criminality' was constantly inferred.

The work of 'knife crime' to interpret high levels of everyday violence in deprived communities as cultural deficit, now enabled political violence to be discredited through the same ideas of a 'youth criminality' as 'culture'. This reapplication proved to be very effective, with the LSE research finding that 86% of the general public thought the two principal causes of the unrest were 'poor parenting and criminality' (Lewis et al. 2011). Unsurprisingly the state response to the uprising is punitive and violent,



with immediate requests for the authorization of water canons, rubber bullets and curfews (Bates 2011) in the event of future unrest, and harsher sentences for those found guilty of 'rioting'.

In the weeks following the riots over 1000 cases were rushed through the magistrates courts with 70% of defendants remanded in custody compared to the usual 2%. There were reports of young people in their early 20s receiving four-year sentences for Facebook posts that were deemed to incite rioting (Carter 2011). The extreme sentencing caused such a sudden swell in youth custody that the resulting crisis in the prison system sent many young people across the country, hundreds of miles from their family for first time minor offences (Ibid.).

The contrast of this criminal justice response compared to 1981 exemplifies society's advanced neoliberal condition during this era; a common-sense individualism relegates group action to selfish opportunism. Without a sense or possibility of collective political culture the events in 2011 were framed as '*a brisk sequence of criminal events and transgressions that could be intelligible only when seen on the scale of personal conduct*' (Gilroy 2013:np). Meanwhile, Black communities were internally divided in their response in 2011, with a common denouncement of the relevance of racism during the riots on the grounds that thirty years ago there had 'really been things to complain about' (Ibid.).

Three decades of ideological and political entrenchment of neoliberalism and morphing forms of cultural racism present a significantly different public response to organised resistance. The absence of an official inquiry into the causes of the 2011 uprising is a noteworthy discontinuation from the political reaction of 1981 and indicates that a social shift has taken place. 'Knife crime', along with other transformed expressions of cultural racism at this time, produce political blind spots for anti-racist critique. Broad theoretical research and debates often fail to link to the detailed and specific forms that race and racism take in national and local contexts (Solomos & Back 1996:203). Despite the extensive application of the theoretical aspects of '*Policing the Crisis*' (Hall et al. 1978), the field of critical criminology has experienced a particular absence of race in recent years. This must also be recognised as a contributing factor in the contrasting reception of social unrest in the 2010's.

The lack of consistent application of social theory to emerging manifestations of cultural racism have left young people disconnected from the activism of the 1970's and 1980's. New generations experience the continuation of hostile policing and social discrimination but due to increasingly disguised expressions of racism, and the failure to expose their forms, they have inherited a limited language of resistance. The well-established ideologies of free market individualism and the slippery reinventions of racism depoliticised the 2011 uprising in ways that were not possible in 1981. But despite no official governmental inquiry, the legal

challenges and public scrutiny of stop and search puts policing back on the defensive. Then Home Secretary Theresa May announced a national review of stop and search powers at the end of 2011 (Ball and Taylor 2011), and the proactive tactic remained out of favor for several years. That is, until a revival of 'knife crime' from 2015 onwards re-centers stop and search once again.

### **Second Wave 'Knife Crime'; Speculative Analysis**

During recent years the category 'knife crime' has returned to news headlines with great urgency presenting what appears to be a second 'spike' in youth homicides in London in 2017 and 2018. Although it is much too soon to fully comprehend the broader significance of the particularities of this reaction, there are some speculative conclusions that can be drawn from an analysis of the interactions and events during this moment. The first observation is that there appears, yet again, to be a mobilisation in law and enforcement that predates the second upsurge in 'knife crime' data.

In 2014 when 'knife crime' rates had returned to the relative lows of pre-2007, and stop and search under intense scrutiny had been scaled back, there is once again a recognisable mobilisation towards knife offences. A

change in law, passed by parliamentary vote in 2014 and enacted from 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015 introduces a new crime of ‘aggravated possession’ with mandatory custodial sentences for a second knife possession offence; 6 month for adults, 4 months for 16 and 17 year olds. From April 2015 there were also ‘statutory restrictions around the use of cautions, including their use for possession of a knife’ (Ministry of Justice 2016:13). There was resistance to the law change from the Liberal Democrats and some Labour MPs who argued that the low ‘knife crime’ offence rate at that time demonstrated the current criminal justice response was already effective (‘Coalition split over...’ 2014), and that the proposed change was merely a populist move to appear ‘tough on crime’ ahead of the general election in 2015 (Wintour 2014). Nevertheless, the law was enacted and these ‘tough’ new measures resulted in the number of people imprisoned for knife offences more than doubling within the first twelve months (Ministry of Justice 2016:11).

It is at this time in 2015 that a statistical increase in ‘knife crime’ is reported, after a downward four-year trend. The exact impact the law change had on the recording of all ‘knife crimes’ is difficult to know. But the 2% overall increase in ‘knife crime’ offences that year did include a 10% increase in knife possession offences (Travis 2015) – in the first quarter since behaviours that previously might have received cautions were now mandatory offences. Violent crime overall is reported to have increased by 24% in 2016 but the Office of National Statistics warns this is largely due to

improvements in recording practices, more incidents being reported as crimes and increased confidence in reporting incidents of rape (Travis 2016). Teen homicide rates throughout this period remain relatively constant but by 2016 public panic is rising.

In *The Guardian's* aptly named project 'Beyond the Blade', journalist Gary Younge confronted the assumption of the label 'knife crime' as it returned to the headlines. The project reported on the individual circumstances of every teenage/child knife homicide in England and Wales in 2017 and collected historical knife homicide data that had never before been collated by governments or the police despite their claims of prioritising 'knife crime' (Younge 2017). The findings of Younge's investigation substantiate the arguments in this thesis, demonstrating the enduring injustices of the label's use and definition.

Looking at the inconsistencies of 'knife crime' reporting Younge (2018) found that in all national press other than *The Guardian* the term 'knife crime' was only used when the victim was a black teen or child in London – with one exception which was for Sait Mboob, a black 18 year old stabbed in Manchester; *'So the term is not used to describe all crimes committed with knives, just those where young black men in London are involved'* (Younge 2018). Of the thirty-nine teenagers and children killed in knife attacks in England and Wales in 2017; twenty died in London, twenty-two were black, fourteen were white and three were Asian. In the analysis of

historical knife homicide data spanning forty years, roughly half of all teen and child deaths are outside of London and the ‘overwhelmingly majority... are not black’ (Ibid.).

Analysis of *where* in London the deaths of children and teenagers by knives are concentrated reveals a compelling correlation. ‘Very few stabbings take place in central London, with most occurring in the outer ring – travel zones three and beyond’ (Ibid.). This spatial relationship between teen deaths is widely ignored, whilst the temporal fixation of homicide ‘clusters’ provokes ‘flurries of media interest’ (Ibid.). When several knife homicides of young Black men occur in a short space of time this creates urgency, news value and public attention. But the label that links these deaths also defines the response, thus the assumption of a ‘criminal Black culture’ obscures the common socio-economic context of the individual events.

The four knife homicides on New Years Eve usher in the heightened ‘knife crime’ concern of 2018. The total fatalities of the previous year are reported with comparison to the levels of the previous ‘spike’; ‘It is the highest number of teenage homicides in the city since 2008’ (Dearden 2018:np). In March 2018 a cluster of unrelated murders in the capital accelerates the moral panic further and there are increasing demands for a proactive law and order response targeting young people (Drewett 2018).

The distinction between murders, knife murders, and teen knife murders become blurred, as homicide figures that include infants and adults (many in domestic violence contexts) are used to sensationalise ‘knife crime’ news in 2018. When reports that London’s homicide rate in February were higher than New York’s it ‘sent shockwaves around Britain’ (Buck 2018). The majority of the victims in London in February were adults, ten of the fifteen killed were over nineteen years old and two were women in their fifties, but the shock comparison of this statistic propels a targeted response aimed solely at young people.

In February 2018, London Mayor Sadiq Khan releases additional funding for the Met Police to ‘combat knife crime’ (Gov.uk 2018a). In April The Met Police announce this money will fund The Violent Crime Task Force, a dedicated team of 150 officers taking robust measures in targeted areas of the city. This is the same number of officers and tactics described in Operation Blunt 2 in 2008. Stop and search had already been intensifying, with the authorisation of Section 60 increasing fourfold from twenty-three times in 2016/2017 to one-hundred-and-six in 2017/2018 (Grierson 2018b), and in the first month of the Violent Crime Task Force stop and search further increased across London by 10% on average (‘London Murder Rates...’ 2018). The authorisation of the controversial section 60 areas to stop ‘knife crime’ increased again by 219% from 2018 to 2019, with the number of ‘no reasonable grounds searches’ increasing fivefold in London, ‘from 1,836 in 2017-18 to 9,599 in 2018-19’ (Murphy 2019)

The sensational representation of crime data and the exceptional use of force from 2016 onwards have all the hallmarks of a second moral panic over 'knife crime'. However, the percentage of all homicides that involve a knife have remained consistent throughout this period, as they have for the past decade (Edgington 2018), but as violent crime rates in general have increased in recent years so too have murder rates - including knife homicides.

Knives or stabbing implements were involved in 7% of all recorded violent attacks in the year ending March 2016, 77% involved no weapons at all (Shaw 2019). Of the 19,243 recorded knife possession offences in 2017, under eighteens accounted for 4,148. This represented 22% of all possession recorded despite the 15 – 19 age group being the most searched age category in London that year (Ibid.). As knives make up a small proportion of violent crime, and young people with knives a smaller proportion still, it is significant that this narrowly defined category is the dominant issue *yet again* as the violent crime and homicide rates appear to increase.

The patterns of response to criminality explored within this research have demonstrated that the mobilisation towards racially defined crimes correlate with particular moments of hegemonic crisis. What then, can be seen as the socio-political context in which this re-mobilisation occurs?



Whilst it is clear that the response to increasing rates of violence through 'knife crime' provides a functional distraction and mitigation of the social impacts of austerity, political events running in parallel to these developments suggest there is a broader role performed by this interaction.

Along with strong law and order rhetoric, the Conservative Party ran its 2015 general election campaign with a manifesto commitment to a referendum on Britain's membership to the European Union (EU), in order to appease political divides in the party and secure the populist vote (Hobolt 2016:1260). After winning the election with a majority in the House of Commons, Prime Minister David Cameron agreed to a referendum the following year. The shock results on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2016 were the beginning of a period of unprecedented political uncertainty in the UK, with Leave voters securing 51.9% of the ballots and Cameron resigning as Prime Minister on the same day.

The impact on the national economy was immediate, the 'British pound plummeted to a 31-year low against the dollar and over 2 trillion dollars were wiped off shares globally' (Hobolt 2016:1259). Meanwhile the social divide between 'leavers' and 'remainers' presented a civil disruption on a national scale. The success of the leave campaign was seen to be largely dependent on its aggressively anti-immigration campaign and,

emboldened by the winning majority, hate crimes increased dramatically in the days following the referendum (Burnett 2017:86).

At the time of writing this Britain has not yet left the EU, thus the events of this moment are too close to adequately comprehend. However, there are several indications that the reaction to 'knife crime' is utilised in the management of social cohesion during this period; through moral outrage concentrated on a 'criminal Other', drawing attention away from the European debate, and justifying increasing police powers on the street. This becomes progressively more apparent after the appointment of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister in 2019, a politician who is renowned for his overtly racist language (Bienkov 2019) and support of law and order policies (Walker 2019, 'Crime: What Has...' 2019)

Despite the urgency of the negotiations with the EU and the approaching date of Britain's departure, Johnson prioritises 'knife crime', policing and enforcement soon after becoming Prime Minister. Within the first month of his premiership Johnson makes several law and order policy announcements; 20,000 more police officers, 10,000 more prison places, increased prison security and an expansion of stop and search powers ('Crime: What Has...' 2019). With immediate effect the Home Office changes the way in which Section 60 areas are approved, allowing the discriminatory practice to be used by officers across England and Wales

without senior authorisation. This symbolic liberation of stop and search expands its powers beyond that of 2008, returning Section 60 with unrestricted authorisation at a time of political tension and high risk of social unrest.

The interactions that enable consent for the state of exception through 'knife crime' seem to mobilise during this moment. It is significant that leaked police documents in September 2018 suggest a 'real possibility' that the military may be required to keep peace on the streets in the event of Britain leaving the EU (Khan 2018); and six months later the Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson announces that 'UK armed forces "stand ready" to intervene in the knife crime epidemic' (Sharman 2019). The limited speculation of this research on the interaction between the political and economic uncertainty of Britain exiting the EU and the policing of 'knife crime' is an area requiring further attention in the future.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, this chapter has depicted an evolving political terrain in which expressions of racism shift their forms and adapt to contemporary ideologies of difference. 'Knife Crime' as one most recent representation can be seen to functionally 'work through' multiple crises within this neoliberal, law and order conjuncture. In 2008 the 'knife crime epidemic'

ensured public consent for increased police on the street and an extension of search powers, whilst manufacturing cohesion through common outrage at a time of global financial and ideological crisis.

During the ‘war on knife crime’ economically deprived young people were increasingly subjected to humiliating displays of social exclusion, racial profiling and police hostility – whilst their collective resistance against this structural and symbolic oppression was branded ‘mindless criminality’ during the subsequent uprisings of 2011. The analysis of this chapter has demonstrated the unique ability of indirect forms of cultural racism to mitigate structural critique in the response to this unrest. The pre-established categories such as ‘gangs’ ‘anti-social youths’ and ‘knife crime’ contributed to a deep-set neoliberal logic of individual responsibility that denied an official inquiry into the causes of the riots in 2011.

Furthermore, the latest resurgence of ‘knife crime’ concern has ensured that the scrutiny of violent acts *by* young people far out weighs attention given to the violence enacted *on* young people. The devastating cuts to youth services, attacks on access to education through rates of permanent exclusion and removal of the EMA, and the compounding conditions of crime-inducing deprivation has vastly increased structural harm on young people. And yet the same racially selective application of ‘knife culture’ in 2007 is evident in the reporting of ‘knife crime’ in 2017, mitigating the austerity context of a perceived intensification of violence.

This research emphasises the continuation of *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al.

1978) in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the similarities between ‘mugging’ and ‘knife crime’ in the management of hegemonic crisis. However, the differences between the public and political response to uprisings in the 1980s and the 2010s demonstrate distinct discontinuations between the two moments. The failure of an official inquiry into the causes of discontent amongst large numbers of young people in 2011 suggests racial inequality is harder to recognise and easier to dismiss in the age of ‘cultural racism’. Without cultural interventions such as the Scarman report (1982) or the MacPherson Report (1999) in recent years, stop and search has returned with increased authority, allowing discriminatory and excessive police tactics to be unleashed once again on young people.

This chapter concludes the first unit of this case study, providing a detailed account of the pre-mobilisation, public definition and the moral panic of ‘knife crime’. This analysis has presented an alternative understanding of the events that defined ‘knife crime’; demonstrating the label’s constitutive interaction with enforcement and crime recording practices, news value and public spectatorship, and the concept’s broader interaction with crisis management and hegemonic social order. In the following unit of analysis this research considers the limitations of current interventions that respond to youth violence through the ‘knife crime’ label, reflecting on the empirical experiences of professional practitioners and young people in south London.

## **Chapter Six.**

**The Realities of 'Knife Crime';**

**Life Beneath the Label.**

## Introduction

So far, the deconstruction of the 'knife crime' label within this thesis has remained within the theoretical tradition of social constructionism. Deviance labelling theory (Becker 1963) moral panics (Cohen 1972) and Policing the Crisis (Hall et al. 1978) have provided a framework through which the assumption of 'knife crime' as a criminological fact has been challenged. However, the limitations of this approach are revealed in the questions that remain unanswered. Such as; how can we make sense of apparent increases in violence in the mid 2000s if not through the concept of a 'knife culture'? And how can a critical understanding of 'knife crime' labelling account for the *real* experiences of practitioners and young people who are in direct contact with the actions defined by the label?

Beneath the political discourse and interactions of policy makers there are professionals and young people who confront the complex realities of interpersonal violence in everyday practices and actions. The experience and insight of these groups are the focus of this chapter. Drawing on qualitative research with twenty youth justice practitioners and ten focus groups with a total of seventy-eight young people in southeast London, this chapter provides a sociological understanding of the shifting experiences of youth that are concealed by assumptions of the 'knife crime' label.

The analysis in this chapter considered data from two sample groups with distinct empirical approaches; practitioners were interviewed and asked to reflect on the transition into specialised 'knife crime work' in youth justice from 2008 onwards, whilst young people were presented with the findings of my research during focus groups and their responses discussed and documented. The themes that emerged through analysis of interview and focus group data are presented here along with a discussion of the meaning that can be interpreted from this research.

The purpose of this project has never been to explain or justify the actions of young people and the following points should not be considered as a positivist contribution. Chapter one detailed the ways in which attempts to explain 'knife crime' through 'cause and effect' relationships have fundamentally restricted the criminological imagination in the past and the 'realism' of this chapter is not a replication of this endeavour. Rather, it is intended that these inferences, substantiated with supporting theory, extend rather than define an understanding of violence; identifying alternative 'knife crime' realities that have thus far not been represented by the label.

### **Violent Sociological Shifts; 2007-2008**

The first line of inquiry during interviews with practitioners was to establish their early recollections of 'knife crime' becoming a concern



within youth justice and their experience of the initial application of the label within their work. Invariably this discussion would lead to practitioners describing an intensification of violence between young people and specific youth fatalities that immediately preceded the introduction of targeted 'knife crime' work. Although my analysis of the label has sought to contextualise the moral panic over 'knife crime', the consistent accounts by practitioners suggest that beneath the label there was a genuine shift towards a more intense level of interpersonal violence at this time.

Whilst this agreement suggests the increased rates of violence reported in 2007 signified an authentic crime concern amongst communities affected, there are significant differences between the accounts of this violence in news media and the descriptions by practitioners working with young people . The reporting of 'knife crime' in 2007 and 2008 focussed heavily on homicide rate and knife injuries (as detailed in chapter five), but youth justice practitioners recounted a much broader shift in the dynamic of youth interactions towards increased levels of anxiety, fear and violence. During the interviews there were several alternative practice-informed explanations provided for the changes they witnessed during this period.

The de-construction of 'knife crime' in previous chapters has sought to contextualise the policing response to the moral panic in 2008 in relation to the political and economic conjuncture. The alternative accounts of the

realities ‘on the ground’ presented here, now provide an additional level to this analysis. The ways in which tabloidised understandings of ‘knife crime’ came to misidentify the changing landscapes of violence between young people had particular implications that are explored here.

The following four themes that emerged during the analysis of interview data, represent alternative perspectives on the causes of increased violence in 2007 and 2008, outside of the restrictive cultural explanations dictated by the label ‘knife crime’. Observations and references that practitioners made to external forces or sociological changes are further investigated in the discussion below and the interpretation of these themes is presented along with supporting research, data and theory, where possible. The contribution of these accounts to the broader case study of ‘knife crime’ is hoped to demonstrate that; not only has the construction of ‘knife crime’ served systemic and structural functions, but ‘knife crime’ has replaced the articulation of alternative realities that are both important and urgently in need of critique.

### ***1. The destabilising impact of proactive policing***

A reoccurring theme during interviews with Youth Justice managers was that the structures of the informal drug economy had been destabilised in 2006 by a variety of pro-active policing and immigration policies. It was repeatedly suggested that this contributed to an increase in violence in subsequent years; the previously secure organised groups splintered into

smaller and younger fractions, jostling for position and power in territories and the supply chain. As one former Intervention Manager described during interview:

They went hard on some of the top boys and they started deporting some people as well... 2006 police are coming harder putting people away and also some people are being deported you then suddenly had Black Mafia, you had Shower, Anti-Shower, Def and Rats all these types of gangs started coming through and suddenly every ward, if you like, in Lewisham had its own gang. Which made it even harder for us to deal with (Interview B 25.01.2018).

The term 'gang', like 'knife crime', has become synonymous with the idea of 'black criminality' and has facilitated discrimination in the Criminal Justice System by being a label disproportionately attached to Black offenders compared to White offenders (Amnesty International 2018). However, whether attributed to American popular culture, UK media or organised crime, groups of young people in the 2000s were self-defining as members of 'gangs'. These identified groups were not necessarily criminal, indeed many of them were friendship groups from school (Densley 2012), but they have been recognised as collectives with the potential to evolve into loosely affiliated crime networks (Hobbs 2013:126).

Previous research (Hobbs 2013, Densley 2012, Alexander 2008, Smithson et al. 2012) has questioned the application of the 'gang' label to territorial disputes at the lower rungs of street drug markets, arguing that sensationalism over 'gangs' mythologizes petty criminality by schematically associating youth conflict with serious organised crime

syndicates. However, there is no doubt that the multiple marginalisations experienced by young people in post-industrial London during the 2000's provided an endless supply of keen workers at the lower end of drug distribution structures – regardless of the accuracy of the 'gang' label:

As legal alternatives have diminished, there is no shortage of potential labour for the complex overlapping urban networks that are located in a web of 'Multiple group-affiliations'... Whatever transgressional sobriquet is applied to them, these urban youth groups are part of the constellation of collaborations that constitute a community of practice responding to interpretations of global markets operationalized via local identities and sensibilities (Hobbs 2013:136).

The accounts provided by practitioners in this research describe significant shifts in these structures in the mid 2000's, explaining how proactive policing created vacancies in crime networks and destabilised territorial monopolies at this time. It turn, these 'restructures' made it economically logical for aspirational young entrepreneurs to see these vacancies as lucrative opportunities worth fighting for.

Statistical evidence of increased rates of incarceration and deportation within the informal market in 2006 support this idea, particularly the impact of the newly formed Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) initiated in April of that year. SOCA obtained 60% more funding in its first year than the organised crime division had previously received and increased its operations by 118% in 2006 with a 64% increase in arrests (Sproat 2011:344, 348). Records show that the population of young people within the youth justice system reached its peak in 2006/2007 (Gov.uk

2016), corroborating the idea that there was a particular proactive dynamic to policing in 2006 that could potentially have destabilised criminal structures and informal hierarchies.

## **2. Generational shift**

Along with the incarceration and deportation of key figures in 2006, the murders of notorious 'olders' such as Eric Akinniranye (2004) and Andrew Wanogho (2006) marked for many the end of an era and a generational shift of power to emerging groups of 'youngers'. The word 'generational' is used here not in the sense of parent to child but more accurately from older sibling to younger sibling. Self-socialising youth peer groups with limited adult contact are known to organise into closely defined age based micro-hierarchies (Densely 2012), 'older' are often around 17-24 years old, whilst 'Youngers' are usually 12- 16 years old (Densely 2012:53,54), those younger than 12 are sometimes referred to as 'young youngers' or 'tins' (Densely 2012:52). Although anxiety over youth subcultures often claims that a new generation is distinctly more dangerous than those that came before (Cohen 1972), data from interviews along with socio-political evidence suggests that there were some distinct differences amongst the emergent groups in 2007 and 2008.

During interviews with YOS staff from this time they expressed in various ways that they felt the offending service was ill-equipped and unprepared

for the intensity of the trauma, fear and extreme violence young people were experiencing in 2007:

*So there's a peak in 2007...*

And I definitely think this is related to the top tier of gang members, talking about the old school 28s, ghetto boys. What was happening was their younger brothers and sisters were now coming up and they had learnt about violence because we can tell you about violence we saw in 1991, 1992.

*Their role models would've been Sparks [Andrew Wamego] and them?*

One hundred per cent... so his murder, there were murders like that across the whole of the UK, so when these guys are killed, across London, across specific areas of the UK it caused a split. .... So what happened here is I think maybe the first three to five children that died, stabbings had been going on, violence had been going on, but when the first of those children died, it definitely scared that generation. It traumatised them because they were now burying their friends (Interview A: 21.02.2018).

In this account the generational shift is described as a 'split' resulting in children already exposed to the violence of their 'older' taking a step up in the existing informal hierarchy whilst simultaneously traumatised by the death of their peers. Another YOS worker working with young offenders at this time also highlighted the impact on children of experiencing peer murder, the impact of blanket media coverage on knife related crimes and how he recognised an increase in the severity of offending behaviours at this time:

...I started to notice around this time, 2007 to 2009 period, young people were turning up to the YOT in taxis, they stopped coming by bus and on foot because they were aware of their own fatality because so many children had been murdered. And what the media did negatively on this was they just publicised it everywhere and kids were like [*sharp intake of breath*] "I'm not walking on the street without a knife" ... I recognised that the boys and girls were talking

to me in a completely different way... so I'm developing this whole new understanding (Interview C 23.02.2018).

This observation of a direct impact between the media coverage of 'knife crime' at this time and the knife carrying behaviours of young people is greatly significant when considering the multiple 'knife crime' realities that overlap. The tabloidised interpretation of violence became the dominant representation, communicating an idea of 'knife crime' back to young people who came to reflect this understanding in their actions.

Interviewing an ex-intervention officer from the Youth Offending Service, he expressed similar observations on the impact of the deaths of young people in 2006 and 2007, mentioning disturbing developments in violence and how the services were not prepared and didn't understand the rapid changes and caseloads they were witnessing amongst the young people:

...we were seeing some pretty bad youths come in, like, 'you lot are not a joke'... And I think if I recall, 2007, 2008 was a massive spike. *That* was the one! So that's when things started looking a bit kind of like... well the question was really "are we really equipped to be dealing with this as a YOS?"... But then the cases started coming in rapidly. And I just remember some stuff started happening where you were just like, I remember some sexual violence cases. I remember reading this kid set a girl alight after raping her, and I remember thinking this has got nuts (Interview B 25.01.2018).

These accounts suggest that the increase in youth homicides in 2007 and 2008 was part of a broader generational shift of violence to include emerging younger groups of adolescents in London, perhaps drawn into

the informal markets and conflicts prematurely by the instability caused by proactive policing or the death of respected 'olders'.

This interpretation of events by practitioners is corroborated by the accounts of generational changes in recent ethnographic research in London (Hobbs 2013, Clement 2010). Social constructivist theories of deviance and subcultures often reinforce the notion of transient youth criminality (Cohen 1972:228), emphasising that young people eventually mature into a working and conforming parent culture. However, research of young people's experience in London that span the first 'spike' in 'knife crime' has demonstrated that this context is changing.

Unlike working class teenagers in previous decades that may have demonstrated oppositional cultures '*as a means of reconciling themselves to their mapped-out future of low-status employment*' (Clement 2010:444), it has been argued that working class young people growing up in neoliberalism '*are deprived of such certainties; thus, their alienation and anomie are both greater and have become more real*' (Ibid.). Working class children under advanced neoliberal policies are both excluded from the core financial economy and increasingly unsuitable for the 'service class' occupations at the periphery. Thus, it has been demonstrated in previous research, that the aspirational culture that formally made 'respectable work' the desired destination in adulthood has been stripped away by



generations of deindustrialisation and inherited worklessness (Hobbs 2013:122).

The observations made by practitioners of an intensification of violence amongst a new emerging generation of teenagers in 2007 and 2008 are significant for several reasons. Firstly, it reiterates the findings of ethnographies in London at this time that recognise a distinct disconnection from formal work opportunities for a new generation of young people; thus supporting that theory that advanced neoliberalism increases the entrepreneurial logic of working class children engaging in informal, risky and violent economies.

Secondly, the consistency of these findings also highlight the limits of a social constructivism that doesn't also take into account the accumulating impact and interaction of harm caused by advanced neoliberalism. The long-term effects of deindustrialisation on working class young people require interrogation, acknowledging that the shifting economies cause new challenges in which emerging generations must adapt. The 'realities' of 'knife crime' are not limited to the processes of its representation. Rather, the analysis of this phase of the research suggests that beneath the headlines in 2007 and 2008 there were *real* and complex sociological shifts taking place in which the normalised brutalities of everyday life for the working class children intensified in violence.

### 3. Community Fragmentation.

Speaking with practitioners who grew up in the same south London areas as the young people they work with, various aspects of the sociological shifts within the previous 'black enclave' (Hall et al. 1978) were raised. Several mentioned the increased visibility of the poverty gap as previously impoverished suburban areas came to be occupied by affluent residents and the businesses that serve them. Now aged in their forties the participants gestured to the streets they grew up on and described them as unrecognisable from their youth. One company director illustrated the different experience of a young person growing up in the divided economies of a London suburb saying; *'I can live on one road and I'm in absolute poverty and at the top of my road there's a coffee shop where cake, biscuit and a coffee is going to cost me £9 and I can see that there's people who can afford that and I can't'* (Interview L 01.05.2018).

The arrival of affluent neighbours were seen to change the sociological life of the suburbs and participants felt the disruption of the established communities had impacted on young people's sense of belonging and strength of identity in the spaces previously marked out as Caribbean and Black neighbourhoods. As one participant who grew up in Peckham described; *'we knew we were 'Other', you have to identify as 'Other', and we were all 'Other' together, you know? Even the African kids when they started coming they would pretend they were Jamaican because it was stronger to have our identity back then'* (Interview J 03.04.2018). There was a sense

amongst those I interviewed that there was a dispersion of the former 'black colony' that Hall et al. (1978) described, as local economies changed, new migrant groups arrived and Black families began to move out into the outer Suburbs.

Within this demographic change (along with the economic shifts detailed above) it was suggested by practitioners that the broader informal structures and collective identities that had dominated everyday life for young people in suburbs in the 1990s became destabilised, leading local groups to fracture into smaller enterprises located in more restricted areas. It was generally agreed by those I interviewed that the new, younger, more localised groups were distinctly different to their predecessors:

I remember a time when then youngers got youngers but they were totally different to what the Peckham boys used to be. The original Peckham boys were older, it was different, and yeah they were on a few things, making money and that but they weren't crazy like these kids today. There's just too many of these little gangs now and no one can go anywhere (Interview J 03.04.2018)

Exploring the specifics of this example further, I asked the participant to tell me more about what the Peckham Boys were like and what areas this collective covered. His answers, along with corroborating accounts from participants who grew up in the same area, provide an interesting point in case. The participant explained to me that the collaboration known as 'the Peckham boys' was originally a Southwark wide enterprise of collective pride and masculine identity into which temporal or permanent affiliation enabled patriotism for the area, safe movement in the home-borough, and

a pastime of rivalry with outsiders. The biggest conflict of this original collective was with 'Ghetto Boys', a name that included young people from the broad area of the neighbouring borough of Lewisham:

One of the things we used to do when we were around 14, 15, this would've been about 1995 or something, was we'd all sneak to Ghetto, which was Lewisham, and we'd spray paint 'Peckham Boys' on the bridges and they hated that, there was one at the end of Lewisham High Street we used to do. And that was dangerous because if we got caught it would be a serious fight (Interview J 03.04.2018).

Participants described how the instability of the former structures in the mid 2000s, due to the changing population and gentrification of the inner suburbs, caused a fragmentation of both Peckham Boys and Ghetto as restructuring created smaller collectives of more localised groups. I asked participants to name the groups of young people they could remember working with during the heightened violence of 2007 and 2008 and from their answers I ascertained the following: The former collective known as 'Peckham Boys' in the 1990's had separated by the 2000's into; Original Peckham Boys, Black Gang Ryders, Spare No-1, Shoot Instant, Pecknarm Young Gunners, Anti, Drugz Funz Armz, Pecknarm Killerz, Lettsom Gs, Crane Block, and Stick'em up klick. Meanwhile Lewisham's 'Ghetto Boys' collective divides into; Ghetto Boys, Shower, Anti-Shower, Catford Wildcats, Black Mafia, Brockley Mandem, Brocktown, Deptford Boys, Deptford Marlies, Hells Hustlerz, Monson Bloodset, Pepys Gang Bangers, Shankers and Gunners, and the Money Makers.

From the knowledge of my participants it can be surmised that within one generation the two collective identities that organised the movement of young people across all of Southwark and Lewisham had split into at least twenty-five rival groups. Analysing the self-defined labels of these groups there is a notable shift in discourse to reference violence, drugs and weapons as representative descriptors. The original name 'Peckham Boys' inferred the area and a sense of masculinity, and 'Ghetto Boys' added a sense of toughness and style, but those that followed are distinct in their provocation. Several of the new group names make direct reference to killing in the identification of their collective suggesting a more aggressive and defensive form of territoriality defined this era.

The inference from interviews with practitioners is that in the mid 2000s the rivalry between Peckham and Lewisham had transformed into intense intra-borough fighting between closely situated smaller groups of young people. The realities of interpersonal violence (with or without knives) were that the changing maps of the city increased the likelihood of daily conflict greatly. For many young people living in these conditions, just going to school or visiting friends involved crossing invisible boundaries of fiercely defended areas.

The fear and daily anxiety of coming up against groups identifying themselves as 'killerz' and 'shankers' was one inescapable reality for young people at this time and accounts from practitioners suggest it severely

limited young people's movement and access to London wide opportunities at this time. Whilst societal reaction to 'knife crime' draws attention to 'gangs' as a correlate of knife offences, it fails to see beyond the labels to recognise the sociological changes that caused instability in the organisation of communities and increasing the vulnerability of young people moving through divided areas. This alternative reality of 'knife crime' suggests further research is required into the long-term impacts of gentrification and regeneration, especially its impact on marginalised groups that are precariously dependent on local resources and informal communitarianism.

#### **4. Lucrative business and Pyramid schemes**

The last theme identified in interview data in relation to 2007 and 2008 was the consistent explanation of violence between young people as a symptom of heightened recruitment and new entrepreneurial practices in the informal economy and drug market in the 2000's. It was the opinion of many of the practitioners interviewed that the introduction of expensive mobile phone technology incentivised street robberies at this time, and that changing UK drug markets increased the recruitment of younger children by older teens and young people in their twenties. These ideas will be explored here in relation to existing research on informal markets, in order to infer from interview data what realities of 'knife crime' young people were experiencing in London in 2007 and 2008.

Several ex-youth offending officers placed crucial significance to the advancement of mobile technologies in understanding increasing violence at this time. One described the increase in violence in 2007 as characterised by a shift ‘from anti-social behaviour to street robberies’ that was inspired by the release of iPods; ‘*Now people were walking around with 500, 600 or 1000 pounds gadgets in their pockets*’ (Interview S 21.02.2018). The participant went on to point out that adults and organised crime networks were central in incentivising the ‘quick cash’ of mobile phone and iPod robberies but were not held accountable:

‘...adults are complicit in this, because there were so many shops locally even now who are allowing children to rob phones, walk in, exchange them for cash and send the phones abroad and have them re-chipped. And from an organised criminal perspective no body was taking down these shops’ (Interview S 21.02.2018).

The development of a lucrative industry relying on robbery, that in turn increased knife carrying and use amongst young people, is an interesting observation by practitioners. It is true that the explosion of personal technologies in digital music players and mobile telephones is an aspect often overlooked in the discussion of knife crime in 2007/2008. The popular Blackberry smartphone was worth £400 when it was released in 2002, the first Apple iPod cost £300 in 2001 with a new generation produced every year, whilst the first Apple iPhone cost £500 in 2007. It is highly likely that the popularity of portable technologies and their high retail value incentivised street robberies at this time and that the ease of

converting stolen phones and iPods into quick cash was a catalyst for violence amongst low-level criminal enterprises at this time.

Participants also drew attention to the deepening contradictions between the aspirations of young people looking to prosper in criminal syndicates and the realities of the opportunities available for success in these enterprises. Many felt that younger and more easily influenced young people were being targeted for recruitment into drug dealing enterprises at this time and being exploited by older (late teens and early twenties) young people who were themselves struggling to achieve success in these risky markets. One participant described the young people he worked with in 2007 as; 'hugely vulnerable! Easy pickings for the older lot' (Interview N 03/04/2018).

Analysing these comments in the context of existing research (Hobbs 2013, Densley 2012, Clement 2010) it can be inferred that the observed shift towards recruiting younger, more vulnerable children as 'easy pickings' at this time was one consequence of the stagnation of previously transient deviancy. As mentioned previously, the 'olders' with larger profit margins in the distribution chain, who traditionally left vacancies as they matured into the adult work culture, increasingly decide to remain and occupy the higher levels indefinitely. Applying the work of Densley (2012) on informal market structures, the conditions in 2007 and 2008 described by practitioners can be interpreted as the mechanisms of drug dealing



pyramid scheme; a multi-level marketing system that puts more emphasis upon the recruiting distributors than on the selling products (Densley 2012:55):

If the basic idea is for sellers to recruit more sales persons then rather than expanding the client base they are increasing internal competition. Only those who control the gang and supply the drugs at the top profit by having more youngers trying to out-sell each other. For those at the bottom, the gang becomes an exercise in survival of the fittest... Gang structure serves a purpose: the rich get richer. (Ibid.)

In relation to the comments made by participants in this research this suggests that *younger* young people came to be increasingly exploited by *older* young people within the drug market at this time. The insight of these realities in the intricate lives and interactions of young people provide alternative explanations for increased violence at this time. It has been previously established that the frustration of the rigged systems of the drug economy are most commonly expressed as violence *between* low-end distributors - because '*[y]oungers climb the hierarchy in competition with their peers rather than their elders*' (Densley 2012:56). The analysis of interview data suggests that the intense recruitment of younger young people into drug distribution, along with stolen mobile technology initiatives, all provide lucrative incentives for criminal enterprises that increased the likelihood of knife carrying and knife violence in the everyday lives of young people throughout this period.

In Summary, the analysis of interview data from practitioners presented several alternative realities of the context of violence in 2007 and 2008 that are not represented in the interpretation of acts as 'knife crime' at this time. Recognising the sociological shifts caused by; the death of iconic figures, the destabilising affects of proactive policing, structural changes in drug distribution, new criminal enterprises and the long term impact of gentrification on inner-suburb communities – practitioners on the ground provide a 'realist' perspective on increased violence that go beneath and beyond the label and its constructed meaning.

The failure to identify and investigate these developments was a devastating neglect of vulnerable children in this moment. Instead, fatal stabbings in the mid 2000s were understood as distinct events of 'knife crime' and through processes of racialisation were explained through notions of cultural deficit and inferiority. This narrow focus on a deadly 'knife culture' negated any sense of societal obligation to evaluate the policies and social harm that had led to an emerging generation of actors that were younger, fragmented, further marginalised, increasingly vulnerable, exposed to extreme violence and at risk of exploitation. Furthermore, as chapter five detailed, the response to 'knife crime' as it was understood in 2008 authorized excessive state force and discriminatory police practices targeted at young people in deprived areas. This was an aspect of the reality of 'knife crime' that participants were asked about directly during this research, leading to the following

inferences of the particular experience of stop and search from 2008 onwards.

### **Confrontation and Hostility; Experiencing Exceptional Policing**

In chapter five the dramatic increase in stop and search in 2008 and extension of police powers were considered in relation to symbolic criminalisation and the function of law and order at a time of economic uncertainty. Theories of hegemonic crisis present the state of exception as a mechanism of neoliberal social management (Hall et al. 1978) and whilst this constructionist approach exposes the broader context of policing it cannot represent the character and experience of searches at this time. I asked professionals working in the Youth Justice System in 2008 about any changes in policing that they witnessed during the 'war on knife crime' and participants consistently recognised a distinct shift in the dynamic of police interactions with young people throughout this period.

In their responses practitioners described a new dynamic during the searches that they felt directly related to the authority and urgency that 'knife crime' bestowed on searching officers. One Intervention Officer described the new offences being processed by the Youth Offending Team in 2008 and how the speed of the government-to-policing reaction didn't allow time for training or education around legalities and rights:

*Did you notice an increase in stop and search in 2008 in response to Knife crime?*

We definitely saw it in Triage, we saw more young people that had been stopped and searched. It was weird stuff like: “why are you here?” “Oh, I had a compass in my bag” ...“right.. Did you pull that compass out on somebody?” “Nah, I just had a compass in my bag and I got stopped and searched and here I am”

*But you're allowed a compass for school right?*

Well... yes...

*I mean, how long is the point on a compass?*

Well this is it, ‘bladed article’ they would call it. So yeah, we started to see that as like, it was the *new thing*. Not that it was a new thing, but police were like “this is going to save everything” and you’re like “oh ok, this is interesting”. And I think what was happening was, not only were young people being stopped and searched but they didn’t know their rights. And I think police were playing on that – you don’t really understand your rights so we’re just going to do it and that’s where confrontation would come. Because what would happen was that, police would stop and search a young person, they wouldn’t know how to articulate a simple question of “why?”

*The young person?*

Yeh, “why am I being stopped and searched?” and “what is the process?” and “what am I allowed to carry and what am I not allowed to carry?”. It was almost like the government were like “we’ve got a knife crime problem” – bang! (Interview F 29.01.2018)

The confusion over what was legal during this episode of blanket Section 60 searches increased confrontation and heightened the hostility of the interaction between police and adolescents. The speed of the response didn’t allow time for young people to be educated on their rights, they were not equipped with the language or experience to communicate their

frustrations and it was felt by practitioners that this was exploited by the police during searches.

I asked the same question to a Youth Justice Resettlement Manager in 2008, and whilst pointing out that he felt there was justification for increasing searches because 'the yout's out of fear were carrying more weapons' (Interview D 16.02.2018) he also recognised a shift in the dynamic of the searches which began to connect Black children with the stories of their parents:

...what they were doing is they were just stopping and just frisking, there was no communication. And officers weren't trained properly before they did it and then they're given this blanket responsibility and the authority to just go and pull up whoever they suspect to be somebody who is carrying something. And they're gripping these boys, getting their hands all over them. Its violent, its intrusive and if you really have done nothing wrong that is a tipping point for you which connects to what your fathers and mothers have told you about what police were like in the 70's and 80s and you say 'now I've had my experience (interview D 16.02.2018).

The frequency of searches increased, the powers used were more discriminatory and the dynamic of the interaction was more aggressive - and yet there was public consensus and support for it as an urgent response to 'knife crime'. As discussed in chapter five, the renewed commitment to stop and search from 2016 onwards has produced similar experiences for contemporary young people. The following excerpts were comments from two young people during focus groups in 2018 talking about their own experiences of stop and search:

...one time I was at a party and someone had a comb in their back pocket and then five police pushed them against the wall and were like “whats that sharp object in your trousers?”. I feel like they assaulted him kinda, just to get that comb out his pocket. And I didn’t think that a comb - that’s used to comb your hair - that the police would portray that like a knife (FG 10 20.11.2018).

...at our school we had a stop and search day thing, and they kind of covered it with “oh everyone’s getting searched”. At the beginning of the day they had that thing what you walk through, so everybody had to walk through it. And you could basically see that they were basically stopping the Black children, the boys, they were basically stopped them and searching them when everybody else just had to walk through. It was almost like even if you’re coming into a school you’re still seeing a bunch of Black children you’ll automatically think “oh they’re bringing knives to school they’re the ones causing the trouble (FG2 26.11.2018).

The language young people used to describe how police ‘portray’ innocuous objects as knives (FG10 20.11.2018) or racial profiling ‘covered’ by knife arches (FG2 26.11.2018) suggest that contemporary stop and search continues to be characterised by a feeling of being taken advantage of and manipulated. These accounts demonstrate just a few of the practical realities of searching for knives; that the expectation of a knife provides justification for excessive force during searches and that the seemingly indiscriminate knife arches can be used as a veil for highly discriminate search practices.

Beyond the arrest rates and measurements of disproportionality discussed in chapter five, the experiences of practitioners and young people communicate the realities of stop and search in connection to ‘knife crime’

that characterised police tactics within the response. Emboldened by the political and public commitment to proactive policing of 'knife crime', stop and search not only extends the consensus for force, but also facilitates the criminalisation of Black children in pragmatic ways. The specific embodiment of 'knife crime' searches and the anticipation of knives in police work, presents a shifting reality experienced by young people, beneath the structural function of 'policing the crisis'.

Consulting with young people during focus groups it became apparent that whilst these realities of 'knife crime' policing connect to the experiences of historic Black politics and resistance in the UK, participants had little access to these alternative narratives. This is a condition I confront next in this chapter, with reference to the institutionalisation of anti-racism and its implications for contemporary young people.

### **Institutionalised anti-racism and depoliticising 'knife crime'**

The focus groups stage of research with young people began with a presentation that included local histories of political struggle and Black activism, connecting the construction of 'knife crime' to a history of 'Othering' and the community resistance that was mobilised against racist and hostile policing of in the 1970's and 1980's. In the ten presentations I delivered to 16, 17 and 18 year olds, this was consistently quoted as young people's favourite part of my presentation. None of the seventy-eight

young participants had heard about the riots and resistance during the 1980's despite many of them recognising the streets and landmarks in the black and white photos I presented. In the discussions that followed many young people said they wished these histories were taught at school and wondered it was being deliberately kept from them. When I asked young people if they felt their experiences connected to the histories I discussed.

One group responded:

YP3: It looks different back then. Like, certain areas were more White then – it wasn't socially integrated.

YP2: I think people don't tell us about what happened in the 70's and 80's because they're embarrassed.

*That's interesting*

YP2: Like, they had a political party that was being openly racist!

YP1: But they do that now!

*Perhaps the language has changed so it seems different now.*

YP3: I think that who they're racist to, as well, has changed too. Because at first they were racist to Black people more but now they've sort of shifted towards Muslim people - so the ways and who they're profiling has changed. And people can be acting like they're not racist in person but then get on social media and get together with other people and share stuff and say stuff that's very racist. And they can be like "I live in a multicultural area so how can I be racist?" (FG1 31.10.18)

During this short interaction young people demonstrate that despite not having engaged with this content before they were beginning to connect histories of mobilisation and the political potential of groups to the changing influences of social integration, multiculturalism, social media and the shifting racism they currently recognise. The comments and



engagement with critical politics during focus groups suggested that young people welcomed the opportunity to explore these connections but that they have few opportunities to do so.

Similarly, young people during focus groups were able to draw connections between societal racism and the use of excessive policing of Black people to improve police reputation and be seen to be actively preventing crime.

One participant described:

...Black people are always seen as second, or inferior to White people. So in terms of when they do stops and searches they're always quite firm and quite hostile – its to do with racism but I feel like the police are not really good at what they do... I feel like because Black people have that stereotype of being inferior to White people then they [police] use Black people as scapegoats and they use that for crime in order to impress and supposedly get their reputation up (FG9:20.11.2018).

Young people's responses during focus groups suggest that despite being exposed to the realities of a socially constructed 'Black criminality', critical anti-racist understandings are not currently being made accessible to them through their informal or formal education systems. Considering that young people are known to be disproportionately subjected to discriminatory stop and search and hostile policing, and are targeted by practitioners for intervention on the topic of 'knife crime' specifically, it is significant that these themes, contexts and histories are not being presented to them by the adults that currently work and live around them.

Exploring this aspect of young people's realities through the analysis of original interview data with practitioners and existing research, it can be inferred that the absence of critical anti-racist approaches in youth and community work is symptomatic of a broader institutionalisation of race relations (Shukra 1998) and the mediation of intervention through state apparatus. The professionals I interviewed were mostly Black men (fifteen of the twenty interviewed), all of whom in various roles had worked to impact young people's lives through the existing structures of the Youth Justice System. There was a reoccurring inference from their responses that they felt they were not only attempting to change young people but also the institution itself through their inclusion. Many described their commitment to the institutions through the idea that "change happens from the inside" (D 16.02.2018), describing themselves as "the bridge between local initiatives and organisations" (interview B 25.01.2018), "a voice that will speak for the voiceless" (Interview F 29.01.2018).

Some confessed that their best work was achieved when the structures were subverted or rules bent, but ultimately the job required professionalism and was intervention on specific bureaucratic terms. Within this endeavour, practitioners expressed a matter-of-fact acknowledgement of a flawed system, of an impenetrable 'police culture' that overshadowed their efforts of community and criminal justice cohesion, and a multifaceted institutional racism that was hindering their work at every level.

The difficulty and desperation of embodying this contradiction was expressed by one Company Director who recounted multiple times he was aggressively stopped and searched in front of young people he worked with. On one such occasion he had just delivered a session on stop and search, defending police actions and encouraging cooperation, only to be violently searched in front of the young participants upon leaving the youth centre. He concluded:

Its very hard to maintain your integrity, its very hard to keep pushing these key and positive messages because that is one of the only solutions we have... its very difficult (Interview L 01.05.2018).

These participants were highly skilled and experienced Black managers who had committed themselves to this frustrating tension of negotiating government machinery in order to reach young people and mediate interventions that were *at least* capable of achieving small, individual changes – knowing that without their contribution and compromise the youth work delivered would be inept and ineffective. But handling cases of severe child violence, within the inadequate structures of the institution, was a difficult contradiction for genuine, caring leaders to maintain.

One participant spoke candidly of eventually leaving what he described as ‘the frontline’ of the Youth Offending Service, suicidal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He attributed this to receiving no clinical supervision and a persistent lack of recognition from his employer of the intensity of the

social issues presenting. Another manager described how he decided to redirect his commitment into pastoral Christianity with an understanding that the heavy case loads and focus on specific behavioural changes such as 'knife carrying' were restricting his potential to effect 'transformations of the heart'.

Practitioners I spoke to were socially and politically aware - often drawing on post-colonial interpretations of power and policing in the communication of their frustrations. For example, One ex-police officer who has worked in 'knife crime' prevention with young people for many years described his frustration with the institutional response to police racism thus:

...to get a good understanding of racism and police racism and personal racism you need to understand what it is – Really, I think it's got its roots in the British empire and colonialism... So if the diversity training of police officers doesn't touch on what the British Empire was, and meant and the vestiges of colonialism and neo-colonialism in today's world, then we're completely wasting our time. So its just like, going through the motions and pretending that you're doing diversity training when you're not even beginning to touch on it (Interview K 12.01.2018).

It is curious that practitioners experiencing the everyday confrontations, restrictions and frustrations of a legacy of imperialism and racism were not also organising to impart this knowledge onto young people facing the brunt of police brutality at this time. It has been argued elsewhere that the movement towards Black representation in state institutions as a means of achieving equality, led to an increasing dependence on the race-relations

machinery for council grants, resources and facilities, and this integration shaped the way Black leaders responded to discriminatory institutional practices (Shukra 1998:62). During the 1980's, *'the movement against racism was bureaucratised through integration of black people into local government machinery... black people came to redefine their objectives such that small changes rather than social transformation became their concern'* (Shukra 1998:62).

The Interpretation of feedback during youth focus groups within the context of the institutionalisation of Black politics, and in relation to the deep frustrations of Black practitioners working within these structures, raises several points for discussion. Firstly, it suggests that whilst the experiences of racial discrimination and police harassment have continued for emerging generations of young people, the political articulation of these interactions as racist and imperialist has become less accessible to those subjected to these practices. Leaving contemporary youth alienated from the histories that contextualise their experiences and thus restricting their capacity to organise in proactive resistance.

Secondly, the absence of significant anti-racist progress, due in part to the institutionalisation of race politics, has made it increasingly difficult for effective Black practitioners to sustain their work within the inherent contradictions of their practice. Accounts by practitioners in this research suggest that this untenable position has led to experienced Black leaders

moving to different roles and away from direct youth intervention. These dilemmas within the realities of the 'knife crime' response were made particularly apparent during interviews with practitioners when participants recalled the increasing specialisation of intervention work with young people in the 2000's.

### **Specialisation in Youth Justice; 'Knife Crime Work'**

Unlike traditional youth work, work with young people within the youth justice system has always been a targeted practice, structured around punitive or preventative strategies and aimed at young offenders or young people 'at risk' of offending. However, interviews with youth justice managers and directors of organisations suggest there was a significant shift in the specialisation of crime prevention youth practice in the late 2000's. Participants described an increasing offence specific approach within the youth offending service in which 'knife crime' and 'gangs' became organising features of intervention practice.

Many of the practitioners spoke fondly of a time when their work with young offenders was less structured and activities were organised around young people's interests and what they enjoyed doing. I asked one ex youth offending Manager to reflect on the work he did before the emergence of 'knife crime prevention':

*...So there was concern about street robberies when you started working there in 2005 and at that point there's no knife crime prevention projects?*

S: No, what we had was 'RAP'; Resettlement Aftercare Provision. And the Resettlement Aftercare Provision was again, money that got released by New Labour - it was to bring a more creative approach to working with young people who were either at risk of offending or young people that were involved. We were working with the children who were offending. When we first started we were taking children to Alton Towers and my manager would say "Just book!" and I would say what's the budget? And there was no budget. Book me a nice 12 seater [minibus] and then what about food? What do you think they'd like? I think they would love West Indian. Cool. So we'll drop 200 for the West Indian. Where do you want to go? Alton Towers. We'll take them all the Alton Towers and spend a 1000... Just do it. Do what ever you want. And I do believe that was some of the best work we did. Because the children stopped coming to the YOT just for their order it became like the new youth club. Which is difficult to say because it is an institution about the management of children who have committed criminal acts so you shouldn't be enticing children in who haven't committed crime to start coming (Interview S 21.02.2018).

Although reluctant to equate the punitive or intervention strategies of 2005 to the open access approach of a 'youth club' this practitioner described this as 'some of the best work' they did and went on to explain his efforts to recreate this delivery style in projects later developed for 'gang intervention'. When I asked this participant why they thought provision changed to the more offence related approach of later years they suggested this was part of a new model influenced by policy change:

They started to look at risk, need and responsivity around interventions - The RNR principle. And that basically means that any intervention delivered to a young person or an offender, you have to understand the risks that they present, you have to fully understand their needs and the programme has to be responsive to who they are... you can't just provide 'Alton Towers' you now need to be specific about the offence, you need to provide an intervention that matches that' (S 21.02.2018)

This shift towards offence specific interventions described by participants created a demand for 'knife crime prevention' programmes within the youth justice system. Practitioners described that from around 2009 'knife crime prevention' projects began to emerge and were delivered by both youth offending practitioners and external private contracted companies. Devising services in response to the growing demand and funding made available for 'knife crime' work was described by participants as an easily accessible market for entrepreneurial organisations. As one Company Director described:

'...Everyone suddenly wanted to open a business "I run a youth organisation" "I do this, I do this" oh really? , ok no problem... It was like, yeah, anyone can work with gangs. Anyone can work in knife crime. Forget what you know, forget your understanding, forget anything - you go and grab a few trustees set up a committee, apply to the Big Lottery, make it sound great, a bit of funding - we now do gang work. Great!... So there's a whole economy being built around this problem now. There's millions of organisations that have been set up, there's heads of services now set up for this, special this, special that, trauma informed workers - you just name it - if you suddenly stop the problem, you've now got an unemployment problem for all of these other people!' (Interview O 10.05.2018)

It is significant that participants drew attention to the financial dependency that developed around the valorisation of work that directly responded to and specialised in 'knife crime'. In terms of how the construction of 'knife crime' was experienced on the ground, this specialisation of practice was influential for young people. The priority status of 'knife crime' funding at this time can be seen to transport the crime label from tabloid news onto institutional practice with very little



adaptation or scrutiny. The work functioning under the same title as the moral panic itself came to dictate the content of projects that worked with young people at this time, influencing the realities of children in contact with youth services, youth justice and mainstream education.

During an interview with one ex Youth Offending Service manager who had been responsible for developing knife crime prevention and probation courses throughout this period I asked his opinion on the effectiveness of this shift towards specialisation. He replied:

[the knife crime prevention project] worked but we need to change it up a little bit because actually we're focusing on the - We're not focusing on the causes we're focusing on the issue. "you're here because of knife crime, but really we wanna talk about why you carried the knife in the first place"

*You think that's what it was or what it should've been?*

I think that's what it should've been. It wasn't that. It was more like "right lets bring in [ex 'gang member'] to tell you his experience and shock you, let me bring in the ambulance staff to shock you, lets bring in the police so they can tell you what's going down" instead of actually saying "you know what, why are you here in the first place and lets work backwards". Yeh, I think we dealt with the 'issue'... The problem with all these interventions is they focus on the behaviour, that's the problem.

*Maybe that's the impact the 'knife crime' label had?*

Well that's what the money was for, and that's what we were called to do (Interview N 03/04/2018).

This evaluation of the design of prevention projects reveals several realities of how 'knife crime' came to impact on young people and practitioners at this time. Firstly, it demonstrates how the re-articulation of intervention

work as 'offence specific' in reality grouped together the offences of individual young people through the idea of a collective crime type socially constructed by the label. Secondly, it describes a set template for 'knife crime' work that drew on shock and fear in the method of behaviour change, influencing the content of discussion and imagery that young people were exposed to through these interventions. And lastly, it crucially reveals the restrictive impact the label and its response had on effective practice. These comments suggest that even when practitioners knew it wasn't the best approach to the problems they perceived amongst young people, they were tied to the incompatible methods dictated by the social construction of 'knife crime' because 'that's what the money was for'.

The continued prosperity of industries functioning under the banner of 'knife crime' is a reality of the response that will be returned to with greater scrutiny in the analysis of chapter seven, whilst the final discussions of this chapter focus on the analysis of focus group data with young people. The consequences of the incorporation of 'knife crime' as a priority issue in policing, policy and youth practice, as discussed above, impacted on the lived realities of young people significantly. Young people's responses during the focus groups reveal several crucial points for consideration, reflecting on how these changes have been experienced in their lived realities.

### **Resilience and Retribution; Focus Group Analysis.**

During this stage of the research project the findings of the constructivist methods of early chapters of this thesis were presented to ten groups of young people in both mainstream and informal youth work settings. In reflecting on this process and the findings of group discussions there are several unique themes and observations to discuss. The first of these presented here is the taken-for-granted familiarity that young people had with the language and methods of 'knife crime' discussions in itself.

I provided schools and youth centers with a detailed description of my research intentions in the initial stages of arranging my visits, but understandably when this was communicated to young people ahead of my arrival it had been summarized to them as; 'knife crime research.' As a result of this, young people had made certain judgments in advance of meeting me and already anticipated the content of my presentation.

It was often the case that I would begin the presentation with a disinterested and indifferent audience who gradually engaged as the critical content became apparent. On one occasion this growing enthusiasm lead to a spontaneous round of applause by the young participants upon the completion of the presentation – a personal highlight of this research project. The difference between the expected and actual content of this 'knife crime' presentation was often one of the first things young participants commented on in the group discussions that

followed. As one sixth-form student described; *'When they said you were coming to talk about knife crime we thought it was going to be like those police assemblies'* (FG9 20.11.2018)

Talking at length with groups about their previous interactions with 'knife crime' assemblies and projects there was consistent discontent with the delivery and assumptions contained within these interventions. Their experiences ranged from professionals they found insulting and patronising in their simplistic advice, to sickening feelings from being shown photos of knife injuries. Young people's foreboding anticipation of my presentation demonstrates not only a familiarity with the concept 'knife crime' but also a dissatisfaction with the existing methods of responding interventions. This consistent theme was one of many that emerged across the variety of settings and contexts of focus groups.

Although the presentation focused on the labelling processes and responses to 'knife crime', young people invariably wanted to discuss causes and solutions to violence between young people in the discussions that followed. Economic causes were always readily offered; with young people able to explain with depth and clarity the accessibility and attraction of 'fast money' compared to the low wages or high tuition fees of 'slow money'. As one young person summarised; 'you can be a rich criminal or a poor graduate' (FG5 13.11.2018)

Young people described with insight the processes through which young people are groomed into drug dealing by 'olders', the increased likelihood of contact with predatory dealers in densely populated, deprived housing estates and the absence of supervision as parents worked long hours on low pay to provide for their children. In contrast, participants never suggested economic or structural solutions to the issues they discussed. Variations on comments such as 'more activities for young people' (FG6 13.11.2018), 'more education on the risks' (FG9 20.11.2018) or 'move away from dangerous areas' (FG10 20.11.2018) were common during discussions, centring the importance of the individual's responsibility to access reformatory provisions or to remove themselves from harm.

During one focus group a participant explained the aspect of himself that he felt had kept him from becoming violent. Tapping his finger on the side of his head he said; 'I'm very strong up here, mentally. Some people are more resilient than others' (FG5 13.11.2018). The use of the word 'resilient' is particularly interesting considering its prominence in the language of 'knife crime' prevention and intervention. Even when I hinted at structural solutions young people repeatedly returned to a discourse of individual responsibility, with one group telling me 'the government haven't got any money to help' (FG9 20.11.2018). Demonstrating the extension of individualism into the understanding of proximal violence one participant described the recent death of local young people saying; 'when they die,

although its deep yea, but, they had it coming' (FG2 26.11.2018). Other members of the group concurred.

This assertion of a particular type of young person that willingly engaged in extreme violence and thus deserved retribution was a consistent theme during focus groups. Sometimes referred to by participants as 'gang bangers' or 'nutters' they were spoken about as a small minority, often with references to poor mental health and impulsive violent behaviours, and seen to pose a great threat to the majority of young people. I asked one focus group whether young people would ever use the police to remove the threat of this identified minority or to refer them to mental health services. This suggestion was met with laughter. One young person explained it to me this way; *'but the police treat me like dirt and then I'm going to basically put my life in their hands because I've snitched? Nah, how can they protect me? Do they even want to protect me? That's nuts!'* (FG 9 20.11.2018).

This reaction, in line with previous research (Densley 2012, Bowling and Phillips 2002, Kushnick 1999), suggests that the over policing of young people, particularly Black children, has had lasting implications for their accessibility of protection through legal routes. Five of the ten focus groups were conducted with young people within mainstream educational settings. Their shared experiences of stop and search and the suspicion and humiliation that crosses school gates highlights the harm of non-

intelligence led proactive policing that cannot differentiate between young people who are 'high risk' and young people who are 'at risk'.

Overall the focus groups provided an essential contextualisation of the findings of this research. Demonstrating how the multiple realities of 'knife crime' as both a tangible threat and a societal response are navigated in the everyday lives of young people. Living with the threat of extreme violence and with little trust or faith in the ability of the police to enforce justice, it is staggering but not surprising that many young people have come to understand the deaths of children as self determined or 'deserved'. This reality, as described by young people, acts as an urgent reminder of the material impacts of *policing the crisis*.

## **Conclusion**

The first hand data analysed in this chapter has presented an empirical case for alternative realities of 'knife crime'. Interviews and focus groups provided a crucial contextualisation of the acts defined as 'knife crime' presenting multiple realities that have been obscured by the dominant tabloidised representations of a youth phenomenon. In this phase of the research, it is suggested that beneath the headlines in 2007 and 2008 there were *real* and complex sociological shifts taking place in which the normalised brutalities of everyday life for working class children intensified.

The practitioners recalled with ease and specificity the developments in the informal economy, fragmenting affiliations and generational shifts that redefined the experiences of young people during this moment. The changes in youth justice work that increasingly focused on knife offending were also discussed in this chapter, along with experiences of particular dynamic and authority of stop and search in response to 'knife crime' at this time.

Interpreting these findings it is evident that the multiple, overlapping realities of knife crime are not equally represented by the label. The dominant representation of 'knife crime' is that which is defined by the tabloid press throughout the moral panic, and it is this version of reality that dictates the specialisation of practices and a hostile policing attitude. The discussions during focus groups suggest that young people are still navigating the contradictions between lived realities and 'knife crime' representation; tasked with trying to keep themselves safe from normalised everyday violence in deprived areas of the city, whilst being subjected to discriminatory and confrontational policing in the name of 'knife crime prevention'.

Practitioners who were aware of the contradictions of 'knife crime' work at this time were seen to remain committed through necessity and lack of alternatives, describing their position as 'the only solutions we have' and



'what the money was for'. The empirical phase of this research has emphasised the importance of radical approaches that look beyond constructed categories of criminality, to the realities of both the acts *and* the response that defines them. It is only this endeavour that reveals the very *real* harm caused by the label 'knife crime' and the responses that it validates; exposing the true costs of this moral panic.

## **Chapter Seven.**

### **The Knife Crime Industry;**

### **Knife Fetish and the Commodification of Prevention**

## **Introduction**

In the previous chapter the analysis of empirical data described the multiple 'knife crime' realities experienced by young people and practitioners within the actions and reactions contained by the label. Within this it was recognised that 'knife crime work' with young people that was preventative or 'offence specific' increasingly dominated crime prevention initiatives from 2009 onwards and became financially incentivised at this time. Expanding on this aspect with greater scrutiny, this chapter introduces the idea of an influential 'knife crime industry' that extends across and beyond criminal justice to include privatized services, creative arts and entertainment.

The phrase 'knife crime industry' will be used in this chapter to refer to an interconnected network of public services and private enterprises that have come to benefit from the crime label 'knife crime' in various ways. It will be demonstrated that in the contemporary context there is active communication between direct and indirect beneficiaries of this industry that in varying degrees are dependent on the label for their existence and sense of legitimacy.

In order to analyse the shape of this industry and the forms that it takes this chapter includes a process of content analysis of 'knife crime' communications on Twitter during one month in 2018. Analysing text and images shared across a network of beneficiaries and members of the public

this chapter intends to demonstrate the ways in which the label carries value and meaning and the complexities of responding to interpersonal violence through this existing framework of response.

In addition to this, the analysis of this chapter will develop an argument that within the knife crime industry images of knives have become fetishized; capitalising from their value and powerful symbolism whilst simultaneously 'Othering' and sensationalising 'knife crime' through reinforcing and re-inscribing the knife. Questioning the accountability of professional actors in this network, the analysis of tweets will demonstrate that forms of 'knife crime' communication are inseparable from the popular racism and vitriolic hate speech that is contained within the floating signifier; 'knife crime'. First however, the notion of a 'knife crime industry' will be explained in more detail, exploring the definition of this network as defined in this thesis.

### **Defining an Industry**

The early chapters of this thesis drew attention to the actions within policing that were formative in the construction of a new crime category in the early 2000's. Changes in crime recording practices, the language of crime reports and mobilisations towards particular acts were seen as definitive in communicating the meaning of 'knife crime' during its early use. In considering the developments over the years that followed the

moral panic of 2008, it is clear that the defining voices and key actors in the response to 'knife crime' extend far beyond enforcement.

As early as 2003 the first 'knife focused' campaign groups begin to emerge and along with dedicated charities and government initiatives there is an increasing authority of the label as it is attached and communicated through a variety of influential organisations. Campaign groups such as;

- Mothers Against Knives - founded in 2003 ([mothersagainstknives.tripod.com](http://mothersagainstknives.tripod.com)),
- Lives not Knives - Founded 2007 ([livesnotknives.org](http://livesnotknives.org)),
- Communities Against Gun and Knife Crime - founded 2007 ([cagk.co.uk](http://cagk.co.uk)),
- Say No 2 Knives - Launched 2008 ([sayno2knives.co.uk](http://sayno2knives.co.uk)),
- Solve This On-going Problem 'STOP' - founded 2008 ([facebook.com/pg/Solve-This-Ongoing-Problem](https://facebook.com/pg/Solve-This-Ongoing-Problem)),
- It Doesn't Have to Happen 'IDHTH' - Launched 2009 (Hoskins 2010),
- No Knives, Better Lives - launched 2009 ([noknivesbetterlives.com](http://noknivesbetterlives.com)),
- I don't Carry a Knife - Founded in 2010 (Channel 4 project Battlefront)

Along with other campaigns the organisation of these groups all begin to contribute to a common 'knife crime' understanding through their public representation and popular support.

Victim charities and trusts (such as The Ben Kinsella Trust (2008), The Rob Knox Foundation (2008), and the Tom Kirwan Trust (2013)) are particularly influential in mobilising politically to demand harsher sentencing of those convicted of knife related offences, intervention in schools and youth centres, and supporting increased stop and search. They become an active link between government, the press, policing and schools, by helping put together and promote 'knife crime' workshops, write reports (Kinsella 2011), organise events (such as The Peoples March Against Gun and Knife Crime in October 2008) and design advertising campaigns. Later, as the Internet provided increasing platforms for engagement, they also become active on social media.

Alongside and in interaction with these groups and organisations the government responds with multiple legislative Acts that identify 'knife crime' as a distinct form of criminality. 'Knife crime' is specifically targeted in: The Violent Crime reduction Act (2006), Tackling Gangs Action Programme (2007), Tackling Violence Action Plan; Saving Lives, Reducing Harm, Protecting the Public (2008), Tackling Knives Action Plan (2008), Youth Crime Action Plan (2008) and Count Me In; Together we can Stop Knife Crime (2010).

Many of these Acts and policy initiative emphasise 'joined up' collaborative work to 'tackle knife crime', particularly between the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the Home Office and policing. For

example, expanding the reach of the 'knife crime' response by providing step by step teaching resources and lesson plans for schools to teach young people about 'knife crime' (Count Me In 2010, TKNP 2008). Additional policing operations are also launched off the backs of these campaigns, such as; Drop The Weapon (2008), Bin It (2009), and No More Knives (2009) that are supported by community campaign groups.

The scale and organisation of the response to 'knife crime' that develops during these years produces a growing market for 'knife crime work'; industries employed in the mechanisms of intervention development and delivery, including face-to-face work with young people and the administrative roles, and management these practices rely on. The forms of 'knife crime work' that are now common practice, were developed from 2008 onwards, when targeted government funding began focusing on knives and 'knife crime' as a priority public issue.

The first of this kind was the Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) receiving £7million in 2008, a further £5million in 2009 and a final £2million in 2010. In 2011 this was replaced with the Communities Against Gangs, Guns and Knives (CAGGK), which received £4million in 2011 and a further £500,000 in 2012. The CAGGK fund was part of a total £18million ring fenced by the Conservative coalition for 'tackling knife crime' over two years. News value of 'knife crime' was at a low in 2012 but the revenue for 'knife crime work' continued under the End Gang and Youth Violence

(EGYV) post-riots funding that released £10million for targeted intervention work and additional policing operations. As 'knife crime' news began to regain prominence again in the second half of the 2010's, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, announced the Anti Knife Crime Community Fund in 2017 with an initial £250,000 increasing to £1.4 million in 2018 and £15million for policing 'knife crime' in London.

These knife focused government funds were also accompanied by the shifting priorities of large funders such as the National Lottery and the Arts Council who provide long-term revenue in the sector. The Big Lottery fund, for example, provided a single grant of over £600,000 to on-going anti knife crime work at a south London church in 2009 and just under £500,000 to a theatre project aimed at reducing knife crime in 2010 ([tnlcommunityfund.org.uk](http://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk)). These capital investments are relatively small compared to the hundreds of millions removed from statutory youth services since 2010, but they represent a significant shift in priority funding at a time of scarcity in the youth sector.

The expansion of 'knife crime' as a societal response to crime, through public and private apparatus, produced a network that interact in co-dependency with the law and order response at this time. The interconnected cross-sector representation of 'knife crime' that is constructed and benefited from through this network is referred to in this research as 'the knife industry'. I use the word industry in the sense that



each contributing actor within the network is productive; producing meaning and relevancy of the crime label but also creating value for 'knife crime work', accumulatively constructive of a broad 'knife crime' economy.

Within the knife crime industry there are a variety of contributors. To understand the interactions across the network it is helpful to subcategorised actors into two groups; direct and indirect beneficiaries. Here I define direct beneficiaries as institutions, services and organisations that receive direct capital in the form of knife crime funding. Whilst indirect beneficiaries are defined as enterprises and initiatives that capitalise from association with the label and the legitimacy it bestows. Both are seen as productive of a common meaning of 'knife crime' but their intentions and methods often differ.

The significance of this emerging industry on the function and durability of the label will be discussed in this chapter, drawing attention to the standardised language and communication of 'knife crime work' that reinforces a particular interpretation of the problem. To demonstrate this, consider the forty-seven successful applicants for the £250,000 anti-knife crime community fund in 2017. In the short summary of their projects (Full list in Appendix C) published online, 83% (39) used a distinct language of knife crime prevention (highlighted in bold in Appendix C) that has become normalised in knife crime work and rhetoric. Phrases such as 'involved in knife crime', 'knife related crime', 'intensive intervention' and

'key issues' have become standardised language that has no clear or definite meaning.

40% (19) of the summaries used language to describe 'targeting' particular types of young people, described as 'at risk', 'on the cusp', 'challenging' or 'hard to reach'. Whilst 49% (23) confirmed an individualist approach of 'education', 'awareness' or building personal 'resilience' as their method of 'knife crime prevention'. Project names such as 'Aspire Higher', 'Aspire to Change' or 'New Choices' exemplify the responsabilisation of the individual within the paradigm. Reinforcing the patronising assumption that young people living under extreme conditions of inequality just need to be more aspirational or make better choices in order to counteract the structural, symbolic and physical violence of their daily lives.

There are some hints within the descriptions of subversion from the individualist approach; two include a 'holistic approach', one mentions criminal 'exploitation' and a further two include the context of deprivation in their targeted group. None of the summaries suggest that 'knife crime prevention' requires educating, challenging and mobilising against inequality, racism or structural violence – and they would be unlikely to receive funding if they did, as this does not conform to the requirements of the industry. Whilst it is true that the projects may well subvert to a more politicised content in practice the competition in the sector for relatively

small, short term funding creates an incentive for reproducing the uniform narrative of the response.

This brief analysis of language in funding allocation suggests the importance of exploring the forms and communications of a knife crime industry are twofold; Firstly, that the actions that make up this industry are producing and reproducing the common-knowledge meaning and interpretation of the label. And secondly, that the communications of direct and indirect beneficiaries in this network extend this interpretation into practice and material forms; acting as the interface between an idea of crime and physical interventions in everyday life.

Examples of this will be explored throughout this chapter using data from content analysis of social media communications on Twitter. The reason for this approach is that the unique methods of sharing on this particular micro-blogging website provide not only texts of 'knife crime' communication but also insight on how the actors in this network interact with each other and members of the public. This enabled an analysis of both the 'textuality' of individual contributions and also inferences of how the industry functions as a whole and its interaction with public opinion. Details of the boundaries and criteria of this content analysis are provided below, along with an overview of the research findings.

### **Knife Crime Tweets; One Month on Twitter**

Twitter is a microblogging social media website that was launched in 2006 and rapidly grew in popularity. By 2012 there were over one hundred million twitter users posting three hundred and forty million publicly accessible and sharable posts everyday (Twitter.com 2012). Along with the use of hashtags for searching and connected popular topics, the short character limit (initially 140 increasing to 280 in 2017), produced a platform renowned for its concise and immediate response to events and current affairs.

Along with individual users it is now common practice for organisations, charities and educational institutions to maintain twitter accounts, posting and sharing relevant news and opinions for their followers and broader audiences. There are official police Twitter accounts for every borough in London and for each force across the UK, The Home Office and most Members of Parliament tweet their activities. This wide representation and frequency of communication makes Twitter a unique space of interaction between public, private and state and communications and provides an opportunity for meaningful content analysis of the contemporary interactions of the knife crime industry.

Using a search of all tweets containing the exact phrase 'knife crime' I analysed the content categories of 5982 tweets during March 2018. This particular month was selected for analysis as it is frequently referenced as

the month London had a higher homicide rate than New York City (Buck 2018, Gilligan 2018). This month was significant, not only for its comparative murder figures, but because the frequency of several incidents involving knives created a 'cluster' of high profile reports one week. As discussed in chapter five, when several reports are grouped together in a short space of time it causes increased panic and concern. The frequency of tweets containing the phrase 'knife crime' at beginning of March was around one hundred per day but this rate increased to over six hundred tweets on two days in the second half of the month. The intensification of reports, along with the launch of the 'knife free' government campaign in March, signalled a symbolic 'change of gear' in the public response to 'knife crime' during 2018 and provided rich text for analysis in this research.

The sample included tweets from international locations but only when the content was in reference to UK crime. For example, tweets that were discussing 'migrant knife crime' in Germany, a newly emerging label in German politics, were excluded whilst tweets by US nationals about 'knife crime' in the UK were included. Reading each tweet its content was coded into several categories and sub categories of interest. Of the total 5983 tweets containing the exact phrase 'knife crime' with reference to crime in the UK in March 2018 I quantified the following content categories and subcategories;

| Category                         | Sub Categories                          | Total |
|----------------------------------|---|-------|
| Policing (any reference to)      |   | 1409  |
|                                  | Posted by official police account       | 207   |
|                                  | In support of/promoting Stop and Search | 141   |
|                                  | Weapon Sweeps                           | 19    |
| Sadiq Khan                       | Neutral                                 | 152   |
|                                  | Positive                                | 115   |
|                                  | Negative                                | 2311  |
| Knife Crime Enterprises          |   | 1598  |
|                                  | EastEnders                              | 104   |
|                                  | Promotional Photo (photo opportunity)   | 172   |
| Image of Knife                   |   | 164   |
|                                  | Knife found (search or sweep)           | 7     |
| UK Government (any reference to) |   | 263   |
| USA Gun Control                  |   | 484   |

|                                     |  |     |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----|
| Economic Inequality (any reference) |  | 79  |
| The Public Health Approach          |  | 95  |
| Knife Crime Campaigns               |  | 419 |

One tweet may contain multiple content categories. For the category ‘knife crime enterprises’ the definition used was ‘a promotion or demonstration of services funded through ‘knife crime’ revenue, or the use of the label to promote/direct attention to a related service or company’ This would include for example photos at a anti knife crime assembly containing links to the organisation that runs them but also promotional tweets advertising blogs, podcasts, radio or tv programmes that had ‘knife crime’ content.

I included funding announcements and the sharing of funding news by organisations in this category but campaigns without funding/financing referenced were collated in a separate ‘campaign’ category. Despite the benefit of heightened news value I excluded news media from the ‘enterprise’ category. As a communication of events there is an expectation of news sources to respond to incidents and this process is distinct from the actions of the knife crime industry. To include all ‘knife crime’ news as an enterprising action would produce misleading data. Therefore news tweets were classified by the content of the tweet, e.g. the headline,

*'Increase stop and search to prevent knife crime'* would be categorised as 'policing' content, subcategory 'in support of stop and search'.

The five most common categories were; Negative Sadiq Khan (2311 tweets), knife crime enterprises (1598 tweets), policing (1409 tweets), USA gun control (484 tweets) and knife crime campaigns (419 tweet). The relevance of the frequency and content of these five categories will be explored in the following chapter through close analysis of the images and discourse they contain and the themes they raise. The discussion begins with the findings of the category 'knife crime enterprises', representing the second largest content type during March and demonstrating the direct and indirect commodification of 'knife crime' through online discourse.

#### ***'Knife Crime' Enterprises; 'Donations to Stop this Evil?'***

There were 1598 tweets in March that contained the phrase 'knife crime' in reference to an enterprise of direct or indirect financial benefit from the label, representing 27% of all 'knife crime tweets' that month. It was not always clear from their tweets alone if an organisation is being directly financed by knife crime funding, for this reason direct and indirect enterprises were categorised together in my quantified analysis. However, in the analysis of content discourse there were distinct patterns of communication produced by services involved in the delivery of 'knife



crime work' that can be considered direct beneficiaries of the knife crime industry.

During March various organisations promoted their currently funded knife crime work whilst others advertised their services to potential funders and clients. Within this space the communication of 'knife crime' becomes an advertisement of services; images of school assemblies, posters and workshops for sale are accompanied by anti-knife crime slogans. The image below is a tweet by an illustrating and printing company that is advertising posters it sells that can be personalised with a school logo in the top corner. Accompanying the hard-hitting image of a large blade held in a clenched fist is a statement of individualistic responsibility - 'DON'T CUT YOUR TIME SHORT' followed by threatening statements of punitive consequences. The caption by the company selling the poster reads; 'Let's put an end to knife crime'



(Twitter.com 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018)

This company and this poster appeared six times in knife crime tweets in March, always represented as an intervention to 'end knife crime' rather than an advertisement of printing services. The inclusion of the image of a knife is an aspect of the knife crime industry that will be returned to later in this chapter, but it is the language adopted by these services that will be considered in more detail here. The poster advertised above has reproduced the common vernacular of responsibility within the industry and the assumption that 'ending knife crime' can be achieved through the threat of law and order measures. This sentiment is reproduced throughout knife crime tweets in March with little opposition.

One organisation called 'Lets Get Talking' repeatedly advertises its anti-knife crime workshops designed for primary school children aged between seven and eleven years old. In the attached flier the twitter post describes how the workshop focuses on 'decisions and consequences' in order to prevent 'knife crime'. In a bid to increase its visibility and position its advertisement more advantageously, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March *Lets Get Talking* replies to a tweet from actress Elizabeth Hurley who has posted about the news of her nephew being stabbed. The caption of the tweet (image included below) reads; *'Heartbreaking news, we all dread news like this... maybe you would like to support us with our anti knife crime education programmes, we rely on donations to stop this evil?'*



(Twitter.com 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018)

Posting a request for funding and advertising an organisation on the back of young person being injured, is a characterisation of this industry on its own. But it is also revealing that an organisation that works specifically with very young children educating them on 'knife crime' uses the pathologising language of 'evil' to refer to the crime category it seeks to increase awareness of. Tapping into the folk devil rhetoric (Cohen 1972), the use of 'evil' in this sentence acts to reinforce the need for donations, demonstrating how the intention of the industry shapes the language of knife crime communications for its own benefit.

Poster companies targeting schools and education services targeting public figures, demonstrate the scale of an industry that is responding to a market as much as it is the criminality itself. The influence of promoting 'what will sell' rather than 'what will work' is greatly significant when it is considered that these advertisements are representations of interventions that will physically engage with young people and that the language used to promote funding will carry over into practice. For many young people their first engagement with professionals communicating 'knife crime' will be during special assemblies or projects delivered at school or through posters and advertising campaigns. The language and approach promoted through these mediums will be formative in their understanding of violence.

The knife crime tweets in March suggest that enterprises within the industry promote a positivist approach to knife crime work as standard.

Posters, assemblies and projects emphasise individuality and reinforce a responsibility agenda. This produces a culture of 'knife crime work' that communicates to the public and to young people themselves that 'knife crime' emanates from a flawed character or bad choices; a societal 'evil'. Analysis of tweets communicating across the network of the industry suggest that this position is closely aligned with anti-knife crime campaigns at this time and is an approach that permeates community organisation against interpersonal violence during March.

#### **Campaigning for Individual Change**

On the 23rd March the Home Office launched the advertising campaign 'Knife Free' in England and Wales 'amid warnings of stabbing epidemic in London' (Grierson 2018a). With a budget of £1.35 million the campaign is predominantly digital, aimed at directing young people to the 'knife free' website through promotion and sharing of the hash tag trend #knifefree (Ibid.). There are one hundred and forty two 'knife crime tweets' on launch day that pledge their support for the campaign from a variety of accounts; including police, charities, local councils and politicians. This represents 34% of the total four hundred and nineteen campaign related knife crime tweets in March.



(Twitter .com 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018)

It is significant to note, that the #knifefree campaign received more funding than the entire amount announced in February 2018 for charities delivering face-to-face knife crime prevention work. This allocation of money was spent on an advertising campaign containing real life testimonies and images of young people and featured on Twitter, Snapchat, On Demand TV and Spotify, along with posters displayed in 'English cities where knife crime is more prevalent' (Gov.uk 2018a). The

Home Office commissioned research to advise the campaign and consulted with a range of charities and victim families in its development. Home Secretary at the time, Amber Rudd, described the campaign in an official statement;

‘The emotional stories at the heart of the new Knife Free campaign bring home in powerful fashion just what a far-reaching impact it can have on a young person’s life if they make the misguided decision to carry a knife. I hope any young person who is seriously thinking about carrying a knife listens to what the implications can be and realises what options are available if they choose to live knife free.’ (gov.uk 2018a)

The aim of the campaign is to achieve behaviour change through education, in the belief that the slick production of short advertisements will influence the actions of young people. As with prevention work, the language of the campaign reasserts the individual responsibility of the young person to implement change, without mention of structural inequality or harm caused by social policies.

The simplification of the complex causes of intensified interpersonal violence to ‘misguided decisions’ trivialises the experiences of young people. As described by practitioners and young people in chapter six, the decisions made by young people within the violent contexts of current social conditions are not irrational or illogical. To tell a young person who fears for their safety each day that the solution is to click on a website and simply ‘choose to live knife free’ can be interpreted as both inaccurate and insulting.

However, this is not to say that campaigns such as #knifefree do not achieve *an* effect. There is sense of collective action and fulfilment within campaign responses to 'knife crime' and not all of them are limited to digital engagement. Many community campaigns are inspired by individual cases or led by victims' families and they contain energy for direct action that mobilises groups to take to the streets. During the month of March families, young people and community members in Camden organised a silent march in response to two fatal stabbings in the borough. Photos of large crowds with emotional banners are shared on twitter on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March.





**Keir Starmer** ✓

@Keir\_Starmer

Follow

Camden's response to knife crime: powerful messages.



4:37 PM - 22 Mar 2018

42 Retweets 118 Likes



5



42



118



(Twitter.com 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018)



(Twitter.com 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018)

There is a powerful unity and a political potential when communities come together in displays of solidarity such as the Camden March Against Violence, and this is a motivated mobilisation for change. However, a close analysis of the images and captions of twitter users during this march suggest this community intervention is predominantly articulated through the existing language and conceptual framework of the knife crime industry.

Although a march against ‘violence’ the communication is directed at the label ‘knife crime’ with the event described as ‘Camden’s response to knife crime’, and participants who are ‘ready to stand up for an end to knife crime that is taking the lives of so many young people’. Here the loss of lives through violence are understood as ‘taken by knife crime’, a popular rhetorical device that insinuates ‘knife crime’ as an autonomous force; an outside threat. Several banners visible in photos reproduce popularised catch phrases directed at young people themselves; ‘drop the knife, get a life’, ‘lives not knives’, or ‘enough is enough’.

The interpretation of the problem through the label ‘knife crime’ produces a campaign response that is directed at the phenomenon and not the structures behind it, focusing yet again on behavioural changes and individual choices. The political demands and economic criticisms made by communities in response to violence are compromised by the summation of the march as ‘against knife crime’. In this way, the language and common discourse of ‘knife crime’ can be seen to actively depoliticise community responses to violence. Vernacular and phrases which have been normalised by the communications of the knife crime industry now act to redirect collective action into the condemnation of young people’s choices.

The campaign content of ‘knife crime tweets’ in March exemplifies the full range of actions in this category; from government funded digital

advertising campaigns to community led marches. But at both ends of the spectrum the problem is consistently located in the individual and the energy of collective support and collaboration remains within the existing structures that harm young people. This not only protects the state from scrutiny, but risks further marginalising vulnerable young people through the misrecognition of their everyday lived experience. Indirect beneficiaries were also seen to conform to an individualist representation of violence, but analysis of tweets during March that use 'knife crime' to add value to existing enterprises demonstrate a distinct commodification of the concept that will now be explored in greater detail.

### **Indirect Beneficiaries; the Commodification of 'Knife Crime'**

Indirect beneficiaries of the knife crime industry are defined in this research as enterprises that are not financially dependent or directly funded as 'knife crime work' but that contribute to the discourse in ways that increase their audience and impact by association with the label. Within the tweets containing 'knife crime' in March there were communications of creative projects, television programming, and an academic event that all indirectly benefit from the urgency and interest the label brings. It is not only that these industries refer to 'knife crime' - this in itself is nothing significant - but the particular ways in which they interact with the concept and its representation that is of interest in this analysis.

Exploring three separate contexts from the 'knife crime' tweets in March, it will be argued here that the interactions between indirect beneficiaries and the concept 'knife crime' constitute a commodification of the societal reaction to violence for status and consumption. The first of these is when the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) announces on Twitter that its renowned soap opera, EastEnders, will be introducing a 'knife crime whodunnit' story line. This news is received by its audiences with great enthusiasm and is shared widely on the social networking site. In the content of the 104 knife crime tweets referencing the EastEnder's storyline in March, only one member of the public responded negatively. The rest welcomed the violent depiction through drama and entertainment with many hoping it would highlight the 'realities' of the issue and prevent harm between young people.



(Twitter.com 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018)



(Twitter.com 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018)

It is widely reported on Twitter over the following days that the BBC were advised on the storyline by Brooke Kinsella of the Ben Kinsella Trust (McIntosh 2018), a prominent charity in the knife crime industry. This interaction between two actors in the network in this moment can be interpreted as promotional for the work of both; the Kinsella Trust receives press coverage whilst the BBC appears responsibly engaged with the topic. However, the reporting of the storyline as a 'knife crime whodunnit', and received by fans with 'sooo excited for it' suggests that the consumption of 'knife crime' as entertainment is problematic.

The transition of 'knife crime' from crime category to a cultural object as a soap opera storyline will be interpreted here as a process of commodification, in recognition that the label comes to stand for something quite different within this interaction. When 'knife crime' is attached to cultural objects and communicated as entertainment it becomes its own distinct 'thing' – viewers are not 'excited' for 'knife crime' the crime category, but 'knife crime' the representational theme. Communicating 'knife crime' in this way increasingly constructs the category as a consumable commodity in the market of the industry. The value of 'knife crime' as commodity is demonstrated once again in an exchange between academics under a promotional tweet advertising a 'Trauma Conference' on the 19<sup>th</sup> March


For academics who are striving to provide critical debate on issues around recent violence, the commodification of ‘knife crime’ and its added exchange value can be problematic. Academics are often keen to increase impact by appealing to broad and varied audiences and the urgency of the label can be used to attract new viewers or readers to engage with alternative perspectives. But to what extent are the politics of their approach compromised by adhering to the norms of ‘knife crime’s representation? This was a dilemma confronted during one interaction on twitter in March concerning an academic conference with the title ‘Knife Crime Programme’.



(Twitter.com 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018)



**StreetDoctors** @StreetDoctors · Mar 29  
 Have you seen the line up for this violence reduction conference?  
 @KierIrwinRogers @TemiMwale @garyyounge @brianpaddick @GSlutkin  
 @Graham\_vru @duncanbew @poyton @SuptMatShaer BOOK A PLACE!  
 #publichealth #youthviolence



**Traumacare UK** @TraumaCareUK  
 Take a look at the TRAUMA CARE CONFERENCE  
 Tuesday 17th April 2018 Programme and take advantage  
 of our offer on the Knife Crime Programme, now from £35  
 per person. Tickets available now @

2 9 12

**Karyn McCluskey** @karynmcccluskey · Mar 29  
 Sounds like some great speakers but I think the poster advertising this is  
 terrible. Everyone knows what a knife looks like. Its not saying violence  
 reduction....it says knife crime programme. Sorry, I'm generally always positive.

1 3 24

**Graham Goulden** @Graham\_Goulden · Mar 29  
 Ha, you've spoiled my talk. Agree

1 3

**Duncan Bew** @duncanbew **Following**  
 Replying to @Graham\_Goulden @karynmcccluskey and 7 others  
 I agree entirely Karyn and and didn't agree to  
 this change in branding of the programme.  
 This is not a "knife crime" programme

(Twitter.com 29<sup>th</sup> March)

The 'Trauma Care Conference' with speakers who are advocates of the 'public health approach' find that their event has been rebranded on Twitter as a 'knife crime programme' accompanied by an image of a clenched fist and a hunting knife. The organisers are aware that such branding will increase their audience and add value but it directly

contradicts the intention and approach of the event. This dilemma is symptomatic of the broader contradictions of the knife crime industry; an exchange of goods and services in the name of the very thing they aim to eradicate.

The final discussion of indirect beneficiaries in March will focus on one particular creative response to 'knife crime' that was shared on Twitter in March that demonstrates the complex interactions between actors within the network of the industry. On the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2018, one Twitter user shares an image of twenty-six foot high sculpture referred to as 'the knife angel'. In the caption with the image the user prompts discussion writing; *'The 100,000 knives forming the Knife Angel have either been confiscated or surrendered to UK Police. What's your thoughts? #knifeart #creativity #protectingvulnerablepeople #savinglives'*



(Twitter.com 18<sup>th</sup> March 2019)

This artistic contribution to the response to knife crime has been welded together using knives that were surrendered in amnesty knife-bins nationally during 2015 and 2016. Described as a ‘national monument against violence and aggression’ (alfiebradley.com) the piece was commissioned by The British Iron Works Centre and is said to be ‘a memorial to those whose lives have been affected by knife crime’ (Ibid.). Built in Shropshire the sculpture was moved to Liverpool in November 2018 and no has plans to tour the country ‘to create awareness of the knife problem the UK has’ (Drury 2018)

Looking into this interaction more closely it emerged that the artist Alfie Bradley had previously created a four metre tall gorilla made from 40,000 donated spoons. His website features a video about the knife angel that includes footage of the owner of the British Iron Works Centre, Clive Knowles, describing how the project came about. He says:

The knife campaign really was born out of brain storming sessions. Having finished the spoon gorilla and needing to really keep that energy going and to get the next project underway. Now I'd recently seen a documentary where the police were defending themselves against the media and they were under a little bit of crossfire over their success at collecting knives off the streets of the UK and their amnesties. So we thought, having seen that – knives had been mentioned previously with regards to cutlery, this was being knives with reference to violence – so we decided to adopt the collection of knives, create the sculpture out of knives, and at the same time do something good for society and help the police remove those knives from the streets of the UK. (Clive Knowles transcribed from [www.alfiebradley.com](http://www.alfiebradley.com))

This honest account of the knife angel's inception demonstrates the overlapping interests within the responses to 'knife crime' and how they come together in the enterprises and creative initiatives within the industry. Knowles acknowledges that the creators were looking for a new project to follow on from a previous sculpture made of spoons. Knives were already being considered in continuation of a cutlery theme so they 'adopted' the collection of knives as a way to support police work that was receiving criticism from the media. The benefit for the artist and the Iron Works was that the piece would undoubtedly receive greater attention by being incorporated into a knife crime campaign. Whilst the police, by

supplying the knives, also increased support for knife amnesties and their work through the emotive and dramatic display of the blades surrendered.

The associated hash tags on the tweet that make reference to protecting vulnerable people and saving lives, connect the artwork with a pro-policing message despite the on-going scepticism of the effectiveness of knife amnesties. A petition with nearly thirteen thousand signatures asks for the knife angel to tour the UK 'raising countrywide awareness of the epidemic that has now become knife crime' (change.org 2018). But many victim's families have objected to the use of weapons in a sculpture, stating; *'maybe you have not lost a child so cannot see the deep rooted agony this will cause... we don't need even more awareness about knife crime in London – we experience it every day'* (Elgot 2015). Whilst the accuracy of the representation of knife amnesties as 'saving lives' is questionable, and the insensitivity of using weapons as a tribute to victims is problematic, the sculpture is undoubtedly a powerful image that stands alone from the interactions of the industry that created it.

The explanation of motivation within this particular interaction is indicative of a broader relation that is also reflected in the EastEnders storyline and the ticketed 'knife crime' trauma conference. Underneath the decision to associate services with the label of 'knife crime' is a pre-existing intention; A dramatic storyline, an academic conference, or an Iron Works sculpture. The adaptation of these underlying intentions to incorporate

'knife crime' happens as a secondary process; Consulting the Kinsella Trust for 'knife crime' certification, rebranding the conference to a 'knife crime programme', or collaborating with police to use surrendered knives. The original intention remains the same – but through association with 'knife crime' the motivation becomes reinterpreted as an 'anti-knife crime' endeavour, adding value to the service or industry through this re-articulation. These processes of collaboration produce new manifestations of 'knife crime' as cultural objects, independent from the interests and interactions of their creation.

The sharing of the 'Knife Angel' on Twitter, along with the advertising of a trauma event as a 'knife crime programme' and the EastEnders 'knife crime whodunit story line' has drawn attention to the significant reiteration of the label in creative industries that commodify the idea of 'knife crime' attached to new industry objects for exchange and consumption. Within these interactions two inferences can be made concerning the cultural articulation of 'knife crime'; Firstly, the concept 'knife crime' brings together public and private industries that interact with each other in mutually beneficial relationships – simultaneously promoting 'knife crime work', increasing its value and justifying its existence. And secondly, whilst the outward portrayal of collaboration with the arts and creative industries appears well intended (to "increase awareness" etc.), the analysis presented here suggests the ways in which 'knife crime' is consumed as cultural commodities within these practices is problematic. Narratives

centre the knife and a sensationalist audience driven representation of the phenomenon, maximising the added value the label brings to their work. Further analysis of the visual representation of 'knife crime' on Twitter in March suggest that the particular ways in which value is added to 'knife crime' as a commodity is often through 'fetishisation' of the knife. This is an aspect of the response that will now be considered in more detail, through analysis of images shared by police services on Twitter in March.

#### **Police Twitter and the Fetishised Knife.**

There were one thousand four hundred and nine 'knife crime tweets' in March that contained policing content, two hundred and seven of these were posted by official police twitter accounts. Many of the posts by police were to promote their community engagement activities such as visiting schools, running workshops or speaking at events. The examples of this activity throughout March suggest that a large proportion of police community engagement work is being articulated through 'knife crime', particularly for young children in primary school settings.

One dominant characteristic of the police 'knife crime' tweets in March was their consistent use of images of bladed weapons and knives to advertise police events and services or display their work. Images of knives have always been included in reports of 'knife crime' and chapter four discussed the formative role of these images in constructing the label in

the 2000s. In 2018 on Twitter there is a similar importance given to the representation of 'knife crime' through images of knives. Tweets analysed during March contained 164 images of bladed weapons, seven of which were found or seized by police during searches or weapon sweeps. The rest were visual representations of knives in anti-knife crime posters, campaigns or event advertisements.

Looking closely at the style and content of knife imagery shared by police during March, this analysis presents several points for discussion. It will be argued that in many instances the portrayal of bladed weapons is so excessive and deliberate that it constitutes a knife fetish, in which the object is bestowed value and meaning beyond that which is represented by its use. This fetishisation will be discussed in relation to professional accountability and the contradictory communications of value in knife crime prevention more generally.

The first image to consider in this analysis was posted 12<sup>th</sup> of March when an official police twitter account shared a composition of thirty-two decorative bladed articles arranged into the shape of a large knife, accompanied by a caption that also includes an emoji knife.





(Twitter.com 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018)

Looking at this image closely the number and range of blades is excessive and their presentation is intended to be high impact – emphasising the threat of such a variety of weapons contained by the label ‘knife crime’. Arranged aesthetically to resemble a knife there is a communication of order and design and the blades seem impressively ornamental in this context. The blades and weapons appear intriguing to the viewer, drawing the gaze in to secure attention. The caption expresses police concern that too many young people are hurting a killing each other and promotes the use of Crime Stoppers for public information and intelligence purposes. But rather than a representation of fact, the image is a constructed reality –

the quantity and range of blades implies the scale of the problem, and attaches them only to young people through the reference of the caption. The post maximises its reach and impact by capitalising on the value and inherent reverence of the bladed weapon, but this can also be seen to bestow value on the knives as weapons in the process. It is the argument of this research that the excitement and enthusiasm for decorative and offensive weapons in the images connected to 'knife crime' go beyond representation - to collectively constitute a fetishisation of knives that has particular consequences within the industry.

In a Marxist sense the fetishized commodity is a misconception of value '*in which properties are attributed to objects that can correctly be attributed only to human beings*' (Dant 1999:41). This 'spirit' bestowed on objects produces an 'unreal' intrinsic value from a material character and is fundamental to the capitalist mode of production (Dant 1999:41). But the fetishized object is also a mediator of social value, the properties contained are translated through material culture and become influential on behaviours and actions.

'A fetish is created through the veneration or worship of the object that is attributed some power or capacity, independently of its manifestation of that capacity. However, through the very process of attribution the object may indeed manifest those powers; the specialness with which the object is treated makes it special' (Dant 1999:43)

The use of knife images and the primacy of the blade in the very concept of 'knife crime' has produced a power and capacity of the object independent

of its use. There is a character of 'knife crime' that is bestowed on bladed weapons through their photographic representation. The images constructed to represent 'knife crime' reflect the accumulated meaning of the crime category. The knives in these representations are bestowed with the spirit of a violent and criminal culture. Once this 'specialness' is attached to the object and it is treated as 'special' the object may indeed manifest the spirit it was bestowed – now the knife *is* special. In this way, as the police poster above demonstrates, even kitchen knives – an object used every day in mundane food preparation – are perceived as dangerous weapons when presented in the context of 'knife crime'.

On one occasion in March the fetish became exposed when the capacity of the object to contain the constructed meaning was stretched too far. In a tweet later deleted by the Hackney division of the Met police, but captured and shared by other users, the result of a 'weapon sweep' received ridicule;



**PeterSweden** ✓

@PeterSweden7

Follow



Butter knife = weapon.

Proudly brought to you by the UK.

**Hackney Police** ✓  
@MPSHackney

Follow



Weapons found today in  
[#pemburyweaponsweep](#)



8:17 AM - 16 Mar 2018

(Twitter.com 16<sup>th</sup> March 2018)



(Twitter.com 18<sup>th</sup> March 2018)

The original police tweet contains a photo of a cutlery knife, it has a small serrated edge with no sharp blade and no point. It's capacity as an offensive weapon is clearly very limited. But held by a uniformed police officer in forensic style plastic gloves it is presented to the camera as a

dangerous weapon and shared on social media as a communication of both the prevalence of knives and the effectiveness of police work.

The presentation of this culinary object as a weapon by police can be interpreted several ways. Firstly, it can be seen to demonstrate the eagerness and desperation of police work to prove its worth through displaying anything that could be considered a successful weapon search. And secondly, it suggests they sincerely anticipated the public would receive it as if it was a weapon. And it is this perception that reveals the power of the knife fetish – that even a butter knife with no blade or point had the potential to be bestowed the dangerous spirit of ‘knife crime’ and viewed as a dangerous object in this context.

The removal of the original tweet based on the response from the public suggests this was a stretch too far. The comments of those that shared a screen grab of the post in March 2018 emphasise not only the innocuousness of the object photographed but also the distinct ‘Britishness’ of the attempt to present this as a weapon. One reads ‘Butter knife = weapon. Proudly brought to you by the UK’ whilst the other criticises the police saying ‘*Meanwhile, the absolute cowards occupying the British Police force scour the streets looking for blunt pieces of metal that could be used in knife-crime #cowardice #Britishpolice*’. These comments, whilst different in intent, infer the same interpretation of the original photo as a communication specific to British police. They both see the

attempt to represent a 'blunt piece of metal' as a dangerous weapon as a reflection a particular relationship between the police and 'knife crime' in Britain – an observation that is supported by research within this thesis

This fetishisation of mundane objects into dangerous weapons by police has serious implications for young people. The interviews with practitioners in chapter six revealed the ways in which stop and search used particularly broad definitions of offensive 'sharp instrument' to even include stationery compasses in the response to 'knife crime' in 2008. These practices were likely enabled by the projection of a spirit of 'knife crime' bestowed on objects carried by particular targeted and criminalised groups at this time. But there is also a sense that fetishizing knives in displays of police work, and in advertising across the whole of the knife crime industry, is in part constitutive of the power within the object that increases its appeal to young people.

Whilst the 'specialness' of the knife and its animate character are endorsed in the 'knife crime' communications of the industries, the same belief in a spirit of the weapon is reprimanded and reproached in the actions of young people. Since the publication of 'fear and fashion' (Lemos & Crane 2004) the idea that one reason young people carry knives is for added self-value or 'style' has been commonly accepted and is a belief often targeted in intervention work and anti-knife crime campaigns (Kinsella 2012). If this is true that knives are being fetishized by young people as fashionable

objects worth more than their use value, then it must also be the case that the fetishized communication of 'knife crime' is part of the material culture that produces the social value of knife possession. In other words, police photos of thirty-two knives arranged into the shape of a hunting knife, contribute to the desire to possess one of these revered objects.

Although there are moments when the 'unreal' value falls down and the fetish is exposed – such as the 'butter knife' weapon – there is no sense of responsibility that an obsessive representation of knives as powerful weapons contributes to the value contained by the object and thus their appeal to young people. The language of 'taking responsibility' and 'making good decisions', the foundational discourse of the knife crime industry, falls short of its application to the actors within its network. The police, just like other services, benefit from the added value that an association with 'knife crime' brings to their work, but the celebration of the object's 'specialness' in police communications is counter-productive.

Recognising the influence that beneficiaries of the 'knife crime' label can have on how the category is understood, and the cross-sector consensus on the discourse and imagery that defines the discussion, this analysis raises questions of accountability within the knife crime industry. The mutual interests between actors of the network has led to charities, campaign groups and organisations being far more likely to collaborate with the



police, the government and entertainment industries than to hold them responsible for their problematic representations.

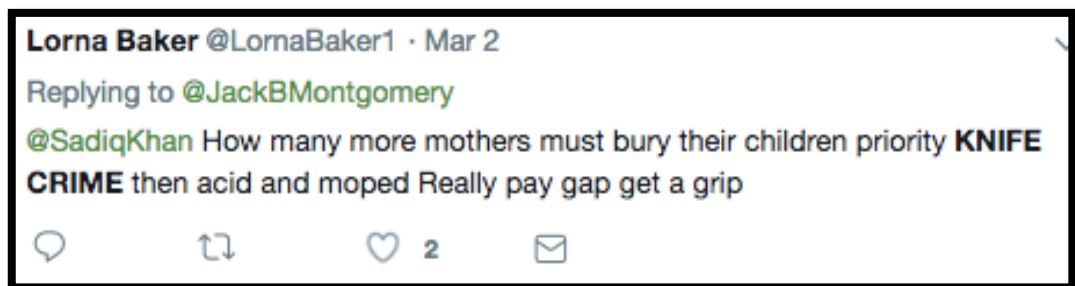
This diffused responsibility and lack of culpability within the industry is particularly harmful given the tenacity of aggressive racism and anti-immigration content that is inseparable from the label in online communications. The dominance of categories of content on Twitter that contained 'knife crime' to promote far-right political ideologies will be discussed below, considering the shifting articulation of racism through 'knife crime' as a floating signifier.

### **'Knife Crime' the Floating Signifier**

During the process of data collection for this chapter I was made to review my initial content categories after preliminary analysis revealed a prevalence of tweets with an unexpected reference to a particular British public figure. The frequency of tweets referencing the Labour London Mayor Sadiq Khan made up 43% of all tweets containing the phrase 'knife crime' in March, the biggest representation of all the categories recorded. To understand this category further the content with reference to Khan was subcategorised in neutral, positive or negative sentiments towards him. This analysis found that 90% of tweets mentioning Khan contained negative content - representing 2311 of the 'knife crime' tweets in March, with only 115 positive and 152 neutral throughout the month. The

association of the London Mayor with ‘knife crime’ is a particularly significant trend considering that Khan’s remit for policy change is far more limited than the elected government’s. References to government responsibility including mentions of Prime Minister Theresa May amounted to only 263 during March; the Mayor of London was held responsible almost nine times as often.

Exploring the context and content of anti-Khan knife crime tweets further reveals a persistent trend in the use of the term ‘knife crime’ with reference to broader right-wing values; anti-immigration, pro law and order and White supremacy. It was also found that ‘knife crime’ was used to interrupt and minimise the importance of liberal initiatives by the Mayor during march; Laws against hate speech, pollution reduction, gender-neutral toilets and the gender pay gap receive reply tweets to the effect of; “*but what are you doing about knife crime?*” (see below).



(Twitter.com 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2018)



(Twitter.com 20<sup>th</sup> March)

The language of tweets that use 'knife crime' as a symbol of Khan's failures or flawed priorities were often openly racist and Islamophobic. Common references to 'Londonistan', a play on words to describe what is seen as an over representation of Asian migrants in the capital, accompanied these tweets. Along with abrasive, insulting and often overtly racist personal attacks on Khan, such as 'Guantanamo too good for that little shite' (Twitter.com 13<sup>th</sup> March 2018).

The authenticity of the 'knife crime as priority' sentiment of anti-Khan tweets is undermined by the increase in racist and anti-Muslim hate speech in response to Khan speaking about or acting directly on 'knife crime'. For example, the highest frequency of negative Khan tweets were recorded on 23<sup>rd</sup> March when #knifefree advertising campaign was launched by the Home Office with the Mayor's backing.



(Twitter.com 27<sup>th</sup> March 2018)



(Twitter.com 25<sup>th</sup> March 2018)

Analysing the high frequency of tweets in this category the meaning that is conveyed through the communication of 'knife crime' is consistent in this context. For example, there is no attempt in anti-khan tweets to really interrogate the issue of knives in London – the phrase is used symbolically rather than literally, to make quick reference to a broader political position.

In this common use the phrase takes on a particular meaning; it represents a politically far-right belief that immigration leads to a 'loss of control' in British streets. 'Knife crime' within this rhetoric is used as a case in point, the long established racialisation of the crime category provides a reliable signifier of violence and criminality as 'Other' that can be called upon to promote right wing ideologies online.

The early stages of this research detailed the processes through which 'knife crime' came to be constructed as a criminality located amongst young, Black, inner-city youths, and the political and social functions of this racialisation (See chapters four and five). However, the data analysed in this chapter suggests the meaning of 'knife crime' is evolving through the communication of populist online politics. The references to Khan's Asian ethnicity and Muslim religion alongside and connected to 'knife crime' demonstrate the fluidity of label's racism to incorporate contemporary right-wing ideologies. As previous chapters have detailed, the capacity of the label to perform this function has always been fundamental to its existence. But the dominance of its use on Twitter as a tool to attack Khan is evidence of the agility of the label to adapt to the new political terrains of popular racism.

This shifting meaning of the label and its continually adapting connotations to incorporate forms of racism suggest 'knife crime' functions, just as race itself, as a *floating signifier*. Floating Signifiers are

seen to *'gain their meaning not because of what they contain in their essence, but in the shifting relations of difference which they establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying field'* (Hall 1997:8). The concept of 'race' is described by Hall (1997) as a floating signifier in that ideas of racial difference function more as a language than as any biological indicator. And because 'race' gains its meaning in shifting relations of difference it can never be fixed but is 'subject to the constant process of redefinition and appropriation' (Hall 1997:8). 'Knife crime', as signifier in the signifying field of race, is also subject to the constitutive language that make and remake its meaning.

This is not to say that 'knife crime' doesn't mean anything, but that its meaning becomes fixed and re-fixed through the language and the 'making meaning practices' (Hall 1997:8) in the relations through which it is communicated. If the data from Twitter during March represents a snap shot of the language that constructs 'knife crime' meaning at this time, then the hatred and vitriolic racism in tweets directed at Sadiq Khan make a significant contribution to the signifying field.

Recognising what 'knife crime' is made to mean through the consistent appropriation by far-right commentators should raise concern amongst a prevention industry that utilises the same signifier for their work with young people and vulnerable groups. The concept 'knife crime' cannot be separated from the racism and anti-immigration politics that are

conceptually linked and constructive of its meaning in everyday language. Therefore, organising a response to violence through the language of 'knife crime' will inherently reiterate racist understandings of criminality. The analysis of the language of 'knife crime' in contemporary online use reveals the potential harm of intervention responses that reproduce a popular concept that has been appropriated by far-right politics in Britain.

### **Conclusion**

The content of knife crime tweets in March 2018 were categorised and interpreted in this chapter in order to provide an analysis of a network of organised responses that have come to constitute a 'knife crime industry'. Looking at the accumulation of charities, companies, organisations and campaign groups facilitated by the label, this chapter has discussed the commodification of knife crime as a cultural object that provides direct and indirect benefits to enterprises associated with the crime category. The actors within this network were seen to collaborate in mutually beneficial initiatives between government, policing, the third sector and the creative industries, producing a consensus on 'knife crime' as an individualistic, behavioural pathology.

Further analysis of particular collaborations shared on Twitter in March revealed the processes through which the value of 'knife crime' was added to existing projects to increase their relevancy and public appeal. This

suggests that the idea of 'knife crime' has become commoditised, produced and reproduced as a cultural object for exchange and consumption within the extended knife crime industry. However, the same processes that establish value for knife crime as a commodity, were also seen to fetishise the concept for material gain and this presents a critical dilemma for ongoing knife crime work; how can preventative work seek to disarm a 'knife culture' whilst remaining dependant on its construction for their own legitimacy?

Along with the communication of the knife crime industry the interactions containing the label 'knife crime' in March were dominated by far-right politics online. Used as a signifier of lawlessness and the perceived threat of immigration on British civility, the concept was appropriated to endorse hateful and racist online abuse of London Mayor, Sadiq Khan. This symbolic and shifting racism has always been central to the concept of 'knife crime' and emphasises the urgency of an intervention into the label's wide application.

Previous chapters have already established that 'knife crime' does not exist as an objective criminological *fact*, thus the processes through which the meaning of 'knife crime' as a floating signifier becomes pinned down are crucial to understanding the concept. This analysis of online communications reaches two fundamental conclusions on the contemporary construction of 'knife crime' meaning; Firstly, that the



dependency and collaboration across an incentivised network of cross-sector industries greatly restricts the ability of actors within this network to critique and challenge the harmful practices of commodification and fetishisation of 'knife crime'. Secondly, the re-appropriation of 'knife crime' by the far-right to fit with anti-Muslim and anti-Asian populism makes the uncritical position of the knife crime industry increasingly indefensible.

## **Chapter Eight.**

### **Conclusions;**

#### **Towards a Disarming of 'Knife Crime'**

## Introduction

This research has presented a new understanding of 'knife crime' as a particular societal reaction to crime that has resolved multiple crises and performed various social functions in the response to violence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Applying the theoretical framework of radical approaches to the study of deviance (Hall et al. 1978, Becker 1973, Cohen 1972, Gilroy 1987) this research presents an analysis of 'knife crime' as new iteration of *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978), punctuated by the distinct political developments of the continuing conjuncture in the new millennium.

Like 'mugging' in the 1970's, the label 'knife crime' can be seen to move through various stages of development, as the pre-public mobilisation of enforcement towards a new category of crime constructs the idea of an emerging criminality located (yet again) amongst young, Black, inner-city, youths. This has been demonstrated to continue a process of managing hegemonic crisis through the racialisation of crime, 'knife crime', enabling the articulation of the law and order society and increased authoritarianism at times of economic uncertainty and social unrest.

As well as recognising the similarities of this continuing conjuncture, this research suggests several aspects of the phenomenon that make it particularly responsive to the new context; 'knife crime' can be seen to navigate the new terrains of acceptable racisms through a language of difference attributed to 'culture'. The empirical contributions and online

analysis in this thesis have also recognised the distinct influence ‘knife crime’ has had on a language and industry of crime prevention that can be seen to sustain the label’s popular use and shield it from scrutiny.

‘Knife crime’, like ‘mugging’, has provided the continued euphemistic ‘working through’ of the inherent contradictions of the ‘moment of force’, described by Hall et al. (1978) as essential to the management of this political conjuncture. Summarising these findings below and reflecting on their meaning, this research presents not only a new understand of the concept ‘knife crime’ itself, but also inferences about the current condition and how ‘knife crime’ can be seen as a societal response in interaction with the particular hegemonic crises of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **Overview of Findings**

Through an in-depth case study analysis of the phenomenon, this research has conducted three distinct phases of research that each provide an alternative approach to the study of the label ‘knife crime’. The findings from the conjunctural analysis of chapters three, four and five; the empirical research with practitioners and young people in chapter six; and the online content analysis of chapter seven will be summarised here. Leading to reflections on the overall conclusions that can be drawn from this research.

This project began with an account of the pre-public mobilisation towards knife-enabled offences at the end of the 1990s. In chapter three the forces of a distinct dualism in government policy were discussed, detailing the practical contradictions and ideological dilemmas of a socially democratic authoritarianism. Here the policies of New Labour were explored in relation to the impact on young people and policing, recognising the increasing militarization of the police and the growing justification of 'total policing' and intensive surveillance in response to racialised notions of 'gun and gang culture' in the 1990's.

Crucially this chapter explored how the findings of the MacPherson Inquiry (1999) ultimately instigated a public retreat of policing on the ground and a spontaneous reduction in the rate of stop and search. It is in this context that the first sign of a pre-public mobilisation towards a new crime category was shown to emerge; the introduction of the 'knife enabled' feature code in crime records in 2001.

The impact of this development in crime recording was explored in close detail in chapter four, analysing the first public reports of the new knife crime data since the introduction of the 'knife crime code'. This chapter considered the manipulation of data in the press reports of the first police 'knife crime report' (TPHQ 2004), drawing attention to the imperative of 'news value' when combining children and violence in the media. This analysis presented an alternative understanding of the relationship

between 'knife crime' and youth, demonstrated that although 'knife enabled violence' was never specific to young people, the construction of the crime category was only ever possible through the added victim status of youth.

Looking at case studies and the first occurrence of the phrase 'knife crime' in printed press this chapter considered how the additional feature of 'young age' became the first defining characteristic of 'knife crime' concern. This was soon followed by geographical settings and ethnicity in the pursuit of news value as the label grew in popularity. The misleading use of images of knives that accompany early 'knife crime' reporting were also discussed in chapter four. This analysis raised questions of accountability in the construction of the phenomenon, as images from raids of adult's homes in Scotland are reapplied to stories on children's news websites to describe youth crime statistics in London.

Chapter five considered the climactic announcement of the 'war on knife crime' declared by Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, and the Metropolitan police in 2008 that authorised an vast expansion of Stop and Search through legislation that increased disproportionality and police hostility towards young people in the Capital. This chapter considered the impact of the 292% increase of searches in London, enabled by widespread use of section 60 that requires no reasonable grounds for searches.

Using a framework of understanding moral panic in relation to hegemonic crisis this chapter detailed the political and economic context in which the 'spikes' in knife crime provide justification for this exceptional use of force. Here the research presented an interaction in which the global financial crisis of 2007 and the on-going political project of austerity required ideological management and a 'smoothing over' of the exposed contradictions of neoliberalism.

This chapter considered how 'knife crime' proved to be particularly effective at this task and considered the capacity of the label to contain and communicate forms of 'new racism', continuing the same function of labels such as 'mugging' but now adapted to contemporary sensibilities. Comparing the condemning and punitive response to youth unrest in 2011 to the political and reparative reactions to uprisings in the 1980s this chapter argued that discursive devices such as 'knife crime', along with 'gangs' and 'anti-social behaviour' have also worked to discredit collective action against brutality and injustice.

In chapter six, this thesis presented empirical research with practitioners in the field of 'knife crime' work and presented the findings of focus groups with young people in London. This first-hand data identified reoccurring themes that identified sociological shifts that were occurring beneath the label as violence increased during the 2000s. These alternative realities described by participants presented an interpretation of 'knife

crime' as experienced by young people and practitioners on the ground, leading to the conclusion that the dominance of the tabloidisation of 'knife crime' has had very real impacts on young people.

The data from Focus groups with young people, analysed in chapter six identified a language of individualism and 'resilience' amongst participants, suggesting that young people have internalised the responsabilisation of knife crime prevention. The young participants expressed a desire and need for increased engagement with local social histories of resistance and anti-racist politics, that appeared to be absent from current interpretations of violence and police discrimination.

In the final stage of this research project, chapter seven considered the contemporary meaning and everyday use of the phrase 'knife crime' by conducting content analysis on the social blogging site *Twitter*. Looking at the frequency of tweets in various categories of content and using close analysis of posts during March 2018 this research introduced the concept of a 'knife crime industry'; a network of indirect and direct beneficiaries of the knife crime label, communicating and collaborating through mutually beneficial enterprises. Online discourse demonstrated a consistent commodification and fetishization of 'knife crime' within the imagery and language of communications within the industry. This chapter also explored the dominant use of the term 'knife crime' within right-wing anti-immigration rhetoric and racist far-right abuse online, critically analysing



the use of the label within this context to promote services and entertainment in the name of 'prevention'.

In summary, this project has considered the development of the label over two decades, from a pre-public policing mobilisation to a highly active and influential 'knife crime industry'. Reflecting on the broad and complex findings of this research, the two overarching research questions of this project will be answered here; Firstly, how can the label 'knife crime' be understood as a particular societal reaction to crime? And secondly, to what extent can the response to 'knife crime' be considered a continuation of *Policing the Crisis* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

### **A particular societal reaction**

In answering the first of these questions, this research has presented the specific events and mobilisations that came to define a subjective understanding of criminality through the label 'knife crime'. Whilst the data collected on knife offences remains broad and inclusive, this research has demonstrated the various misrepresentations and manipulations of crime figures and photographic representations that constructed a particular representation of the crime category.

This research has retraced the early public definition of a new crime

category and how news value was sustained by conceptually linking individual cases to each other through the knife used, cultivating sensationalising headlines that focused on youth and schools. Policing responses to the high profile cases within this early emergence of the term 'knife crime' were seen to mobilise proactively in cities, increasingly targeting young Black males through disproportionate stop and search practices (see chapter five).

Very early in the processes that defined 'knife crime' there was a language of 'knife culture' attached to the concept. Authorised spokespeople in media responses to knife offences in schools described the criminality as something 'other' - an outside threat from the street that was 'spilling into' schools. This research followed the progression of this 'cultural' understanding of 'knife crime' as it increasingly became attached to Black children in the representation of 'knife crime' news- at first this was achieved through the insinuation of cultural forms (music, dialect, fashion). But with gradually more explicit racialisation the concept is increasingly referenced directly as a 'Black crime', allowing Tony Blair to publicly state in 2007 that its 'black kids doing it' (UKPOL 2007)

Retracing these early developments of the label in the context of political events, this research presents an argument that the articulation of 'knife crime' through race represents a particular societal reaction to crime that was structurally functional during this history. The emergence of a new

racialised crime category that revitalised the imagined folk devil of 'Black criminality' can be seen to respond to several anxieties in White British society in the 2000's.

Firstly, the reclaiming of the inner-city suburbs by affluent Londoners brought middle class White people into the streets of deprived neighbourhoods that they previously avoided. The anxiety of these encounters was exemplified in the extensive reporting and amplification of the murder of Tom Rhys Price in 2006, a White Lawyer robbed and stabbed by two Black teenagers in Kensal Green, North West London. The articulation of wealth inequality through race and 'cultural criminality' justified the increased police occupation and harassment of Black people in these contested areas - despite only seven years passing since the findings of the MacPherson report (1999) were published, setting substantial recommendations against the racist use of stop and search.

Secondly, the crash of global markets in 2007 were seen to send shock waves around the world and threatened to expose the contradictions of neoliberalism and the greed and irresponsibility of financial institutions. The fragility of hegemony throughout this period led to state anxiety of potential unrest and uprising. Chapter five of this thesis presented an argument that the 'war on knife crime' announced in 2008 provided a projection of this structural anxiety onto a racialised criminal 'Other' - providing a legitimization of increased police powers and authoritarianism

whilst simultaneously reinforcing a British identity of civility and order throughout the economic crisis.

In recognising the patterns of mobilisation towards the construction of racialised moral panics, chapter five also speculated on the return of 'knife crime' to the headlines from 2016 onwards. Looking at the disproportionate representation of Black victims in 'knife crime' reports in 2017, and the emphatic law and order rhetoric and extension of police powers in 2019, this chapter signalled the emerging revival of 'knife crime' as a particular societal response within the political context of the EU referendum. Future research with greater perspective distance from these events is encouraged, investigating the possible interaction between exercising exceptional force, managing the consequences of the Brexit vote, and the return of 'knife crime' as moral panic.

Within this account, 'knife crime' can be seen as a subjective representation of particular crimes as 'cultural', enabling a racialised construction of a criminal 'Other' to manage hegemonic crisis and anxieties of the dominant classes in functional ways. Renegotiating the consensus of exceptional use of force at times of social unrest, 'knife crime' can be considered a continuation of the work performed by 'mugging' in the 1970's. However, the second research question of this project requires further consideration, asking; to what extent can the response to 'knife crime' be considered a continuation of *Policing the Crisis* in the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century?

### **A New Labour Project; Crisis and crises**

Answering the second research question, ‘to what extent can the response to ‘knife crime’ be considered a continuation of *Policing the Crisis* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?’ this research identifies several distinctions between the two contexts. It is suggested here, that in order to understand the difference between the ‘mugging’ moment and the ‘knife crime’ moment, the interpretation of ‘crisis’ must be extended on and developed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century context.

When considering the original interpretation, Hall et al. (1978) were writing in the early decades of the economic shift to the neoliberal conjuncture. In this context the ‘crisis’ was founded on managing a change in coercion – from consensus to force. However, when the mobilisation towards ‘knife crime’ occurs the neoliberal conjuncture is well established, the ‘crisis’ is less about change and more about maintenance.

This interpretation of a continuation of law and order as ‘crisis’ makes more sense when contextualised within the New Labour moment; a political shift towards a dual ideology of social democratic authoritarianism. The distinct change in political direction heralded by

New Labour may have continued the same underlying neoliberal conjuncture that preceded it, but the re-articulation of consensus through the 'third way' presented new challenges for hegemonic management and a series of crises that are identified throughout this research.

This is particularly evident in the interactions detailed in chapter three, where the mobilisation towards a new crime category can be seen to respond to the practical challenges of policing within the paradoxical ideologies of New Labour's dualism. This research has discussed the growing pressure on police to professionalise their service at the end of the 1990s and how New Labour's reforms increasingly required performance measuring and community monitoring at this time. The backlash from the MacPherson Inquiry, commissioned by New Labour, challenged the consensus on stop and search as an essential component of the law and order society. It is within these series of *crises*, caused by the contradictions of New Labour's 'spin' on authoritarianism that a pre-public mobilisation towards knives emerges. By focusing on knives and enabling the collection of data as 'knife enabled offences' police were able measure performance and justify their use of stop and search at the same time – policing adapted to the new demands of New Labour through the priority issue; 'knife crime'.

Meanwhile New Labour's youth policy reforms, that increased the surveillance and control of young people and produced an

institutionalisation of deviance, magnified the impact of the label as it came to define youth crime policy at this time. Youth offending services, established under New Labour, were increasingly concerned with targeted early intervention. This resulted in 'knife crime' becoming much more than a discursive device, transforming the label into a co-ordinated, policy driven, cross-sector response, with 'knife crime' prevention work contracted to private companies and an industry of services emerging in its name.

Another New Labour crisis 'worked through' with 'knife crime' was the social contradiction of suburban regeneration in the 2000's. Chapter four discussed how New Labour's extension of Thatcher's 'right to buy' policy, along with public-private redevelopment initiatives, increasingly exposed the extremes of inequality in the neoliberal city. The spatial proximity of wealth and poverty was a cause of anxiety for the suburban middle classes now navigating deprived neighbourhoods daily. As discussed in detail in chapter four the tension of who belongs in the suburbs is played out in the stop and search response to 'knife crime' at this time and any potential uprising pre-empted by exceptional force and over policing of the 'Other' in the spaces of the city targeted for development.

Unlike the preceding Conservative years of government that were defined by punitive law and order approaches, New Labour's social democratic image required a reworking of the language of criminality to perform the

same regulatory social functions. In this regard 'knife crime' becomes particularly useful. Chapter five detailed how the forms of new racism within 'knife crime' rhetoric produced a veiled language of respectability and civility that was able to navigate New Labour's outward expression of multiculturalism and liberal values, whilst maintaining robust law and order sentiments beneath.

The particularities described above redefine 'knife crime' as a characteristically New Labour project. In this context the 'crisis' being policed is distinctly different from that which came before. Whilst the same continuing neoliberal conjuncture requires maintaining, the shift of New Labour policies presented a series of renewed '*crises*' within which the contradictory forces of its political dualism were policed through 'knife crime'.

### **Reflections on Critical Realism**

The methodological considerations at the start of this project described a tension between radical criminological and realist understandings of crime, and how the dominance of the latter have restricted the application of the former in contemporary discussions of 'knife crime'. Reflecting on the vital contribution the empirical phase of research provided within this research, there are several conclusions that are specific to this approach.



Contrary to the positivism of left-realism's 'risk factors', the framework of analysis in chapter six of this thesis explored the experiences of those 'on the ground' with attention to the alternative realities that are not represented by the label 'knife crime' - including the impact of the label itself. The depth of knowledge and experience of practitioners proved to be invaluable in the comprehension of increased violence in the 2000's beyond the 'cultural' explanation provided by the label. Contextualising the 'spike' in 'knife crime' homicides in 2007 and 2008 interviews revealed a landscape of deindustrialisation, gentrification, changing informal markets and a fragmentation of localised collective identities that shaped the experiences of marginalised young people at this time.

The new generation of young people living within these extended conditions of extreme marginalisation were described by participants as a 'split' from previous groups of young people. Focus groups with young people also identified a minority of young people that displayed extreme levels of violence that threatened the safety of the majority. These realities of the changing sociologies of young people are not accounted for in the traditional radical theories of deviance. As such, constructivism alone would not have revealed the complex interactions between lived experience and the processes of crime labelling investigated in this thesis.

However, focus groups also revealed an absence of radical histories and language of structural critique in young people's articulation of police discrimination and racism today. Instead, young people were well versed in

the language of realism, speaking of 'resilience' and individual characteristics they felt protected particular young people from harm. These findings suggest that the political left's commitment to realist approaches to crime, along with the institutionalisation of race politics, has failed to provide young people the critical tools through which to understand the politics of everyday experiences.

This has resulted in a contemporary generation whose experiences of state violence are often disconnected from any imagination of political resistance. The experiences of growing up exposed to the extreme marginalisation of advanced neoliberalism, with only a language of individual resilience and little to no anti-racist community engagement, signals a significant break from previous generations of Black and working class children in London. In this respect, radical constructivism is now urgently required, in order to counteract the harm of the lefts' commitment to realism and connect contemporary issues to anti-racist and radical movements of the past.

The lack of critical race theory in contemporary criminological approaches was a point recently raised at the symposium, '*Race Matters; a New Dialogue Between Criminology and Sociology*' at the London School of Economics and Political Science. In their summary of the event the organisers described:

...we pointed to the reoccurring absence of papers on race and racism in criminology conferences, journals and edited book collections, even as racial disproportionality in criminal justice escalates and intensifies... the weakness of criminological analysis of

race and racism has had serious policy and campaigning implications (LSE 2018).

Without a theoretical framework of radical understanding of 'knife crime', critical voices on race and racism within the discussion of the phenomenon have become quiet or silent. When asked about the violence between young Black men in 2007 Stuart Hall himself felt censored by the parameters of the rhetoric, he *replied 'I find it almost impossible to speak about it. The terrain of the dialogue is so horrendously skewed that one can hardly talk about it at all, but I mourn it every day'* (Hall in Conversation with Back 2007:45).

This sentiment was echoed during interviews with Youth Justice professionals and third sector managers. Speaking of a desperate sadness coupled with an abstinence from public debate one participant explained; *'I refrain from going anywhere public, I wont put myself on TV or radio or anything because I know exactly where they want to skew the conversation towards'* (Interview A 21.02.2018). This restrictive capacity of the label facilitates its racism and ultimately makes the contradictory practices of the label immune from critique. Thus, without radical constructivism there can be no realist intervention.

The limitations of intervention without radical critique were aptly demonstrated in the attempted paradigm shift to the 'public health approach' to 'knife crime' in 2018. This attempt to introduce a new crime discourse on 'Knife crime' will be discussed here in order to demonstrate

the practical challenges of intervening in the current response. The lessons from this attempted shift in approach will inform the final recommendations of thesis.

### **The Shortfalls of ‘Public Health’; A Pseudo Paradigm Shift?**

During the resurgence of ‘knife crime’ panic in the 2010s, an alternative paradigm of response attempted to gain traction in public discourse. Known as ‘the public health approach’ commentators and practitioners attempted to intervene in the law and order response to violence that dominated the first wave of ‘knife crime’ a decade earlier. In this concluding chapter, where research invariably looks to the future and posits recommendations, it is important to reflect on the shortfalls and disappointments of this attempted shift in approach. The following account of the public health approach to ‘knife crime’ provides a stark warning of how campaigns for policy reform can become appropriated by party politics and reduced to nominal adjustments rather than significant structural change.

Whilst its association with ‘knife crime’ is relatively recent, the public health paradigm in itself is not new. As a framework for preventing violence it has been in existence since the late 1970s, widely accredited to the call to action in the ‘*Healthy People*’ report (Richmond 1979), published

by the US Government that linked violence reduction and good health for the first time. Recognising that violence is a major contributor to premature death, disability and serious injury, the public health approach promotes *'a shift in the way our society addresses violence, from a focus limited to reacting to violence to a focus on changing the social, behavioral, and environmental factors that cause violence'* (Mercy et al. 1993:8).

In 1980's America the influence of public health in violence reduction led to the introduction of the Violence Epidemiology Branch that integrated disease control and violence prevention (Dahlberg and Mercy 2009). This reflects a defining feature of the approach that understands violence as a disease that can be cured through prevention of transmission:

Just as with those infected by microbial agents, those exposed to violence have varying levels of resilience and susceptibility. In addition, the influence of the environment can play a major role not only in symptomology, but also in transmission (Patel, Simon and Taylor 2013:1).

The WHO placed the public health paradigm on the international agenda in 1996 when it declared violence *'a leading worldwide public health problem'* (Darlberg and Mercy 2009:6). But it is the success of the public health model adopted in Scotland that will lead to an increasing call for policy reform in response to *'knife crime'* in England and Wales in the 2010's.

As mentioned early in this thesis, *'knife crime'* is a term first used to

describe crime in Scotland and the high frequency of violence with bladed weapons in deprived urban areas. The devolution of Scottish Parliament from 1999 onwards enabled the country to implement its own distinct approach to violence within its jurisdiction, along with reforms to social policies more widely. The public health initiative known as the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) was founded in 2005 in Strathclyde, becoming a Scotland-wide unit in 2006 (Younge and Barr 2017). This functioned as an arms-length policing unit that used a holistic approach of intervention, combining targeted policing tactics with health and social wellbeing initiatives in an attempt to 'cure' violence.

In 2011 the police reported that the CIRV has resulted in a 50% reduction in violent offending of those that took part, and a 25% reduction amongst those who refused to participate (O'Hare 2019). Across Scotland the VRU was seen reduce the murder rate by more than half in the decade since its introduction, reducing homicide figures to the lowest recorded since 1976 (Ibid.). This success is increasingly drawn upon in media discussions of 'knife crime' in England in the late 2010s (Younge and Barr 2017, Middleton 2019).

There is some recognition that the success of the VRU was reliant on its localised and relatively homogenous population, allowing for effective counselling and vocational training from state institutions and that the broader context of social democratic policies from devolved parliament

also contributed to this success (Young and Barr 2017). But the dominant account is that the public health approach worked in Scotland and would work in England too.

There is something undeniably hopeful in the decriminalising language of public health and the political recognition of this paradigm at first seemed progressive. The cross-party Youth Violence Commission (YVC), established in 2016, becomes a political advocate of the public health model as a parliamentary project ‘examining the root causes of youth violence in England, Scotland and Wales’ (Vickyfoxcroft.org.uk 2019). As a priority recommendation of their interim report in 2018 the YVC defines the public health approach as ‘*a holistic and integrated system of care... [that] requires whole-system, cultural and organisational change supported by sustained political backing*’ (YVC 2018).

One month after the YVC interim report, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), a think tank chaired by Conservative MP Ian Duncan Smith, publishes a report with the title ‘It Can Be Stopped’ (CSJ 2018). This paper also draws on the success of the VRU in Scotland but emphasises the role of policing and enforcement alongside the care paradigm. Through case studies of projects, selective stop and search data and a broad definition of ‘gangs’ the report states:

Very often seeking to focus on the social causes of violence leads people to believe that adopting a “public health approach” can somehow prevent the violence without relying upon or requiring

the involvement of policing or law enforcement. It is vital to recognise that this simply is not the case (CJS 2018:34).

This interpretation of the public health approach as containing increased law enforcement as a crucial component is in line with the Scottish example that threatened young people with hostile policing if they failed to comply with the 'care' aspects of the programme (Younge and Barr 2017). At this moment the 'paradigm shift' can be seen to be rearticulated through the law and order society, relegating 'public health' to discourse alone, whilst enabling the continuation of a policing response under a new name. Without the infrastructure and investment in welfare, mental health and youth services in England and Wales it is hard to see how the intensification of hostile policing that initiates this approach could contribute to a decriminalisation of 'knife crime'. It seems the 'paradigm shift' of public health is relegated to discourse alone, allowing the continuation of policing response under a new name.

Whilst the substance of its policy reform were unclear, enthusiasm for its ethos continued to grow in 2018, with politicians rushing to claim ownership of this 'new' approach. At the Conservative Party Conference 2018 Home Secretary Sajid Javid announced the government's adoption of a health approach alongside increased law enforcement (Littlejohn 2018). Perhaps anticipating this proclamation Mayor of London Sadiq Khan publicised the introduction of a public health unit, London's own Violence reduction Unit, two weeks before Javid (Gov.uk 2018b).



Even members of the YVC themselves attempt to re-interpret the health approach in ways that benefit their own political career. In a speech in Brixton in August 2018 the then Labour MP Chuka Ummuna describes the sustained political commitment required for a long-term public health approach not as the 'cross-party' endeavour described by the YVC, but rather as a 'centralist' paradigm – requiring 'national leadership from the centre' (Ummuna 2018). The Member of Parliament for Streatham would later become a leading member of the breakaway centralist party 'Change UK' in 2019.

Public health advocates are clear that the long-term investment that the paradigm requires is only possible when a commitment to the approach transcends party politics, producing systems that are maintained longer than an election cycles (YVC 2018). However, as the popularity and publicity of the public health approach grows it is increasingly subsumed in the competition between political figures that wish to appropriate its poignancy to improve their own popularity ratings status for their own approval. In addition to this, the growing emphasis on the enforcement elements of the Scottish model and little detail on the specific policy reforms of the 'care' component of the paradigm make it hard to see how the English replication would decrease criminalisation.

This posturing around the Public Health Approach demonstrates once again the making and remaking of 'knife crime' as a constant interaction with public opinion and contemporary politics. Without any reinvestment in the services dismantled by austerity the only material aspect of the policy change that is evident is the increase of hostile policing as a deterrent. In March 2019 *The Guardian* reported that '*Police in England and Wales are being given more power to stop and search people without "reasonable suspicion" in an attempt to tackle knife crime*' (Taylor 2019). Making it easier to authorise Section 60 searches is a return to the policing response of 2008, only now repackaged under the handle of 'public health'.

There are two crucial lessons that can be learnt from these recent events that can advise future research and police reform. Firstly, that 'public health' as a left-realist contextualisation of violence without radical intervention in the construction of criminality, only produces an illusion of structural critique. Whilst it claims to be responding to the 'causes of violence' its efforts are focused on increasing state support structures rather than structural challenge or change. This makes its rhetoric easily adoptable by existing state apparatus as a turn of phrase and gesture of liberalism – without providing any substantial political or social change.

The second lesson relating to this 'pseudo' structural critique is that the interactions between members of parliament, think tanks and campaign

groups during this moment vividly demonstrate the enduring influence of the knife crime industry. This incredibly efficient appropriation and incorporation of 'public health' into the existing law and order response and the conflicts of party politics, demonstrate the fundamental restrictions of impacting change through the existing discourse of 'knife crime' and the authority of its industries. The subversion of this attempted paradigm shift into the dominant response raises a critical question at the close of this project; is an intervention in the current response to 'knife crime' possible? The following final remarks will point towards three recommendations that this research suggests could disarm the current harm of the label.

#### **Disarming 'Knife Crime', Closing Remarks.**

This thesis has presented the case of 'knife crime' as an influential racialised construct of criminality that has had far reaching and lasting impacts on young people and the management of crises since the New Labour moment. The political analysis within this thesis, along with the investigation of the knife crime industry and its practices, presents an argument for pragmatic intervention; interrupting the law and order response and disarming the authority of the label through exposure of its harm and racism.

This would require a substantial paradigm shift and this research has already demonstrated the many and complex challenges that confront this task. The appropriation of the public health discourse is one example of how attempts to subvert discourse can be reincorporated into the machinery of the knife crime industry, but this thesis has also evidenced the many aspects of the response to 'knife crime' that make its language and logic almost impenetrable, and its symbolism transferable; The folk devil can be summoned in renewed form, even if this manifestation was successfully dismantled. Looking to the future then, in what ways does this research suggest progress could be made?

Firstly, whilst eradicating the label from use is improbable, and would likely lead to its hasty replacement, there is potential for the concept to be disarmed in popular discourse. By this I mean; its authority challenged, its racism exposed and the 'specialness' stripped from its association. The practicalities of this task are undoubtedly challenging - particularly for youth work and criminal justice enterprises that have become financially dependant on the commodification of 'knife crime'.

However, the knife crime industry depicted in this research must apply the same self-responsibility for actions as they demand of the young people they work with; Acknowledging that a label that has been openly adopted by far-right groups has no place in the organisation of youth services. It is the recommendation of this research that practitioners and youth organisations evaluate their own contribution and complicity in the

construction of the label and formulate alternative ways to frame their work that doesn't rely on harmful representations for increased value.

Secondly, whilst there are occasions when the anger and urgency over 'knife crime' mobilises groups and communities to come together in protest, these 'calls for action' currently do so within the parameters of civil society. Hoping and depending on slow political concessions and gradual progress towards improving conditions for young people. Within this process funding appeasements and policy adjustments are occasionally made to satisfy the demands of mobilised groups, but the deep structure of the neoliberal economy remains unchallenged.

Recognising the multiple realities of violence described in chapter six, there is now a collective responsibility to relocate the perceived crisis from the event of inter-personal violence, to the economic system that prioritises market logic and globalised profit over the quality and value of working class lives. This must occur at an ideological level and will require radical anti-racist critique and community activism. At a time when the contradictions of neoliberalism have become increasingly exposed through the current environmental crisis and climate emergency, this task is both at hand and within reach.

Finally, despite the contemporary relevance of radical theory in the study of deviance, this research has highlighted the absence of criminological work applying these frameworks of analysis to recent cases. Indeed, the

work of Hall et al. (1978) has not been substantially replicated within the study of emerging crime labels. The political crisis of the EU referendum and its mobilisation of exceptional force, along with the rise of the far-right and the normalisation of racist discourse in mainstream politics in recent years, arguably makes this crucial work as urgent and relevant now as it was in the 1970's.

This thesis calls for a revival of a radical criminological tradition, applied to emerging and contemporary issues, in order to provide renewed theoretical foundations for the crises of the present context. The need is great, and there is much to be done. It is hoped that this research can provide a point of reference for those who are aware of the contradictory harms of the 'knife crime' industry but have so far felt unable to speak out, and present a valuable academic source for further research and community action in the future. It is this vital work that can lead to a disarming of the societal reaction that has come to be known as 'knife crime' and an end to the harmful continuations of policing the crisis in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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**Appendix A - Three Page Example of 'Knife Crime' News Analysis – Digital Spreadsheet.**

| Date of Publication | Headline  | Publication      | Location     | Ethnicity/rac                                    | Age | Knife Crime police data used | critique provided   | Action promoted/suggested | Other Points of Interest  | Details of images used | High-Profile cases |
|---------------------|---|------------------|--------------|--|-----|------------------------------|---|---------------------------|---|------------------------|--------------------|
| 07/06/2000          | Sharp rise in knife crime                             | BBC online       | Scotland     | no   | no  | yes (scotland only)          | yes (data increase due to high profile policing and human rights concern) | balanced                  | n/a   | knives seized on table |                    |
| 31/07/2001          | Met wages war on soaring knife crime                  | Evening standard | London       | no   | yes | yes                          | no  | stop and search           | Instigated by met commissioner. Language: Sir John said today: "The increase in the number of offensive weapons on our streets is a menace I am determined to stamp on."<br><br>Many inner city teenagers carry blades as protection or to boost their "street cred", but in posters and on radio adverts, the Met will warn that anyone armed with a knife faces two years' custody. |                        |                    |
| 31/07/2001          | Police get metal detectors in the war on knife crimes | Daily Mail       | south london | Yes (as description of victim) and assumption of | yes | yes                          | no  | stop and search           | language and ethnicity, south london 'The detectors, 18 inches long and similar to those used by airlines, are being given to police in the crime-ridden South London borough of Southwark, where Nigerian schoolboy Damilola Taylor was stabbed to death last year.  |                        |                    |

|            |   |                     |          |                               |     |                     |   |                                   |   |                                    |     |
|------------|---|---------------------|----------|-------------------------------|-----|---------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|-----|
| 10/03/2002 | Rising knife crime deals further blow to Blunkett Home Office figures reveal trebling of incidents in London and worrying trend in other cities | Sunday Telegraph    | London   | yes                           | yes | yes                 | no  | stop and search                   | Blame MacPherson effect. Panic led by police claims about statistics. Writing reasons for serches is to keep minority communities happy |                                    | yes |
| 22/08/2002 | Met's baton rounds to fight knife crime   | Telegraph           | London   | no                            | no  | no                  | no  | no                                | designed for use against large knives and swords - also authorised for use in riots (hall!)   | police man with smokin g baton gun |     |
| 05/09/2002 | MSPs clash over shocking rise in weapon crime:  | Daily Mail          | Scotland | no                            | no  | yes (scotland only) | yes (data increase due to high profile policing)  | more police on streets            | 'The Scottish people deserve ministers with zero tolerance of knife crime.  |                                    |     |
| 03/03/2003 | McConnell pledge to cut knife crime:  | Daily Mail          | Scotland | no                            | yes | yes (scotland only) | no  | toughe r crime policy from labour | Labour re-election campaign names 'knife crime'   |                                    |     |
| 06/11/2003 | Shops, stalls and web illegally sell knives to children   | The Daily Telegraph | uk       | no                            | yes | no                  | no  | law on selling knives to children | trading standards sent a 13 year old into 18 shops in North yorkshire, he returned with craft knives, kitchen knives and hand axes.     | no                                 | no  |
| 06/11/2003 | Knife culture   | The Times           | urban    | no                            | yes | no                  | yes poverty   | no                                | experts estimate that in poor urban areas up to a third of school students, some as young as ten, carry weapons. /                      | no                                 | no  |
| 07/11/2003 | Is knife crime really getting worse?  | bbc online          | urban    | not directly (interview youth | yes | knife seizures      | yes (media hysteria - people have always carried blades, but also anecdotal increases ) | no                                | But has so-called "knife culture" risen while the media's attention has been so fixed on gun crime?                                     | seized knives and exampl e blades  |     |



|            |   |                    |                    |                           |     |                     |   |                                    |  |                                       |               |
|------------|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----|---------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| 09/11/2003 | Kids carry knives and hammers : they have to look after themselves' | The Independent on | London             | no                        | yes | no                  | no  | no                                 | anecdotal evidence from young people about knives in a london school   | PC in Luke Walmsleys playground       | Luke Walmsley |
| 09/11/2003 | At the sharp end  | Scotsman           | Scotland           | no (except 'small victim' | yes | yes (Scotland only) | yes (data increase due to increased stop and search) human rights if teachers searched pupils | Law changes                        | justice minister Cathy Jamieson said the relevant legislation was being reviewed to see whether any improvement could be made, possibly in relation to the sale of dangerous knives. She said: "I recognise that knife crime is a serious issue in Scotland" | no                                    |               |
| 29/11/2003 | Glasgow is Britain's murder capital as knife crime spirals          | Independent        | Scotland           | no                        | yes | yes (Scotland only) | no  | operation magnet                   | booze and blade culture'/ knife culture  | no                                    |               |
| 28/05/2004 | Zero tolerance for knife thugs                                      | Daily Mail         | Scotland           | no                        | no  | yes (Scotland only) | no  | stop and search more police        | first used of "knife crime thugs" in press   |                                       |               |
| 01/08/2004 | Police offer schools weapon scans                                   | bbc online         | London             | no                        | yes | no                  | no  | knife arches in schools            | We would also work with the headmaster in hotspots outside schools... places where we know knives are carried."  | police commissioner                   | Luke Walmsley |
| 09/12/2004 | Scanning Britons for knife crime                                    | bbc online         | London. Scanner at | no                        | yes | no                  | no  | Operation Blunt, tougher sentences | Metropolitan Police commissioner John Stevens said: "Gun crime has been reduced and people have moved over to knives.post Luke warmsley scanners offered   | knife arches in use, police commander |               |

## Appendix B – Three page Example of Digital Spreadsheet News Analysis of High Profile Case – Luke Walmsley 2003

| Date       | Headline  | Publication           | Knife crime' label used? | Linked to other knife cases? | Knife culture/knife problem | Bullying | Comments from spokespeople   | Recommended action?       | Other points of interest   |
|------------|---|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|--|---------------------------|--|
| 04/11/2003 | Classmates see boy of 14 stabbed to death at school | The Yorkshire Post    | no                       | no                           | yes                         | yes      | General secretary of the National Association of Headteachers David Hart said the incident would shock the school system. "My reaction is one of utter horror. To think a youngster can be stabbed to death in a school in a relatively quiet part of the country will send shockwaves through the school system...The chief constable has pledged the full support of the force for the school in what will be a very traumatic time for the students and the staff." | counselling               | Bullying and 'knife culture' assumed the problem. Education bosses have said they are "stunned" at the incident in a school which has an excellent record in combating bullying and was recently awarded specialist arts status. |
| 05/11/2003 | Teenager held after fatal stabbing in school fight: | Birmingham Post       | no                       | no                           | yes                         | no       | same quote David Hart head teachers association 'It does demonstrate very clearly the fact that although this level of violence is very rare, there are an incredible number of youngsters who are willing to sign up to the knife culture and bring an offensive weapon into school.'   | Full support of the force | local news paper reporting non local news  |
| 05/11/2003 | UK pupil died of single stab wound to heart         | Breakingnews.ie       | no                       | no                           |                             | yes      | "It does demonstrate very clearly the fact that although this level of violence is very rare, there are an incredible number of youngsters who are willing to sign up to the knife culture and bring an offensive weapon into school."   | no                        |  |
| 05/11/2003 | Pupils mourn stabbed Luke, 14                       | Coventry Evening News | no                       | no                           | no                          |          | David Hart - it will send shockwaves   |                           | Same quote used , local news paper but not Linconshire   |

|            |   |  |    |  |     |     |   |    |   |
|------------|---|--|----|--|-----|-----|---|----|---|
| 05/11/2003 | Teenager stabbed to death in school fight:  | Daily Post, Liverpool                  | no | no   | no  | no  | David Hart - it will send shockwaves  | no | same quote used , local news paper but not linconshire  |
| 05/11/2003 | Pupil quizzed over school stab death  | Evening Chronicle, Newcastle upon Tyne | no | no   | no  | no  | david hart - it will send shockwaves - an incredible number of youngsters who are willing to sign up to a knife culture   | no | same quote used , local news paper but not Linconshire. It's the youngster who are willing to be sign up - individualism        |
| 05/11/2003 | ANGUISH OF STAB VICTIM'S MOTHER ; MOTHER OF STABBED 14-YEAR-OLD SPEAKS OF HER AGONY AT LOSING SON                     | Evening Standard                       | no | no   | yes | yes | David Hart - it will send shockwaves - an incredible number of youngsters who are willing to sign up to a knife culture   | no | Lots of parent and neighbour quotes. "He's been bringing the knife to school and showing it off to kids.                        |
| 05/11/2003 | BOY, 14, KILLED IN SCHOOL ATTACK: He ran .. then he fell ; PUPILS FLEE IN TERROR AS LUKE KNIFED ON HIS WAY TO LESSON: | The Daily Mirror                       | no | No, but linked through violence; Philip Lawrence, Rashid Femi, Darren Carruthers | no  | no  | "But a family spokesman who answered the door of Paul's home close to the school said: "They are disgusted at the school for allowing this to happen. You could understand if this was in a big town or city but not in a country place like this."                           | no | Violence in schools is causing rising concern mong teachers and parents, particularly since the murder of head Philip Lawrence. |
| 05/11/2003 | Boy, 14, stabbed to death in school   | The daily telegraph                    | no | no   | no  | no  | David Hart, the general secretary of the National Association of Headteachers, said: "My reaction is one of utter horror."To think a youngster can be stabbed to death in a school in a relatively quiet part of the country will send shockwaves through the school system." | no |   |

|            |  |                     |                                |                      |    |     |   |   |   |
|------------|--|---------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|----|-----|---|---|---|
| 05/11/2003 | A scuffle, then panic grips children and staff at village school<br>Chief constable pledges support for community in shock, reports Sandra Laville | The daily telegraph | no                             | no                   | no | yes | Philip Dilkes, Labour Education Secretary<br>"This is a terrible tragedy".                    | no  | very emiotal piece - discriptive and litary   |
| 06/11/2003 | Luke's stabbing has ripped our family apart  | The daily telegraph | no                             | no                   |    | yes | Your family has been ripped apart   | no  |   |
| 06/11/2003 | Unions call for review of security   | The Guardian        | no - instead 'weapon carrying' | yes, philip lawrence |    | no  | no  | parent teacher association want metal detectors | The general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, Doug McAvoy, said: "This is an absolutely tragic incident, but there are 7.5 million children in our schools 190 days a year and our surveys show the number of weapons being brought into our schools is absolutely minuscule." |
| 06/11/2003 | Mum warned school: Bullies are after Luke  | The Sun             | no                             | no                   |    | yes | You can imagine a punch up, but nothing like this. Luke was a quiet lad. Everyone liked him." | no  |   |
| 06/11/2003 | Boy, 15, charged with fellow pupil's murder  | The Times           | no                             | no                   |    | yes | Strong ambition to become a policeman when he left school.                                    | no  | no  |

**Appendix C - Summary of Successful Bids for Anti-Knife Crime Community Fund 2017**

|  |              |         |  |
|--|--------------|---------|--|
| The Enthusiasm Trust                               | Derby        | £20,000 | To deliver a 13-week intensive preventative programme focusing on knife crime and youth violence, for young people aged 11-18 in Derby.  |
| Lives Not Knives                                   | Croydon      | £20,000 | To deliver the Lives Not knives programme to youth workers, public servants, volunteers and teachers so they can deliver it themselves and make the programme sustainable in the long term.                    |
| Wycombe Youth Action                               | High Wycombe | £19,998 | To deliver 12 month anti-knife crime programme with a range of <b>targeted young people1</b> across High Wycombe.  |
| Mentor, Achieve, Learn & Support (MALS) Merseyside | Merseyside   | £18,714 | To deliver an anti-knife crime programme <b>targeted2</b> at young people, aged 10–17 years who have committed offences and have been identified as being <b>on the cusp</b> of being criminally exploited.    |
| Nottingham Forest Community Trust                  | Nottingham   | £17,840 | To fund their Streetaware Programme, in collaboration with the Youth Offending early intervention team, Nottinghamshire Police, the community cohesion team, and education services.                           |
| In2Change  | Sheffield    | £16,000 | To deliver 20 'Knife Point' presentations within the region to local schools, pupil referral units and YOI institutions, aimed at <b>making young people aware of the dangers of carrying guns and knives.</b> |
| Faiths Forum for London                            | Brent        | £18,800 | To deliver the <b>Aspire to Change</b> Project involving faith institutions in the London Borough of Brent in tackling gang membership, permanent exclusion from schools and re-offending behaviour.           |
| Woodlands Youth Centre                             | Medway, Kent | £12,280 | To replicate previously successful sport events in other areas to help to <b>build young peoples resilience</b> to peer pressure and <b>educate them around the consequences</b> of carrying knives.           |
| Remedi Restorative Services                        | Barnsley     | £10,000 | To deliver a series of workshops to young people <b>involved in, or at risk21 of knife crime</b> in Barnsley.  |
| [Newham] Breaking Talent Programme –               | Newham       | £20,000 | Piloting an early intervention program that will provide intensive support to young people <b>at risk32 of becoming involved with</b>  |

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| with Ape Media.   |   |         | <b>knife crime.</b>  |
| Huyton Initiative 4 Youth Activities at Hillside Neighbourhood Centre | Knowsley, Liverpool                                   | £18,884 | To deliver <b>targeted3</b> harm reduction/personal safety programmes through 1-1 mentoring intervention work with known 11-16-year olds who are <b>on the cusp4 of or engaging with knife carrying</b> and focussed prevention work with 9-12 year-olds <b>on the risks and consequences of knife carrying.</b>                         |
| Coin Street Community Builders  | Lambeth and Southwark                                 | £9,800  | A multi-faceted approach to lowering knife crime attacks and <b>diverting young people</b> aged 10-18 years old away from the <b>peer pressure and street culture</b> which feeds this issue   |
| Growing Against Violence (GAC)  | Bedfordshire  | £20,000 | To assist with delivery of the pan Bedfordshire knife crime strategy building the capacity and capability in the police schools teams, schools and empower parents with the skills and knowledge to collaborate and develop appropriate local responses to the challenges that are currently faced.                                      |
| The Ben Kinsella Trust and Head Held High                             | Islington   | £11,437 | To deliver two holistic and hands on programmes to two groups of up to 20 parents who are concerned about knife crime.   |
| StreetDoctors   | Bristol, Leicester, Southampton and Vale of Glamorgan | £20,000 | To deliver 25 educational medical sessions in four areas of the country – Bristol, Leicester, Southampton and Vale of Glamorgan. <b>Teaching young people how to act in an emergency.</b>  |
| The Factory Youth Zone  | Harpurhey Manchester                                  | £8,381  | Bespoke interventions with <b>challenging young people</b> (11-14 year olds) to <b>divert</b> them from crime including knife crime.   |
| Banooda Aid Foundation (BAF)  | Ham'smith and Fulham                                  | £11,103 | To prevent 30 young people from <b>engaging in "knife and other related crime"</b> through <b>practical interventions.</b>   |
| Vulcan Learning Centre  | Hull  | £19,340 | In partnership with police, YOS and schools, to deliver the Cut Knife Crime Project (CKC Project) to young people, <b>reducing the likelihood of being involved in knife crime</b> incidents in the future. <b>Targeted4 interventions</b> for children who have been convicted of knife offences or are <b>at risk5</b> of becoming so. |
| Al-Ghazali Multicultural Centre                                       | Liverpool   | £14,160 | To deliver a 3 month 6 a side Football League. In addition, workshops around knife crime involving Merseyside Police and knife victims   |

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|   |                                  |         | run by community role models to take place each week.  |
| Black Health Initiative (BHI)   | Leeds                            | £20,000 | To deliver a <b>knife awareness</b> campaign amongst the <b>most vulnerable</b> in either being perpetrator and/or victims. <b>Targeting 5</b> young people from the age of 11 -25 and both genders.   |
| Positive Youth Foundation   | Coventry                         | £19,200 | To deliver the Lives Before Knives project aimed at <b>preventing the rising levels of knife crime</b> in the highly deprived areas of inner city Coventry.  |
| Anglia Care Trust   | Ipswich                          | £10,000 | To complement the current provision delivered by 4YP and deliver <b>quality interventions</b> to young people who are hard to engage, isolated, victimised, vulnerable, and <b>most at-risk 63</b> .   |
| Colchester United Football Club   | Colchester                       | £13,625 | To deliver United Against Knife Crime – a project with school groups providing educational and interactive workshops which will <b>address the key issues of knife crime, the dangers of carrying knives</b> and also <b>the effect on local communities</b> . |
| Oxygen  | Kingston-on-Thames               | £18,000 | A peer education model to <b>raise awareness</b> of the <b>issue of knives</b> within local schools and youth groups to <b>change attitudes among young people</b> .   |
| Syrus Consultancy, Safety Box and Wipers  | Projects in Haringey and Croydon | £20,000 | To deliver the <b>Aspire Higher</b> (Anti Knife) Programme to engage both those <b>actively participating in high-risk 7 activity</b> and those <b>on the periphery</b> .  |
| The Greenleaf Centre  | Newham                           | £19,996 | Spark2Life project in Newham working with <b>disaffected young people</b> in partnership with New Choices for Youth and the Youth Offending Team.  |
| Wigan Athletic Football Club Community Trust  | Wigan                            | £2,440  | To deliver four, three hour <b>'say no to knife crime' awareness workshops</b> over a 12-month period to over 320 young people across Wigan.   |
| The Robert Levy Foundation, and The Kiyan Prince Foundation (KPF) in partnership – project in Hackney | Hackney                          | £20,000 | To deliver a holistic anti-violence programme to 16 London secondary schools and PRUs between December 2017 and March 2018.  |
| Ambition,   | Newham                           | £19,500 | To offer an <b>informed</b> and comprehensive  |

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| Aspire, Achieve and Racial Equality in Newham       |                       |         | response to knife crime and associated criminality within the Newham neighbourhoods with the highest incidents of <b>knife related criminality</b> .  |
| Sheffield United Football Club Community Foundation | Sheffield             | £20,000 | To deliver a mixture of <b>diversionary activities</b> and <b>educational interventions</b> to get key messages across to local young people.   |
| Laurel Road Community Sports Centre                 | Handsworth Birmingham | £17,200 | To deliver the 'What's the Point?' <b>Knife Crime Awareness - self-empowerment</b> and <b>awareness workshops</b> for young people in order to <b>raise their awareness about the consequences of knife crime</b> .   |
| Damilola Taylor Trust                               | Croydon               | £19,978 | To deliver the <b>Youth Capacity Building &amp; Empowerment Initiative</b> to up to 100 young people aged 12-24 and their families.   |
| Community & Rehabilitation Solutions CIC            | Newham                | £15,576 | 'Peer Mentoring to Reduce Knife Violence' project developed in partnership with Newham Council's Youth - a front line service to over 3000 young people across Newham aged between 11 and 21.   |
| Goldhill Adventure Playground Ltd                   | South Leicester       | £15,137 | To deliver a project to work with CYP aged 13-19 who are NEETs, identified as <b>at risk84</b> , excluded from school, or hard to reach and <b>develop an action plan based on practical solutions to address knife crime</b> .   |
| Eden Bow Community Project, Tower Hamlets           | Tower Hamlets         | £19,815 | To deliver weekly mentoring for young people identified as <b>at risk95</b> in liaison with their family and school.  |
| The Prince's Trust - Liverpool                      | Liverpool             | £8,174  | To deliver workshops to 32 young people in Liverpool who are <b>at risk106</b> . This project is a collaborative response to the <b>increasing issue of knife crime</b> in the UK specifically <b>targeting6</b> vulnerable young people in Liverpool.                                |
| The Anson Cabin Project                             | Longsight, Manchester | £3,966  | Professional youth work support utilising a range of informal educational methods to <b>raise awareness of knife crime</b> , substance abuse, healthy lifestyles, safe sexual relationships, racism, bullying and other issues effecting young people of the area, through workshops. |
| Mahdlo Youth Zone                                   | Oldham                | £11,923 | To focus on influencing those <b>at risk117 of being involved in knife crime</b> in specific neighbourhoods of Oldham, working with at least 100 different young people.  |
| Grimsby Town  | Grimsby               | £20,000 | To specifically <b>tackle knife crime</b> , working   |



|   |                           |         |  |
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| Sports and Education Trust  |                           |         | with Humberside Police, Young and Safe, and Youth Offending Services.  |
| Groundwork  | North Wales               | £15,068 | To deliver the RIPples project <b>targeting7</b> the hardest to reach young people across North Wales, delivered from Groundwork bases at Wrexham and Bangor.  |
| Life Skills Education charity                                     | Nottingham and Derbyshire | £13,100 | A 45 to 60 minute session on the subject of knives for schools - in the classroom and with parents or carers.  |
| Race Equality Foundation  | Lambeth, Brent, Islington | £18,780 | To provide combined intensive support as well as London-wide support to agencies working with families <b>at risk128</b> .   |
| Brighton Oasis Project  | Brighton and Hove         | £20,000 | A community development approach working with a number of partners across the city, including the statutory sector. Delivering a number of interventions for which there is some evidence and establish their acceptability and effectiveness in supporting young people and their families to reduce knife crime. |
| St Giles Trust SOS+   | Brent                     | £20,000 | To provide an intervention programme to YP in year 6 in Brent, specifically <b>tackling8 knife crime</b> .   |
| The Good Shepherd Voluntary Organisation in Stratford and Newham. | Stratford, Newham         | £16,201 | To deliver a ten week programme for 20 troubled families in the Stratford area in which young people (aged 12-21) are <b>involved in knife and gang culture</b> .  |
| Leap Confronting Conflict   | Southwark, Lambeth        | £20,000 | To deliver the Leadership and Enterprise project to 36 young people aged between 13 and 19, living in Southwark and Lambeth who have been directly affected or arrested for knife related crime.   |
| Gloves Not Gunz Croydon Boxing Club                               | Croydon                   | £10,680 | Gangs' – Crime and Anti-social behaviour programme focusing on Knife Crime offending, counselling and 1:1 mentoring sessions once per week.  |