Reflections on a 'Depressing Inevitability'

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1.1 The events of August 2011 have afforded an array of opportunities to deliberate on the condition of contemporary society, to reflect upon the positioning of its citizens, on the state of the family, of its young people in particular, and has provided a moment to pause and reflect on the role and capacity of the state and its agents to protect, maintain peace, order and control. As a criminologist, such a spectacle presents much rich pickings and as Robert Reiner reflects, the 2011 riots became something of a criminological *Rorschach test* which different perspectives have read in conflicting ways (Reiner 2012).

1.2 Evident from the consequent deluge of 'riot talk' in the form of academic research papers, official and media reports that have followed, it is not surprising that commentators have tended to view the events of that week as a vindication of their own particular perspectives and concerns. I declare my own positioning here as a criminologist with a research interest in all things related to policing and gender. And as such, my own interest in the events of August 2011 are underpinned by an inquiry into the role of policing in contemporary society and the significance of gender in relation to both those involved in 'rioting' behaviours and those tasked with a legitimate mandate to police. Though dominant images from the riots and the political debate that ensued about their causes, focused on the idea that they were caused by a group of exclusively young men, we know that girls and women were present and played a significant role in the disorder. While official arrest data indicate that only 10% of those who took part were female, other sources have suggested that the numbers were higher, figures from the *Reading the Riots* series for example, show that of the 270 interviews with rioters carried out, 21% were with girls and women (The Guardian 2011a). Where girls and women were reported, the search for 'vengeful equity' (Chesney-Lind 2006) with their male counterparts was resounding. It is all too clear that in an increasingly punitive climate the female offender has not been exempted from the 'incarceration binge' characteristic of contemporary western states and now occupies a central place on government and criminological agendas (Heidensohn & Silvestri 2012). Yet, we still know so little about 'her' (or 'him' for that matter). Though 'she' (and 'he') were present during the 2011 riots, a gendered analysis of that landscape in which gendered bodies collided, where bodies of the 'controlled' and 'controllers' met and clashed, has yet to be fully explored.

1.3 Careful thought and analysis takes time though and the warnings issued by the academic community to avoid reaching premature conclusions together with the need for more evidence, are now beginning to pay off, as we witness the emergence of a varied body of interdisciplinary and critical analysis of those five days in August 2011. Indeed talk of the 'riots' has facilitated a greater appreciation and engagement with the interdisciplinary nature of criminology as a discipline, a much needed exercise given the continuing emphasis on producing 'administrative criminology' (Matthews 2009). Contributions to the conference '*Collisions, Coalitions and Riotous Subjects: the Riots one year on*', upon which this Special Issue is drawn, serve as a stark reminder of the continuing need for academics to transgress the disciplinary boundaries and insular spaces that they increasingly find themselves in. As a criminologist, I searched the conference programme for the 'usual suspects', and whilst there were a couple within the gathering, it was perhaps their absence that was most notable. Academics across a broad range of disciplines; social commentators, voluntary sector workers, film makers and playwrights gathered to fill the space to reflect on events. As the drive towards maintaining a clear disciplinary presence begins to bite even more fiercely within and across university departments, it is precisely such diverse contributions that remind us of the benefits of working 'across' and 'outside' of our usual circles – I am mindful here of David Downes (1988) often quoted description of criminology as a 'rendezvous subject' for an exchange of ideas. A whirlwind of reflections, of positions, of standpoints, of evidential bases, each in turn achieved through differing methodologies and all seeking to unpick official characterisations of the riots as that of simply 'mindless criminality' provide a much needed and refreshing extension of the criminological gaze that has dominated much of the discourse thus far.

1.4 Within the contributions to the conference (and carried through the papers in this special issue), the 'riots' are recast with complexity and depth, with more nuanced understandings emphasising: the

problematic relationship between the state and the media (Bassel 2013); the ruinous effects of the growing and damning narrative on the 'feral underclass' (Tyler 2013; McKenzie 2013); the importance of acknowledging the socio-economic and political backdrop within which events unfolded; the increasingly hostile conditions of neoliberalism and Coalition policies, the growth of the 'precarariat' and a growing army of NEETs; the responsibilisation of the family through a focus on the 'parenting crisis' (Bristow 2013; see also Allen & Taylor 2013), where fathers are absent and single mothers prevail; the significance of an education system that excludes children all too readily; the fusion in contemporary consumer societies between culture and commodities (Harvey et al. 2013; Casey 2013; Jensen 2013); opportunism and the seductions of crime (Katz 1998) in which individuals are seduced by the existential possibilities offered by criminal acts – by the pleasure of transgression, the excitement and 'sneaky thrills' presented by looting; the dynamics and significance of police and community race relations; the excessive and vengeful punitiveness of criminal justice responses; the gendered dynamics of violence experienced; the diversity of experience across place and space; the recasting of the victim and the overall criminalisation and demonization of young people.

1.5 Through such narratives, the significance of 'protest', of 'control' of 'race', of 'gender', of 'youth', of 'place' and 'space' – all of which were for the most part rejected and erased in official characterisations – take centre stage. Here we are reminded of David Cameron's rejection of the idea that the disorder we saw could be considered as protest. On the contrary, in his view it was 'people showing indifference to right and wrong, people with a twisted moral code, people with a complete absence of self-restraint' (The Guardian 2011a). Contributions to this journal special issue are transformed into a collective voice in which the significance of 'protest' emerges loudly. Unfolding as a protest with various dimensions and stages, the protest directed at the police service for its insensitive and inadequate response following the shooting and death of Mark Duggan is deafening. This I recognise well, how wrong the police had got it (again). Papers point to the ongoing damning evidence of poor and strained police-community and race relations as a fundamental backdrop and 'context' to understanding what happened in August 2011 (McKenzie 2013) – an all too familiar discourse and regular feature of lecture notes of countless criminologists, the essence of which remain pretty much unchanged since the 1980s. The message is clear; though these may not have been 'race riots' in the same way as those of 1981 and 1985, uneasy and difficult police-race relations were unavoidably present (Rogers 2013). The spectacular failure of the police to communicate effectively with the communities they serve exemplified for many the lack of progress in police and community relations and an ongoing abuse of power by the police and the criminal justice system more broadly. Findings from the joint study by the Guardian and LSE (The Guardian 2011b) reveal a 'deep-seated and sometimes visceral antipathy' towards police among those people who rioted across cities in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Nottingham, Manchester and Salford.

1.6 Plagued by a number of high profile and damning reports, including; the criticism of police public order tactics, the advent of Police and Crime Commissioners, evidence of serious police misconduct following the 1989 Hillsborough tragedy (2012), the abuse of police powers to perpetrate sexual violence (IPCC 2012), the announcement of the *Stevens Independent Commission into the Future of Policing* (2012), the recent publications of the Winsor Review of *Police Pay and Conditions* (2012) and Peter Neyroud's *Review of Police Leadership and Training* (2011), it is not an understatement to suggest that the police service is in crisis. It would be remiss however to suggest that this current crisis in policing is somehow new. Concern over the conduct of police officers has long been object of external scrutiny and criticism, including the Scarman Report (1981) following the Brixton riots in 1979, the MacPherson Report (1999) following the death of Stephen Lawrence in 1993; the Independent Police Complaints Commission reports (2007, 2010) following the police shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes in 2005 and the death of Ian Tomlinson in 2009.

1.7 With such a deplorable history of 'previous form', it becomes difficult to accept the idea that the chaotic and negligent police response following the death of Mark Duggan in August 2011 was indicative of a service caught unaware? In his analysis of events, Jefferson (2012) challenges the idea of police 'surprise', noting this position as 'disingenuous'. He goes on to remind us that we need only conduct a fleeting review of major urban disturbances over the past thirty years to realise that the death of a black person at the hands of the police in a poor and deprived neighbourhood with long-standing antagonistic relations between police and young people is often a key starting point of many such events. It is not difficult to be convinced by Jefferson's position, from the riots in Brixton in 1981, following the lack of medical care given to a local black man in police custody, to the shooting of black woman, Cherry Groce, leading to the unrest in Brixton 1985; to the unrest on Tottenham's Broadwater Farm in 1985 following the death of another black woman Cynthia Jarrett, who collapsed and died from a stroke after police officers raided her home, to Handsworth in Birmingham, when two days of rioting followed another poorly judged police arrest.

1.8 Reflecting on public disorder in eighteenth and nineteenth century England, Stevenson (1979: 38) emphasises that 'it is often possible to pinpoint a moment which things might have turned out differently', and that, 'often, it was the reaction of the authorities which ultimately decided what occurred'. An appreciation of the importance of those dynamic communication processes that take place between the state and its citizens beg further exploration. In relation to the police use of stop and search, Reicher and Stott (2011) emphasise that poor police-race relations are indicative not only in the indiscriminate use of stop and search powers but in the manner in which those searches are carried out. It is here that we can begin to map out the ongoing and strong sense of social injustice felt by various 'suspect communities' (Hillyard 2003; Pantazis & Pemberton 2009; McKenzie 2013). The powerful effects of being 'treated unfairly and without due respect' are played out in confrontational battles with the police over 'time' and across 'place'. Not surprisingly, improving the 'personal encounter' has been identified by police reformers as a powerful 'lever' for affecting an improved relationship between the police and public (Myhill & Bradford 2012). Advocates of a 'procedural justice' model of policing, that is, the fair and respectful *treatment* that 'follows the rules', suggest that this approach is more important to people than obtaining

outcomes that they regard either as fair or favourable to themselves (Tyler 2003; Hough 2012; Bradford 2011; Jackson et al. 2012). The benefit of adopting a 'procedural justice' model of policing has been hailed by many as significant in developing greater public confidence, consent and legitimacy in policing, together with the possibility of securing greater normative compliance with the law (Tyler 2003). Moreover, adopting such an approach has particular resonance in contemporary times of budgetary constraint. After all, treating people with respect and dignity costs nothing and is not dependent on financial resources.

1.9 We are now facing a window of opportunity for police reform. The extent to which the police service will seize this as an opportunity to bring about change, remains to be seen, but if the past is anything to go by, there is a 'depressing inevitability' of its resistance to change. Despite a number of policy changes to try to improve police-communities relations and in particular the quality of police-race relations, few of the policing issues identified by the inquiry reports listed above have been adequately dealt with. The use of stop and search procedures continue to be of concern and January 2013 saw Stuart Lawrence (brother of murdered Stephen Lawrence) launch a complaint against the Metropolitan police claiming that he has been the victim of a sustained campaign of harassment because of the colour of his skin after being stopped by officers 25 times.

1.10 As the police service strives to rebuild the lost legitimacy with the communities it serves, the lack of diversity among the police service workforce remains a serious failing. The representation of women and black and minority ethnic officers remains woefully inadequate, with ethnic minority officers representing only 5.6% at constable rank and 3% of all police chiefs. Though women have made considerable progress over the last ten years, now standing at 26% at constable rank and 13% of leadership ranks, research continues to show that women face considerable barriers and resistance to their presence and progress within the ranks (Dick et al. 2013). I have argued elsewhere at length of the ruinous consequences for citizens of having a police service resident in the minds, hearts and hands of a predominantly white male organisation (Silvestri 2003, 2007; Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey 2008). How can a police service so skewed and under-representative of its population police with a legitimate mandate? The benefits of recruiting a more diverse workforce brings immeasurable benefits to the job of policing and are neatly encapsulated in a joint report published by ACPO, APA and the Home Office, *Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy for the Police Service* (2010). Drawing on both 'external' impacts with communities and 'internal' impacts with organisational members, the report outlines a number of benefits in relation to the recruitment of a more diverse police workforce. These include the potential to achieve: a broader range of information for decision making and a wider range of possible solutions; a willingness to challenge established ways of thinking and consider new options; improvements in the overall quality of the team; better staff management, leading to improvements in staff satisfaction; a reduction in the number of employees leaving the service, and fewer grievances and complaints; and better relationships with the community, resulting in a more effective service and better quality services, leading to increased public confidence.

1.11 Given that a key element of the business of the criminal justice system is to administer and deliver justice, it follows that if those working in the criminal justice system were more representative of society as a whole, the criminal justice system would have a greater chance of securing greater fairness for all – offenders, victims and practitioners alike? As former Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer (2005) notes, 'Diversity increases justice...and confidence in justice rests on the confidence of those dispensing justice'. In an era where the emphasis on service in policing has become paramount, evidence suggests that women officers more particularly may have a positive impact on shifting policing philosophy away from a crime control to a community and citizen-focused approach. Women officers demonstrate a strong 'service oriented' commitment to policing, emphasising communication, familiarity and the building of trust and rapport with communities. The lack of ethnic minority police officers further limits the capacity of the police service to meaningfully understand, engage and address different communities' concerns. Ultimately, the lack of underrepresented groups continues to undermine the capacity of the police service to claim the legitimacy it so desperately needs (Brown & Woolfenden 2011; Craig et al. 2010; Dick et al. 2013; Fleming & McLaughlin 2012). And things look set to get worse. As the economic pressures within the police organisation begin to take effect, we are likely to see greater internal and fierce competition for fewer and scarce police jobs. Could it be that recent proposals by Home Secretary Theresa May to introduce 'direct entry' for some senior police ranks (following recommendations in the Winsor Report, 2012), might hold the key to loosening the stronghold that white men have on policing? Welcomed as an opportunity to literally change the 'face' of policing through a challenge to a century old logic of internal recruitment and progression, the unintended and negative consequences of such a proposal have yet to be fully considered. Underrepresented groups recruited to police ranks in this way may risk further marginalisation in an organisation that already perceives them to be 'outsiders'? We await the outcome but suffice to say for now; such proposals are radical indeed and represent a serious challenge to an organisation that has successfully resisted the call to change.

1.12 In thinking about possible futures, a year on from the London riots saw the city of London transformed in its Olympic cityscape. Where images and discourse of 'youth on the rampage', 'looting chavs' and 'feral scum' once dominated media and social commentaries (Tyler 2013; Harvey et al. 2013), August 2012 saw cities across Britain bask in Team GB Olympic glory. Divisions of class, gender and race, so acutely felt and played out, appeared healed as communities rejoiced in a carnival of community cohesion, togetherness and optimism. Faces once obscured by hoodies and bandanas were replaced by swathes of smiling faces and waving flags and a collective euphoria appeared to transcend the very divisions that symbolised a broken Britain. So, where to now? As Olympic glory becomes a distant memory, Jefferson's (2012) observation of the 'depressing inevitability' of the English riots in 2011, provides a compelling standpoint from which to reflect on events past, on the present, and to ponder on the future(s) that awaits us.

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