

Chapter Nine – Researching the Agenda

Chapter summary

This chapter considers some of the politicized and methodological issues involved in undertaking research into race and crime matters, and criminal justice institutions.

This chapter covers:

- The historical, methodological neglect of black and minority ethnic community, via blaming, ignoring or misrepresenting them.
- The recognition of mainstream criminology as having racial biases, and the call for a development of a ‘black criminology’ for correcting this and making black and minority ethnic voices visible.
- The more recent need to recognise the diversity of black and minority ethnic experiences in criminology.
- The problems associated with researching powerful state institutions, such as politicised issues of access, power, control and conflict
- The way criminological researchers report on uncomfortable truths that may emerge from empirical studies.

Links to SAGE articles

Murji, Karim (2007) ‘Sociological engagements: Institutional racism and beyond’, *Sociology*, 41(5): 843-855.

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Patel, Tina (2005) 'The usefulness of oral life (hi)story to understand and empower: The case of trans-racial adoption', *Qualitative Social Work*, 4(3): 327-345.

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Rodriguez, Dalia (2006) 'Un/masking identity: Healing our wounded souls', *Qualitative Enquiry*, 12: 1067-1090.

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Case study: Policing racist violence in Northern Ireland

Due to the lack of early official means of measuring Northern Ireland's black and minority ethnic population, information was only sought for the first time in the 2001 census, making producing a demographic profile difficult. The 2001 Northern Ireland census indicated that there are approximately 7,920 people in Northern Ireland who describe themselves as being of black and minority ethnic background – this represents 0.47% of the overall population (Northern Ireland Census, 2001). A substantial number of black and minority ethnic people residing in Northern Ireland are second and third-generations, and have been long-established in the country. Yet, appropriate legislation to protect them from racial abuse was only introduced at the start of the 1970s. Here for example, legislation appeared in the form of the Prevention of Incitement Hatred (Northern Ireland) Act 1970. More specifically, the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 came into force in August 1997.

Despite this though, Northern Ireland's white majority population failed to seriously consider racial harassment or racially motivated crime against its black and minority ethnic population as a problem, leaving the black and minority ethnic population 'marginalised almost to the point of invisibility' (Fawcett, 1998: 109). This was because Northern Ireland's priorities lay in issues relating to *the Troubles*. Socio-religious-political history means that Northern Ireland can be considered different from the other countries making up the UK. In recent years however, an accumulation of several factors, most notably the country's progression with the

peace process, and its increased intake of black and minority ethnic economic migrants, has meant that Northern Ireland has witnessed a multi-cultural shake-up (Patel, 2010 forthcoming), albeit a proportionately small one, say in comparison to mainland Britain or the USA. Nevertheless, it has meant that the make-up of its black and minority ethnic population has not only grown in numbers, but also widened in variety. This has brought many benefits, not least the filling of vacancies in low paid and undesirable jobs (Patel, 2010 forthcoming). It also indicates Northern Ireland's entry into 'a new and unprecedented phase with regard to "race relations"' (Connolly, 2002: 18). It has been suggested that this has led to an increase in racist incidents being committed by Northern Ireland's white majority population, against its black and minority ethnic population, so much so that on the 13th January 2004, the BBC stated that Northern Ireland 'has been dubbed the race-hate capital of Europe in some quarters and how one of its investigations found that ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland 'were more than twice as likely to face a racist incident than those in England or Wales' (BBC News, 2004). Jarman suggests that the racism in Northern Ireland emerges from its unique culture and history: (i) an entrenched suspicion of difference; (ii) deep-rooted, conservative religious identities; and, (iii) a culture of violence born out of the sectarianism legacy (Jarman, quoted in Guardian, 2005: 1). In looking at the experiences of black and minority ethnic people in Northern Ireland, McVeigh (1998) found the common and widespread experience of Northern Ireland's African and Asian population receiving 'hate stares – which do not simply say, you're different but also you do not belong here' (McVeigh, 1998: 12). Racism clearly exists in Northern Ireland. However, its presence is 'commonly and routinely denied' (McVeigh, 1998: 12).

The black and minority ethnic community in Northern Ireland had for some years requested that the police seriously recognise, record and monitor the occurrence of racist incidents (White, 1998). However, it was only in January 1995, the time when ‘racism and the racist harassment of minority ethnic communities became publicly acknowledged as a problem in Northern Ireland’ (Jarman and Monaghan, 2003: 8) that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) – then known as the Royal Ulster Constabulary, began monitoring racist incidents. As a force with an agenda previously pre-occupied with the policing of *the Troubles*, the PSNI is only just facing up to some very new challenges of a particular politically sensitive nature (Patel, 2010 forthcoming). However, that is not to say that guidelines on policing racist incidents and the findings of key reports such as Macpherson (1999) had no significance for Northern Ireland’s police service. Its findings and recommendations were taken on board, for example, Macpherson’s definition of a racist incident (Macpherson, 1999: recs.12-13), and other key recommendations were adopted, such as the collaborative working with black and minority ethnic organisations to improve quality of service and guidance on content of race equality training; membership representation of black and minority ethnic community on the Policing Board; monitoring of black and minority ethnic police officers; investigation by an independent body of any complaints regarding acts of racism by police officers; and, a call to make racist motivation an aggravating factor for criminal prosecutions (Jarman and Monaghan, 2003: 11).

However, it can be argued that it is only really with the recent increased recognition

in racist incidents that has led to the PSNI's serious acknowledgement of a need to adopt a different type of policing approach, one that is unfamiliar to officers in comparison to its past service history of policing *the Troubles*. The PSNI itself recognises the implications of their lack of experience and has emphasised its keenness to learn, for example, from colleagues in Britain (PSNI, 2002), with conferences held and liaison partnerships developed (PSNI, 2002; 2005). On an organisational level, the PSNI have recently 'developed a number of initiatives in response to the growing numbers of racist incidents' (Jarman and Monaghan, 2003: 4) which includes a poster campaign; on-line reporting facilities; access to interpreters 24-hours a day, and minority liaison officers (PSNI, 2002; 2005). Other past initiatives have included: the provision of training to all student officers in the Police College on responding to hate crime and repeat victimisation; leafleting campaigns to promote the reporting of racial incidents; engaging with local Health Trusts during the training of non-national nurses, to inform them of assistance available with racial incidents. The PSNI has also recently re-drafted its Association of Chief Police Officers 'Hate Crime Manual', as well as its hate crime policy, both designed to emphasise its serious approach to policing racist incidents (Latif, 2005). In addition, the PSNI has recognised the need to make changes within its actual make-up, as to represent the true reflection of the community, and accordingly it should therefore make moves to encourage black and minority ethnic applications (PSNI, 2002).

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