

INTRODUCTION

The August 2011 riots provided the pivotal moment when the changing nature of British urban youth cultures – specifically ‘the proliferation of violent youth gangs and the culture they ferment’ (Pitts, 2008:4) – was shown to the world via this spontaneous carnival of violence and criminality. Three months after the summer riots the coalition government launched its wide ranging ‘Ending Gang and Youth Violence’ (HM Government, 2011) initiative; at the close of 2011 the UK was officially in the grip of a gangs crisis. At the centre of this latest youth crisis was ‘gangsta rap culture’ which eulogised violent crime and the acquisition of wealth by any means necessary. This viewpoint was put forward by politicians and commentators such as the historian David Starkey – whom after the 2011 riots argued that white youths were becoming black by adopting the violent criminal values of ‘gangsta rap’ (Hastings, 2011). Indeed, the debates about dangerous urban youth cultures have largely been undertaken in the news-media, with stories drawing upon police statistics detailing the avalanche of violent crimes being committed on a daily basis by inner city youth gangs (Alderson, 2010; Bentham, 2014).

Considering the rich history of academic research examining working class youth subcultures in post War Britain, it is interesting to note that contemporary youth cultural studies and in particular ‘post modern subcultural theory’ (Blackman, 2005) has largely moved away from studying deviant and/or resistant cultures of poor and marginalised youth. Instead the field has been left to a small but growing number of youth gang criminologists who are largely detached from the ongoing debates about youth subcultures, transitions, identities,

race/ethnicity, hybridity, and agency (see for example Alexander, 2000; Cohen and Ainley, 2000; McDonald et al, 2001; Bose, 2003; Nayak, 2003; Sanders, 2005; Gidley, 2007; Gunter, 2010). Consequently, rather than challenging police-media driven discourses that portray contemporary urban youth cultures as inherently violent and criminogenic, gang academics have similarly tended to fixate solely on the negative aspects of the ‘Road based’ subcultures and lifestyles of marginalised urban youth.

This chapter will firstly revisit the concept of ‘Road culture’ (Gunter, 2008) as a means to understand the role and significance of subculture, in the lives of young people growing up in two East London neighbourhoods. The term ‘On Road’ is consistently referred to by the young respondents to capture and describe the social and cultural worlds that they both create and inhabit, indicating where (on the streets) and how they spend the majority of their leisure time, it also informs their musical preferences, dress wear/styles and speech patterns (also Gunter 2008, 2010). Drawing on the voices and direct experiences of young people, this chapter – in stark contrast to the dominant problem centred perspectives that focus on gangs and violent crime – will demonstrate that contemporary Road based subculture plays a largely positive and creative role in young people’s lives. This chapter will attempt to further contextualise the role of Road culture by examining the interconnectedness of ‘the personal troubles of the milieu’ and ‘the public issues of social structure’ (Mills, 1959:14); particularly with regard to how structural changes have impacted upon the lives of the young respondents.

ROAD CULTURE REVISITED AND BIOGRAPHY

The empirical data derives from an ethnographic study of young people’s cultures and transitions in two adjoining East London neighbourhoods, comprising in-depth biographical

interviews with 66 young adults aged 14 -24. The study attempts to give voice – filtered via the reflexive lens of the ethnographer – to its young participants with regard their experiences growing up in two poor and super-diverse neighbourhoods. I will revisit and update this the ethnographic study *'Growing Up Bad'* (2010), and will provide a locally situated counterweight to prevailing police-media and gang criminologist (mis)representations, that portray the Road based cultures and lifestyles of marginalised urban youth as being intrinsically criminogenic.

Before moving on to discuss the substantive findings of this study, it is incumbent that I firstly share my own brief biographical history with, and attachment to the research sites and informants. I have worked (and lived) in East London now for nearly twenty years, most notably as a detached (or street-based) community and youth worker. Consequently, I have been able to draw extensively on this knowledge and experience for both studies; particularly with regards to accessing the young research participants. Many of the participants featured in this study, were young people I had previously worked with:

...prior to the commencement of the field work. Field work methods entailed observing and interacting with my informants within a variety of settings – youth club, on the streets, in pubs and clubs, home environment... (Gunter, 2010:38).

As the 'art and science of describing a group or culture' (Fetterman, 1998:1) ethnography, notwithstanding its limitations has been central to my explorations of youth Road subcultures and transitions in East London. Researcher biases and 'meaning-making' judgements – of this study is that it incorporates both the stories of the young people featured and my

particular way of telling them (McCarthy-Brown, 2001:xi). In so doing, it allows for a more nuanced and 'reflexive' (Bourdieu, 1992) understanding and examination of the connections between the personal problems of the social actors and the changes in the global political economy that inform their everyday lived experiences (Mills, 1959).

ETHNICITY, YOUTH AND URBAN MARGINALITY

According to the 2011 Census, 64 per cent of the residents of Gulley and Dungle¹ neighbourhoods are from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background (ONS, 2012). In this study, approximately 10 per cent of the young respondents 'self identified' themselves as White British, 50 per cent as Black British or mixed (black/white) heritage, with the remainder describing themselves as White Other, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Moroccan, Iranian, Mauritian or Somalian. As well as being characterised by super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007) the research sites are also amongst the 20 per cent of most deprived neighbourhoods in England (HM Government, 2010). The neighbourhoods of Gulley and Dungle are part of Manton Estate – built in the early 1970s, comprised of high rise tower blocks and 8 storey flats, interspersed with owner-occupied Victorian terraced houses. Within the early part of the 2000s, Manton had been regenerated by the local Housing Action Trust into a low-rise housing estate.

Neo-liberal government social policies and local authority housing decisions had combined, by the late 1990s, to create pockets of socio-economic disadvantage in particular localities of the UK 'and on social housing estates in particular'(Coles et al., 2000:1). Correspondingly,

¹ All names referred to throughout this chapter, including participants and places are pseudonyms

some estates – or more precisely those ‘low status urban areas’ (Hope, 1996) such as Dungle and Gulley – are characterised by: above average concentrations of children, young people and lone-parent households; and high rates of unemployment, worklessness, educational disengagement, and crime. Over the past 20 years or so there has been a never ending loop of news-media headlines and comment pieces chronicling ‘broken Britain’ (BBC, 2010) lamenting the anti social and criminal activities of feral youth living on social housing estates in poor urban neighbourhoods. Panorama’s ‘Trouble on the Estate!’ (BBC, 2012) managed to distil all of these concerns into a one hour BBC television documentary about life on a housing estate in Blackburn. The documentary unsurprisingly uncovered a ‘troubled estate’ with high incidences of poverty, worklessness, lone-parent households and over-run with drugs and by gangs of young people engaging in criminal and anti-social behaviour.

Contemporary media-driven discourses about the anti-social and criminal subcultures of marginalised urban youth are part of a long history of moral panics (Cohen, 1972) and respectable fears (Pearson, 1983) concerning poor and working class youth in Britain. However, they have been updated to take in the additional public anxieties about race/immigration and problem housing estates. The perennial problematisation of poor youth centres upon their unsupervised use of decaying urban (public) spaces and resultant creation of deviant subcultures (Mays, 1954; Downes, 1966; Parker, 1974). Indeed, Bob Coles et al.’s study (2000) of young people’s experiences growing up on 10 deprived social housing estates in England and Wales, found that the biggest issue – according to ‘key adult players’ including residents, housing managers, police and youth workers – ‘related to groups of children and young people “hanging around”’(Ibid:24). Whilst there was a consensus amongst the key adult players about the problem of young people ‘hanging around’, there

was less agreement on the causes and solutions for this. The study's authors noted that young people did congregate in public spaces, sometimes in large groups and sometimes being boisterous and noisy. 'Hanging around' in public spaces is a historic and key feature of working class community life which has become increasingly criminalised (Blackman and Wilson 2014:291).

ROAD LIFE REALITIES I: LEISURE AND PLEASURE

In contrast to contemporary media-driven portrayals and discourses that criminalise and misinterpret the 'urban music'² based Road subcultures of marginalised young people, my earlier research findings found that Road culture largely played a 'seductive yet humdrum and functional role'. Indeed, as opposed to the 'spectacular' Road culture served as a means by which the young people 'derive camaraderie, entertainment as well as a strong sense of identity' (Gunter, 2010:93) and attachment neighbourhood life. At the heart of neighbourhood life is the public setting of the open space or 'Road',

Road culture in Manor (and the surrounding neighbourhoods) is played out predominantly within the public sphere, with young people choosing to spend the majority of their leisure time on the streets or within those open spaces to be found around the various local housing estates (Ibid:103).

Research evidence also points to the fact that street life is a central component of working class youth subcultural identities, leisure activities and neighbourhood attachment (Coles et

² UK Urban music might be referred to as the 'politically correct', and somewhat controversial, term for all contemporary music of black origin and incorporates black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993a) forms such as Hip Hop, modern RnB, and Bashment as well as UK forms like Grime, Funky House and Dubstep

Anthony Gunter, From Bad to Worse? Youth Perspectives, Identities and 'Road Life'(styles), in S. Blackman and M. Kempson Eds, *The Subcultural Imagination: Theory, Research and Reflexivity in Youth Cultures*, London: Routledge, ISBN: 978-1138844032, Publication date: 28/06/2016 [pre copy-edited version] chapter 3 pp 46-62

al., 2000; McCulloch et al., 2006; Shildrick, 2006; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007; Landolt, 2012; Neary et al., 2012). Furthermore, the public setting of the street / Road has significant historical cultural resonance throughout the black Atlantic (Liebow, 1967; Lieber, 1976; Anderson, 1990; Stolzoff, 2000; Sansone, 2003).

Recent criminological studies have made reference to 'on Road' subcultures of black and urban youth (Hallsworth and Silverstone, 2009; Earle, 2011; Iian, 2012; Young et al., 2013; Glynn, 2014) but solely in relation to gangs and violent crime. However, this over emphasis upon deviance largely misinterprets and ignores the larger and more significant role that Road culture plays in the lives of poor and BAME urban youth:

The young participant's in this study noted their own subtle but significant distinction between 'being on road' as opposed to 'living on road'. Whilst many of the young people spoke about 'being on road' and 'catching joke' with their friends, it was only those young people involved in 'badness'³ who were referred to as 'living on road' (Gunter, 2010:103).

The latter observation is still pertinent to Road life in Gulley and Dungle as it was a constant theme that recurred in group discussions and interviews with the young participants:

AG: Where do you spend most of leisure time?
Ramone If I ain't at college or at football then I'm on the endz with these lot

³ Here, badness refers to a social world characterized by hyper-aggressive/hyper-masculine modes of behaviour, and might involve fraud, violent crime, and low-level drug dealing.

- Jamal: On road..... with the fam ennit
Skitz: Yeah ...yeah OTF
All: [laughing]
AG: What happens on Road?
Ramone: Nothing really, Jus out doing whatever ennit. Kotch see whose about and that.
Skitz: Bus joke
Jamal: Link some Yats...
Skitz: Definitely on that.
Jamal: Go over Memorials
Skitz: Pass through the youth club...bare tings really. Yeah just out on Road
- AG: Just out doing whatever?
Jamal: Yeah, with the man dem, the girls. More time in summer there's nuff bodies around. Everything is lively like, always something happening when we're On Road. The youngers are usually trying a ting [being playfully rude]
Skitz; [laughing] You know them ones.
Jamal: They try it with you all the time to get a reaction. But man's aint on that running around getting all sweaty and shit
Skitz; Yeah but you have to ennit, its all jokes though still
Jamal: Something's always going down on Road, definitely

The majority of young people are involved in some way in the public settings of Road cultural life in their neighbourhoods, and this cuts across ethnicity and gender. Road life is particularly vibrant during the spring and summer months when the public spaces are full of young people on BMX bikes, skateboards, 'kicking ball', 'spitting bars'(rapping) over beats that are playing on their phones or just sitting on benches or play apparatus chatting and whiling away their time doing nothing (Corrigan, 1979). During the winter months neighbourhood life is quieter but there are still pockets of activity and movement on the streets. There is seemingly no particular pattern as to why the youth club is the place to be, for whatever reason, whilst at other times – and for relatively long periods of time – hardly anybody will 'go club'. Activities within 'club' are largely an extension of those activities undertaken in the other 'public spaces' of Road culture, so some young people will play

computer game consoles, 'deejay' and 'spitting' using clubs decks and microphone, or make their own beats on portable studios in club or just 'kotch' and 'bus joke'. Also there is always one young person whose home serves as the unofficial youth club/indoor hang out spot where young people can congregate and 'spit', play computer games or 'jus chill' and 'bus joke'. Additionally, Road life for some young people – particularly young women – also extended to meeting friends in shopping malls outside of the neighbourhood and going to the cinema or ice skating:

- Julie:sometimes go cinema. We been going to the mall quite a bit actually as well, since it opened. A load of us from the endz used to all go up there and just walk around and that, looking around all the shops. Its nice.
- AG: Does everyone go, I mean boys as well?
- Julie: Yeah, well at first anyway. But like the security started getting stupid and that, stopping and hassling some of the boys like on a regular, so now they ain't bothered as much. But we still like going up there and just walking around.

ROAD LIFE REALITIES II: RISK AND DANGER

From the ethnography Road life is central to the young people's neighbourhood identity and their leisure activities, it also represented a place of risk and danger – particularly to the young males (see also Evans et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 1996; Watt and Stenson, 1998; Reay and Lucey, 2000; Gunter, 2008; Kintrea et al., 2008; Parkes and Conolly, 2011). When walking about or hanging around the neighbourhood the young men tended to adopt a confident street persona or 'swagger', that indicated they could handle themselves physically if they had to and that they also had 'back up' if needed. In order to successfully pull off the 'swagger' the young males had to be dressed in the right 'garms' including designer clothes and sportswear, and tended to also adopt a slow and rhythmical walking style or 'bowling'.

This swagger was a visual signal that was deliberately given out by young males warning off potential foes indicating that they were not weak individuals or easy targets for bullying and robbery.

Many of the young people felt most safe when 'hanging about' within their own neighbourhoods, whilst at the same time being acutely aware of the dangers and risks posed outside their local area.

- AG: Where do you feel most safe?
Kaydee: In my area because I know where to go, where I can go and basically I know who I can contact. If you go somewhere you don't know, it can be a safer place.
AG: Yeah.
Kaydee: But there's always idiots on the road and always people out there to rob someone so. You just got to mind your back
AG: But generally you feel most safe in Gulley [name of neighbourhood]
Kaydee: Yeah, I feel more safe in Gully because I know what the threat is and where the safest spots are.
AG: And where would you say you feel least safe?
Kaydee: Probably in Haverhill, yeah, I'm not too bothered about it, I'd walk the Streets there, I couldn't give a f***k if someone tried to rob me, I wouldn't give them my phone, I'd rather get stabbed than f*****g give my stuff to them.
- Hamid: Definitely not Manley. I go to Manley. I used to go there on a regular, near enough every Tuesday because my Nan lives down there, but when I go down there on a bike ride, I've had people come to me, trying to stab me, one says he was going to shoot me. It didn't happen.

All of the young males talked about the threat of physical violence and robbery when travelling to and through different neighbourhoods:

- Milton: Like we would look at the school gates and then we'd see a bunch of people running. And like why they running?
AG: Yeah.

- Milton: And then someone will call me and they'll say yeah, blah, blah, blah these guys are here.
- AG: Yeah.
- Milton: And they're here for this one {some young person} and that's the way it is, and sometimes at my school people will come, for boys and if they're not there, they'll just come for whoever's around. I've had people getting stabbed in the head with a screwdriver, that's at my school.
- AG: Is that when you went to school in Manley [neighbouring borough]?
- Milton: No, no, I didn't go to school in Manley, I went to school in Riplets Bow [another neighbouring borough].

Apart from school the socio-spatial worlds of the young males was narrow and limited to the imagined boundaries of the neighbourhood estate. The young males only left the confines of their estate by themselves when they had to attend school, college, football training or visit family, otherwise they would deliberately visit other neighbourhoods mob-handed. This was done either for 'back up' and protection in numbers and this in itself is perceived by youth in other neighbourhoods as a provocative act, or to 'bring it' by engaging in retaliatory acts of violence in response to a previous incident or new threat of violence by young males from opposing neighbourhoods. Although it was the young males who were more at risk from getting drawn into Road Life 'beefs' [petty disputes that quickly escalated into violence with use of knives or even guns] and robberies, young women in the neighbourhood were not immune to these risks and dangers:

- AG: OK so what are the types of crime that happen in your area
- Jamila: Mugging people, people getting their phones nicked or something like that.
- Saraya: Yeah. My friend in the school, she was going home one day after a school club at school and she got loads of boys following her and they attacked her and took her phone and stuff.
- AG: Really?
- Saraya: Yeah, it was like this time of year where it gets dark earlier so she was like on the way home from school.

- AG: And how old is she?
Saraya: She's now in Year 10 but it was when she was in Year 9.
AG: Have you ever been a victim of any of these crimes.
Jamila: No but I've been chased by two people on bikes.
AG: And what did they want?
Jamila: I don't know, I don't know because my aunty lives in a place where there's an alleyway and I was walking down and they just started calling some random names and started running after me with their bikes and I just went into a shop.
Saraya: On the way to school in the morning me and my friend were walking and we got this boy come up to us with a pen, but he kind of pretended it was a knife or something. He was threatening us and saying he wanted to talk to someone else that we knew that's in the school and we basically said we don't know where they are. He followed my friend the day before as well to where she was going, so the next morning when he came up to us he was asking us questions and trying to threaten us.

OFFICIAL RISK DISCOURSES AND YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

The local authority, police and other justice sector agencies had labelled both of the neighbourhoods in this study as 'gang affected areas' and this was reflected with regards policing practice, and youth work provision. As was found in Hannah Smithson et al.'s (2013) study of a gang affected multi ethnic neighbourhood in the North West England, none of the young participants in this study identified with or validated the official risk discourses around 'gangs'. Most felt that the gang problem was a media invention and didn't speak about the daily realities of East London Road life.

- AG: Are any of your friends, or do you know anyone in a gang?
Uddin: No.
AG: You don't know anyone in a gang.
Mo: No. What do you mean by a gang?
AG: I don't know, you tell me. When people talk to me, they always talk about gangs.
Uddin: Gangs as in they mean a group of friends.
AG: Okay.

- Uddin: If you think a group of friends is a gang, then we can say then we know a lot of friends or group of friends, but I don't call them a gang as such. That's a strong word to say.
- Mo: It's the media.
- AG: So if there's violence between gangs it's just groups of friends who are fighting you think, it's not necessarily gangs.
- Mo: I wouldn't call them gangs.
- Uddin: It's one group of friends from one area and another group of friends from another area fighting.
- AG: So gang violence doesn't really exist you don't think?
- Uddin: No.
- Mo: No, not really. It might exist but not that I know of.

This is clarified by the young people who did use the term gang when discussing violence and crime – sometimes its use was pejorative reflecting the influence of news-media and official agencies' youth risk discourses (see also Parkes and Connelly, 2013).

- Debra: I do feel safe in my area, but there are a lot of gangs round here.
- AG: Do the gangs fight each other
- Debra: No, they don't fight each other. They all friends and hang around together.
- AG: Do they fight gangs from other areas?
- Debra: Some of them might, but mostly they just hang around area together doing stupidity.

During the ethnography I met with a 16 year old male, Marlon, who sat on the youth advisory panel of the local authority's borough-wide gang project and was officially described as an ex-gang member. I asked him about his experiences of gangs:

- Marlon: Really when I talk about being in a gang, mostly I'm just talking about me and my boys on the estate.... chillin and doing whatever [badness].
- AG: So the way you use the word gang is different to say how the gang project and police use it.
- Marlon: Yeah, I sit down with them [managers in gang project] all the time and try explain to them that this gang stuff ain't real on Road.

All of the young respondents depicted the nuanced complexities and dangers of Road Life beyond simplistic gang narratives and 'post code war' territorial disputes:

- AG: Do you think that there is a gang problem in East London?
Michael: There is a gang problem but that's only because if you go to someone else's area. They just want to rob you.
AG: And is this in relation to young people representing their postcodes in areas?
Howie: Yeah but I wouldn't really call it a postcode war, it's all about money.
Michael: It's just their way of getting through isn't it.
Howie: If you see another kid and honestly if they're not from like your own neighbourhood.
AG: Yeah.
Howie: You can rob them because you know the next day you're not going to see him walking down your road or at your front door.
AG: Okay but you wouldn't define these young people as gangs, you'd define them as friends, yeah, like you said, friends from certain areas?
Mike: Yeah.
Howie: Mates like in a group you know what I mean, if f***king, if they're all living in the same area they're going to be mates.
Michael: Because it's not really a postcode war it's basically more like. Mates in groups.
Howie: If you come to my area then basically you just rob someone.
AG: And there is no comeback
Howie: Exactly. More times they don't know who robbed them.

Whilst official youth risk discourses view gangs as inherently pathological, drawing on my biographical experiences and perspectives of its research subjects – maintains that Road life and gangs are normal and largely positive developments in young people's lives. As such this study is greatly sympathetic to Thrasher's (1927) understanding of gangs and more generally the Chicago School approach that emphasizes the normality of 'deviance' by explaining it in 'its cultural and community context in opposition to seeing it as a pathological condition'. (Blackman, 2014:498).

UNDERSTANDING URBAN YOUTH VIOLENCE

In attempting to examine both the causes and preventative solutions to urban youth violence criminologists and sociologists have been attracted to subcultural theories and identities linked to street gangs (Klein, 1995; Decker and Weerman, 2005; Pitts, 2008; Densley, 2013) territoriality (Kintrea et al., 2008) or retaliation / 'code of the street' (see Anderson, 1999; Gunter, 2008; Brookman et al., 2011 ; Parkes and Conolly, 2012). This is not surprising given that 'one of the attractions of the concept of subculture is its power to define and describe deviant behaviour in society' (Blackman, 2014:507). Within this study discourses around territoriality and the code of the street in conjunction with other neighbourhood factors – linked to poverty, worklessness, poor educational attainment, homelessness and overcrowding – provide better analyses for youth violence than do those that fixate on the escalation of youth gangs and their associated hyper violent youth cultures (Pitts, 2008).

Responses from the young people about the causes of crime and youth violence included bad parenting, lack of youth centres, poverty, the media, status and peer pressure – trying to emulate the badness (and the neighbourhood respect that comes with it) and reputations of older siblings and peers:

- AG: So you think more youth clubs would help reduce crime in the area?
Rafi: It'll be good for the little kids, because little kids are getting influenced by the older kids.....because for the little one's basically there's nothing happening in Dungle. I remember when there was youth clubs.
Karl: Even I used to go to a youth club, and when the youth club stopped everyone needed somewhere to hang out.
AG: Yeah.
Rafi: Yeah, so basically for younger kids, because younger kids have nowhere to go so they go with their older brother and go out. Basically

- just his being with him and his friends, that's it and then I know my other cousin he was twelve and he used to carry a gun.
- AG: Yeah.
- Rafi: And when I found out I just slapped him up got it off him and threw it in the bin.
- AG: So you think peer pressure is a big factor?
- Santi: Yeah cos its like, all this badness and robbery ting that they're on, I think it's because like the young ones they're looking to the elders isn't it, like and they see what the elders do, so like they just following the footsteps, some of them don't need to do this ting because like they do have houses and things like that but I think they just do it because of the peer pressure really you know what I mean.

Whilst some young people felt that peer pressure was a key factor with regards youth violence and crime in the neighbourhood, many participants talked about the need to have 'back up' or the protection that comes from 'moving' in a big group of friends:

- Jamila: I think that some people don't know what the meaning of gangs are. Like, because gangs might mean a little group of friends.
- AG: do you know anyone that's been part of gangs at all?
- Jamila: I think my brother has probably been involved but I don't really know. Like he's older now but like when he was younger he always used to get in trouble and stuff like that. And like when I was younger I used to get bullied by this girl at primary school and he [brother] kind of ended up having an argument with her older brother and so it kind of didn't help him. And then he would be telling his friends and stuff moved on from there. So yes.
- Saraya: Three of my cousins, they are involved in gangs but not like the sort of gangs where the police think they are going to do crime, like just a gang, but like a big group of friends hanging around.
- Jamila: Yes, if someone says they are involved in a gang it's like they just want to be involved just so they know that if something goes wrong they have their back and they are going to help them.

The viewpoints of these young participants echo the arguments of Waller (1932:180 discussion of Thrasher's classic study which asserts that 'the gang makes an indispensable contribution to personality, and a contribution which adults sometimes overlook' (Blackman, 2014:498).

CONCLUSION

Contemporary media-driven discourses about urban youth tend to be focussed upon crime and anti-social behaviour, with their subcultures seen as the driving force behind gang related violence and crime. According to the popular media (and police) and some gang academics, the negative influence of Black Atlantic popular musical forms such as 'gangsta rap' have negatively impacted upon the Road based subcultures of young people growing up in 'low status urban areas' (Hope, 1996) stigmatised by crime, poverty and immigration. Rather than focussing upon the acute social and economic disadvantage faced by young people (and their families), media and gang academic discourses instead are fixated with gangs, guns and knives and the continuing racialisation and criminalisation of urban youth subcultures.

This chapter maintains that in spite of those broader problems associated with stigmatised poor urban neighbourhoods, Road based subculture plays a largely positive role in their lives. There are real risks and dangers associated with Road life in the neighbourhood linked to violence and robbery. This chapter opposes John Pitts' (2008:4) who argue that youth subcultures in Britain have changed irrevocably for the worst and created a 'proliferation of violent youth gangs'. Within the research sites featured in this study at least, robbery and associated youth violence – a genuine risk, although not the dominating feature, of Road life – was caused by a complex combination of factors including poverty, media reporting, peer pressure and the glorification of 'badness' within the urban music based styles, aesthetics and attitudes of contemporary Road youth culture (see Gunter, 2010). Lastly, it is important to remember that whilst contemporary debates about violent urban youth crime seem new, they in fact should be viewed as a continuation of longstanding populist crises about feral /

delinquent / hooligan / undisciplined / unsupervised poor, working class and black youth
(Mays, 1954; Cohen, 1972; Pearson, 1983; Hall et al., 1978; Keith, 1993).

GLOSSARY

Badness: refers to a social world characterised by 'spectacular' hyper aggressive/hyper masculine modes of behaviour, usually centring around violent/ petty crime and low level drug-dealing.

Back up: where young person can call on the physical support of friends, neighbourhood peers or family members where there is/has been threat of violence.

Beats: instrumental music tracks produced by young people themselves or taken from an already existing piece of recorded music.

Beef: is where a young person (or group of young people) has a dispute or argument with another young person or group.

Bowling: a slow rhythmic and confident style of walking adopted by young males

'Bring it' or 'Move to': where a group of young men violently assault a smaller group (or an individual) of young men

'Bus Joke' or 'Catching joke': is where young people relay humorous stories and situations back to each other, talk about girls or boys and generally 'diss' (name calling/mickey taking) each other.

Garms: refers to clothes/dress wear

'Kicking ball': playing football

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'Kotch' or 'Chillin': is to sit down and relax/ stay in one place as opposed to 'passing through'.

Linking Yats: sexual liaisons between young men and young women – more than just friends but less than girl/boyfriends. In this instance Yats refers to young women.

On the Endz: where young person is referring to being in their own neighbourhood.

OTF: refers to phrase 'only the fam' (family), fam/family here relates to a close group of neighbourhood peers / friends.

Pass through: visiting a place but not intending to stay for very long

Swagger: confidence and style when 'kotching' or moving about the neighbourhood'

'Spitting' or MC ing: to rap song lyrics via use of rhythmic word flow and rhyming techniques.

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