

PARALLEL LIVES AND POLARISATION
BSA 'Race' and Ethnicity Study Group Seminar

Note: this is the paper that was delivered in part at the above Seminar. It is in the process of being modified – in other words, this is “work in progress”. A final version will be available at the end of August, all being well.

18th May 2002 City University, London

The Northern 'race riots' of the summer of 2001 – were they riots, were they racial? A case-study of the events in Harehills, Leeds

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1 Introduction: listing recent violent urban protests

To anticipate one of my arguments in this paper, I shall use my preferred term 'violent urban protest' in place of the concept of riot. I shall justify this usage later. The background to this paper is as follows. Violent urban protest took place in Oldham, in Lancashire, in the north of the UK, mainly over four days at the end of May, 2001 (Saturday 26th to Tuesday 29th) with a firebombing of the home of the British Asian Deputy Mayor, Councillor Riaz Ahmad, on Friday 1st June. Violence took place in several parts of Oldham with high populations of residents of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin. Councillor Ahmad's house was extensively damaged and he, and his family, narrowly escaped with their lives (Oldham Independent Review [OIR], December 2001, p. 71). Just over a month later, over the night of 5th June, violent protest took place in the Harehills area of Leeds, in West Yorkshire (*Yorkshire Evening Post*, 6 June 2001). Harehills is an inner city area which has a high proportion of residents of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin. Just over two weeks later, violent protests took place in Burnley, Lancashire (23rd – 25th June) (Burnley Task Force Summary Report December 2001 p. 5). After about another fortnight, urban violence took place on the afternoon and evening of 7th July, in Bradford, West Yorkshire, mainly in the inner city area, where there is a high proportion of people of Pakistani origin (*Yorkshire Evening Post*, 9 July 2001).

The press usually defined these events as the worst riots in the UK for fifteen years. Since there were no significant 'riots' in 1986, their marker must be

presumed to be major events in 1985. Violent urban protest took place in Liverpool on 30th August (an attack on a police station), in the Handsworth area of Birmingham on 9th – 11th September (two dead, 50 properties gutted by fire), in the Brixton area of London (a siege of a police station on 28th September, and protests on the streets in response to the shooting of a black mother, Mrs Cherry Groce); in the Tottenham area of London when violence erupted in response to the death of another black mother, Mrs Cynthia Jarret, during a police raid on her house, culminating in the murder of a police officer, Keith Blakelock (Benyon and Solomos 1987 pp 15-21, Hiro 1992 pp. 97-9, Gilroy 1987 pp. 236-45).

Reference might also have been made, had the journalists done their research, to the violent disorder that broke out throughout the UK during 1981. On the night of 10th July 1981, so-called riots took place in Moss Side (Manchester, 53 arrests), throughout London (385 arrests), Birmingham (42 arrests), Wolverhampton (22 arrests), Liverpool (65 arrests), Preston (24 arrests), Hull (27 arrests) and Luton (one arrest). Over the week-end of 10th – 11th July 1981 there was further disorder in Manchester, London and Birmingham, and in another 25 cities and towns, including Leeds, Bradford and Tunbridge Wells, with a further 1,065 arrests. The precursor to this conflagration was violent protest in the St Paul's area of Bristol (2nd April 1981, 100 arrests), in Brixton, London (9 – 13 April, 244 arrests), Finsbury Park, London (20th April, 91 arrests), Southall, London (3rd July, 23 arrests), Toxteth, Liverpool (3rd – 8th July, 200 arrests) (Farrar 1982, p. 7, Benyon and Solomos 1987 pp 3-15). And the '2,000 mainly black citizens, many in their mid-teens' who fought the police during and after a raid on the Black and White Café in St Paul's, Bristol, on 2nd April 1980 should also be mentioned in this context (Hiro 1992 p. 85, Gilroy 1987 pp. 237-40), as should the attack on the Leeds' police launched by black youth in Chapeltown on 5th November 1975 (twelve arrests, Farrar 2002) and the violent battles between black youth and the police at the Notting Hill Carnival in London on 30th August 1976 (both of which are undocumented, so far as I can see, in the published histories of black Britain). Table I summarises these events.

This is not the place to provide a proper history of these events. But it is important to list them, in order to place the events last summer in the Northern towns in the context of more than twenty years of violent urban protest involving significant numbers of black (African-Caribbean and Asian) British youth. In the following sections, I shall discuss the particular events in Harehills in Leeds in an effort to dispel the conceptual and theoretical confusion that surrounds these protests. I shall argue that these are not 'riots', but violent urban protests. The protests in Harehills, I will demonstrate, were not 'race riots', but were protests by racialised British men, which were at least in part a response to perceived racism by the West Yorkshire Police.

Table 1 Violent urban protest in the UK since 1975

2 The events in Harehills

Show OHPs

The front page story about the events in Harehills has a one-word headline stretching across all of its four columns: **AMBUSHED**. The story opens as follows:

Outsiders are believed to be responsible for starting last night's riot which rocked Harehills in Leeds.

Police were ambushed at the start of six hours of rioting in which 25 cars

were torched, shops and other premises wrecked and buses and cars stoned. The violence involved up to 300, mainly Asian, youths (*Yorkshire Evening Post Leeds Edition* [YEP] 6 June 2001, p. 1).

Key words in the four inside pages devoted to these events include 'petrol bombs', 'missiles', 'violence', and 'looters'. While 'mayhem' and 'disturbances' are used as descriptors, the YEP's favourite noun is 'riot' and its favourite verb is 'rioting'. The police were reported to be investigating the possibility that the 'outsiders' 'may have travelled across from Oldham, the scene of violent race riots last week' (YEP 6.6.02 p. 4). The allegation that 'outsiders' cause 'riots' is a familiar trope in the reporting of violent urban protests. Equally familiar, and replicated in Harehills, is the complete absence of any justification for that allegation, still less any prosecutions of people from outside the city. I will offer various deconstructions of these reports below.

3 'Riot' as the dominant framing device

The concept of 'riot' is the organising tool for the discourse that is generated not only in the media, tabloid, broad-sheet, radio and television, but also in most of the official reports that are sometimes produced after these events. It functions to block a proper debate about what is really at stake. The Collins dictionary defines 'riot' succinctly as 'a disturbance made by an unruly mob of three or more persons'. A 'mob' is a 'rabble' (Collins 1987). In the media discourse on Harehills, as we have seen, 'riot' and the image of fire dominates the text, supported by images of a broken car windscreen and the broken window of a launderette. The editorial and the news report also offer explanations. Home Secretary Jack Straw is quoted as saying that there is 'no excuse' for this 'criminal behaviour'. According to the editorial:

[T]heories of racial feuding, heavy-handed policing and angry community dissatisfaction are rife throughout Leeds and beyond.
But what seems undeniable is that rioting, which has shocked and disgraced a neighbourhood well used to peacefully sharing a diverse mixture of cultures and backgrounds, was intricately planned [and] criminally choreographed.
Barbaric episodes of rioters hurling petrol bombs, bricks, wooden crates, bottles and stones, produced a depressing tableau depicting a city at odds with itself and communities uneasy with each other (YEP 6.6.02 p. 4).

This editorial moves from the interpretative 'theories' sentence in its first paragraph to the descriptor 'barbarism' in the third by use of the tenuous connector of 'undeniable' criminality in the second. But the second paragraph contains both the opposite of the theory of racial feuding asserted in the first

paragraph – Harehills is described as a peaceful mix of various cultures – and a confirmation of the allegation made in the first paragraph that the ‘communities’ in Harehills are now at loggerheads. In other words, this editorial lists a number of hypothetical causes of the ‘riot’ and then asserts one – barbarous criminality – as the ‘undeniable’ explanation without any explicit argument or evidence to back its choice. No less an authority than the Home Secretary has been quoted making almost the same point in the news report, and the *YEP*’s editor is thus assisting the government’s effort to attain hegemony for its particular analysis of these events. There is, however, one extra step that the newspaper has made over and above the Home Secretary’s. The use of the concept of ‘barbarism’, combined as it is with the descriptors ‘primitive and grotesque’ in the final paragraph of the editorial, returns us to the racist identifications of non-whites that have been in circulation in the West since the early nineteenth century. Not only are these young Asian men to be understood as violent criminals, they are also to be apprehended as grotesque, primitive and barbaric.

It is important to analyse the use of media images, since these have particularly powerful effects, particularly among those who pay less attention to the written word. Colour film and still photography makes the use of images which include fire particularly attractive to journalists. Both the four column front page photo and the five column page three photos in the *YEP* on the day after the harehills events have fire as their focal point. Television images were similarly dominated by flames. While there might have been a benign semiotic of fire in the days when most people had open coal or wood fires in their homes, it is now impossible to read images of fire in post-industrial societies without there being a connotation for the majority of readers of danger to bodies and to property. When these images are combined, as they are in the photographs of Harehills, with police officers in protective clothing, wearing helmets and carrying shields, extreme threat and criminality is signified. At least that must be the dominant, hegemonic reading (Hall 1980) of these images and texts. Alongside the myth (Barthes 1993) of their primitive barbarism, the preferred reading of these words and images is that these people are unpredictable, irrational, uncontrollable. They can only be comprehended, so the reader is expected to believe, as a criminal mob. These Others violently challenge all that the Normals hold dear. These events, in summary, are framed in terms of selfish and violent individualism, unconstrained by the norms and values which regulate the legitimate everyday life of the mass of the population, perpetrated by people who are beyond the pale, outside the confines of civilisation.

That there is a problem with the repeated use of the term riot to frame these events is briefly acknowledged in the summary of the report written about the violence in Burnley in June 2001. The enquiry team acknowledged that it had been criticised for even going so far as to describe the events in Burnley as ‘civil disturbances’. The report states:

The Task Force want to make it clear that Burnley does not deserve a reputation as being a riotous town. It accepts that criminal acts and criminal damage took place . . . Nevertheless it is felt that, bad as they were, the incidents should not be described as 'riots' (Burnley Task Force Summary Report 2001 p. 5).

It stuck to its term 'disturbance', and went on to make quite clear its view the 'disturbances were caused originally by criminal acts involving both Asian and White criminal gangs which were followed by deliberate attempts to turn the violent acts into racial confrontation' (Burnley Task Force Summary Report 2001 p. 5).

The report on the events in Oldham in late May also exhibits unease over the terminology to be used. Opening unequivocally with the statement that Oldham was 'the scene of the worst racially motivated riots in the UK for fifteen years', two paragraphs later it refers to the events in Bradford, Leeds and Burnley as 'disturbances' (Oldham Independent Review Report 2001 p.2). In its sub-title to the History Appendix to the Report, however, it writes: 'Events leading up to, during and immediately after the May *riots*' (Oldham Independent Review Report 2001 p. 68; my emphasis) while referring throughout these four pages to 'incidents', 'clashes', 'threatening behaviour', 'racist abuse', saving the word 'riots' for the Saturday 26th May, and returning to 'disorder', 'attacks on pubs', 'firebombing' and 'incidents' for the following three days. While there is no open reflection on the sociological and political implications on the choice of terms used, this Report does at least indicate some effort to distinguish the various types of events that were taking place over this period.

On the other hand, the major enquiry commissioned by the Home Secretary's Ministerial group on Public Order and Community Cohesion shortly after the violent protests in the Northern towns plays down reference to 'riot', mainly using instead the term 'disturbances'. It provides the shortest possible narrative the actual events themselves (Cantle Report 2001, Foreword and p. 5, p. 15). This narrative is, however, significant in framing the events in the context of illegal drug sales and use, making specific reference to the Burnley events:

One activity which sadly seems to be present within all the communities we visited [Oldham, Burnley, Bradford, Southall, Birmingham and Leicester – Leeds was not deemed worthy of a visit] was drug dealing . . . There was even some suggestion that in Burnley, some of the rioting which centred around a particular pub used by white youths and which was burnt down by a crowd of ethnic minority youths was in fact the result of a 'turf war' between drug gangs rather than a direct racist attack. Drug dealing was not confined to the poorer areas we visited. We were told that Southall, which is relatively prosperous compared to other places we saw, was the cheapest place in Britain to buy heroin (Cantle Report 2001,

p.16).

This mellifluous civil service prose contains all the key terms of the dominant discourse on these events: youth, gangs, war, fire, drugs, and riot. The report spatialises its discussion in towns in which there are areas of relatively high British Asian populations so, despite the reference to white criminals, this is a highly racialised discourse in which the focus is mainly, given the pay-off sentence on Southall, on violent, *Asian* criminal gangs.

The key sociological problem in these official reports and in the media stories is that serious analysis of the cause of these events is pre-empted either by setting them within the discursive framework of 'riot', and even where this term is partially replaced by 'disturbance', by erasing any detailed account which includes the meanings attached to these events by the participants themselves. I should note here just how difficult it can be to obtain these accounts and I am by no means satisfied with my own efforts so far to gain first-hand knowledge of the life-worlds of those who participated in the Harehills' protests. Both journalists and highly-resourced official enquiry teams can, however, gain access to these accounts, and their omission from the record is a conceptual-political failure of great significance.

4 'Violent urban protest' – not 'riot'

Before I turn to locally-derived accounts of these events in Harehills, we need to examine the sociological analyses of the so-called riots that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. The events in Chapeltown (1975) and Notting Hill (1976) were not presumed significant enough to be allocated a chapter in the book titled *Racism and Political Action* edited by Robert Miles and Annie Phizaklea and published in 1979. But John Rex, whose Weberian studies of the Handsworth and Sparkbrook areas of Birmingham in the 1970s provided him with the opportunity to observe black community and political organisation at first hand, had a chapter called 'Black Militancy and Class Conflict'. This chapter, despite its patronising dismissal of some aspects of black youth politics, concluded 'that the black political movements are moving towards a posture of defensive confrontation and that they are quite realistic in doing so' (Rex 1979 p. 91). Although he made no reference to the protests it provoked, Rex referred to the police operation against pickpockets at the Notting Hill Carnival of 1976 as 'extraordinary' (Rex 1979 p. 90).

In a collection of articles on the so-called riots of the 1980s edited by Benyon and Solomos (1987), John Beynon provided a typology of the discourses surrounding these events. There were three identifiable positions among those who offered explanations of what they usually called riots:

1. conservative: these are criminal activities by morally degenerate 'riffraff' who have no respect for law and order, possibly stimulated by political agitators;

2. liberal: poverty and relative deprivation give rise to aggression and/or cognitive dissonance; and
3. radical: alienated, politically marginal people perceive the injustice of their situation and respond violently (Benyon 1987).

While there is no specific critique of the concept of 'riot' in this book, Benyon seeks to establish the term 'urban unrest' in place of 'riot', the term which is unreflectively used in the conservative and liberal discourses. Rex's concept of 'defensive confrontation', if applied to so-called riots, would, I think, fit in the radical category since he situates his analysis within the systematic exclusion of black people from the trade union movement, the housing market and the education system, and he sees their confrontational response as rational and justifiable. (It should be noted, however, that he does not specifically examine the two so-called riots which had occurred in 1975 and 1976, but he certainly was aware of them.) In his chapter in the Benyon/Solomos book Stuart Hall picks up the term 'urban unrest', arguing that 'the central question concerns the extensive alienation of the black population in this society, and urban unrest flows from that deep sense of injustice' (Hall 1987). Given the sensitivity displayed in the Burnley report, and to some extent in the Cattle and Oldham reports, to the use of the term 'riot', it is worth noting that the thesaurus included in the Word 1997 software includes both 'unrest' and 'disturbance' among its synonyms for 'riot'.

Another sociological analysis of the 1981 and 1985 so-called riots appears in the final chapter of Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987). Here Gilroy makes an interesting attempt to employ Tourraine's, Castells' and Melucci's 1980's social movements theories to what he initially terms the 'disorderly protest' (1987 p. 224) exemplified in the events of 1981 and 1985. Later he uses the terms 'disruptive protest' (p. 236) and 'riotous protests' (p. 244), but his shorthand throughout the chapter is riot, without scare quotes or other qualifiers. Gilroy is perfectly clear, however, that these events are to be understood as rational, organised, and as 'conveying antagonism to the world as it is', embodying 'a view of how participants would like it to be'. They are not reducible to "'marginality" and "deviance", terms which imply that they are nothing more than crude reactions to crisis, lacking cognitive, affective and normative dimensions' (1987 p. 237).

>>>> Insert discussion of Keith (1993) esp Ch 4 <<<<<<<<<<

My own initial characterisation of the so-called riots in Chapeltown and Harehills in Leeds in 1975 and in 1981 would be also be placed in the 'radical' category, since I sought to theorise those events as 'uprisings' by black and, in 1981, white working class youth who were responding politically to racism, unemployment and police brutality (Farrar 1982). I was in good company, since Linton Kwesi Johnson, then in the *Race Today Alliance*, published a poem about 'insurrection' of black youth (Johnson 1984), and even some journalists adopted

'uprising' as their descriptor (Kettle and Hodges 1982). This word also appears in the Word 97 thesaurus as an alternative to 'riot'. By the end of the 1990s, however, I had been forced to confront the fact that, if these events were as politically motivated as the term uprising implies then we might have expected to see some rather different practices in this area than those that were evident by the beginning of the 1990s. By then I interpreted the growth of ethnic segmentation, apolitical professionalisation and individualism, the collapse of radical, local organisations, the growth of hard drug sales and use, and other criminal activity among a small but significant section of the youth as evidence that my assumption that a radical politics was underpinning the protests of in Chapeltown in 1975 and 1981 was not secure (Farrar 2002). Thus I now reject the term 'uprising' as a replacement for 'riot', since it imputes conscious political meanings to these events which are not usually held by the majority of the participants. But the other proposed alternatives – 'defensive confrontation', 'unrest' and 'riotous protest' – have significant drawbacks. Rex's use of 'defensive' is misleading in relation to these events, since participants have engaged in a violent attack on the police and property; Benyon and Hall's 'unrest' fails to capture the intense hostility that underlies these attacks; and Gilroy's use of 'riotous' fails to undermine the effort to establish as hegemonic the theory that these events are mere acts of criminality. The phrase I now seek to substitute for 'riot' is 'violent urban protest'. This picks up Benyon's point that these are specifically urban phenomenon, and suggests we should examine the spaces in which they occur – spaces which are socially produced, as Lefebvre (1991) has argued, within the political and economic processes of the modern city. It also picks up Gilroy's point that these events are best understood as forms of protest, and that, therefore, social movement theory will be relevant to their analysis. What I have termed elsewhere the 'proto-politics' of these events, therefore, require examination (Farrar 2002). But I want to stress the use of 'violent' as an important constituent of the term. It is the forceful and dramatic use of violence which distinguishes these phenomena from the other types of political action we observe and engage with in the inner city. It is the move away from the seminar and onto the street as the form of negotiation with the police, the decision to destroy the urban fabric rather than to debate the best methods of regeneration that draws a fierce ideological line between the participants and the rest of the inner-city population. This violence requires close examination if we are to understand the trouble up north in 2001. An article on 'the fires that bruned across Lancashire and Yorkshire through the summer of 2001' by Arun Kundnani (2001) of the Institute of Relations provides one point of departure. Contrasting these events with the 'uprisings' and 'organised community self-defence' of 1981 and 1985', Kundnani describes them as 'the violence of hopelessness . . . the violence of the violated'. This is not the view adopted here.

Towards a sociology violent protest in Harehills

I now turn to an outline of the concepts and theories that are necessary if we are

to begin to properly comprehend the events in Harehills in June 2001. I say 'comprehend' but I could equally well say 'interpret' because the sociology to which I am committed does not make claims to anything so grand as explanation. The conceptual building blocks for my interpretation are: space, racialisation, masculinity and the symbolic role of violence in disrupting local social relationships. The sociology I am trying to apply here is one which is as concerned with the emotional dimensions of everyday life as with the material dimensions, and seeks to focus simultaneously on the meanings held by participants in these events and on their underlying structures.

First, I want to apply an approach to the space called Harehills which is derived from the work of Henri Lefebvre. Territorially, the Harehills area can be mapped in two ways – in the form known to officialdom, and the form known to local knowledge. Officially, it is the name of an electoral ward whose boundaries are precisely known only to the electoral registration officer and party workers. It is on the inner north east side of the city of Leeds and it includes part of the area known as Gipton. The ward's physical composition partly reflects the ethnic composition, with the densely-packed nineteenth century terraced housing being more likely to be occupied by British Asians and some British African-Caribbeans, while the 1930s council and private semis and small tenements (in a municipal version of the garden city plan) are much more likely to be occupied by white people. This large territory of about 9,000 houses lends itself to being roughly divided, in local knowledge, into an Asian area and a white area. I have not yet completed an enumeration district analysis of the ward, but I would estimate that the area popularly mapped as Asian – mainly to the east of Roundhay Road until it reaches the green, open spaces of Gipton – contains a small majority of British Asians, making it very easy for it to be thought of as an Asian area. This is the area known locally as Harehills, while the white area of the ward called Harehills is distinguished by the historic name of this piece of land, Gipton. With a spatialised ethnic division like this, it was no surprise that the British National Party chose the Harehills ward as its only target seat in the council elections of May 2002.

>>>> Figure 1: Map of the area known as Harehills

The first point to stress, then, is that Harehills is space of representation, as Lefebvre would put it, as well as a territory. As such, 'Harehills' (the inverted commas signify the space as locally understood, rather than the electoral ward) stands for the low-income British Asians of Leeds. Specifically, it symbolises the Pakistani working class in the city, since the significant presence of low-income Bangladeshis in the area is off-set by their own symbolic locale lying in an area of south Leeds around the Dewsbury Road. Higher-income British Asians tend to live to the north of Harehills.

>>> insert EDU material on Harehills' economic position.

In passing, we should note the repeated use of the concept of 'self segregation' in the official reports on Burnley and Oldham protests. Such a formulation of the development of near apartheid in those cities implies, in the tradition of Chicago School sociology, that there is a natural ecology of the city, and that the processes which result in the separation of neighbourhoods by ethnicity is a natural, freely-chosen process. On the contrary, these processes are better understood as structurally related to the economic position of the original migrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh, to their exclusion from the council housing market, their ability only to buy the cheapest and oldest property available, often combined with 'red-lining' by mortgage companies, and last but by no means least to the experience of racist exclusion whenever they attempted to move to 'white' areas. In Harehills, there is a significant presence of low-income whites and British Caribbeans in the area coded as Asian, as a result of an even more complex pattern of factors. Many of the British Caribbeans and whites are in a similar economic position to the British Pakistanis and Bengalis. The older British Caribbeans will have experienced similar problems of exclusion within the council housing market. The whites will have been persistently excluded on the grounds that they are the undeserving poor. Other black and white residents are on similar incomes, but, because they work in the arts or the voluntary sector or are students, have greater access to cultural capital, and are often highly committed to multi-culturalism. (During the May elections, the Anti Nazi League amazed itself by collecting about 50 mainly local people to its Harehills meeting. The whole area was leafleted very quickly by a large team of volunteers.) Thus in Harehills we do not observe the voluntarism suggested in the reports on Oldham and Burnley, except in so far as some of the white and some of the black people have chosen to take jobs in low-paid sectors of the economy when their education and training would otherwise have provided access to higher-paid jobs. For the majority of residents, living in Harehills is structured by economic and racial factors.

But the symbolic registration of 'Harehills' as 'Asian' helps us understand why, of the 25 sentenced mainly for arson and violent disorder in the following March, only seven lived in Harehills. Of the other eighteen, eleven had travelled across the city to take part in the protests, while the other seven lived in areas adjoining Harehills. Nine of those sentenced lived in areas which are usually thought of as prosperous. They ranged in age from fifteen to 32. Apart from one white man and one African-Caribbean, all were British Asians with Muslim names. In deciding to join those who already lived in the physical space known as Harehills, a majority of those sentenced apprehended the streets off the main Roundhay Road as a representative space of Asian-ness in Leeds. They responded to mobile phone-calls from their friends, or they saw something going on and jumped off the bus taking them home, because this was an important symbolic space in Leeds for the performance of Asian-ness. But it represented something more specific than merely 'being Asian'.

To explore this further, we need to pay close attention both to the accounts of these events that participants have provided and to the structural processes of racialisation which operate in the UK. I am still in the process of assembling first-hand accounts by participants in the Harehills protests, but it is clear from the second-hand accounts I am gathering from professionals who work with these young men, and from the occasional sentence in newspaper reports, that the context for these events was the prevalent view among those who took part that the West Yorkshire police force operates against young Asian men in a racially discriminatory fashion. Major urban confrontations like these always have a trigger event, and in Harehills this was the arrest of 31 year old British Bangladeshi man, Hosein Miah, on the previous Sunday, while driving his car. He was stopped, according to the arresting officer, on suspicion of either driving a stolen car, or having a stolen tax disc. Local people witnessed the officer using CS gas while arresting Mr Miah, remonstrated with the officer, and the officer called for back-up. Subsequently a large delegation, including the one British Asian councillor for Harehills, went to the police station to seek his release. Further consultations were promised, but did not materialise and a man described in the local paper as 'the leader of a gang of around 30 youths' was quoted on the following Wednesday as saying that "We were making a protest about the arrest on Sunday. And there should be a proper enquiry" (*YEP* 7.6.02 p. 2). Mr Miah's account had sufficient credibility with white members of Parliament for the Harehills area for them to back his official complaint against the police. When the Crown Prosecution Service subsequently refused to bring a prosecution against the officer, George Mudie, MP for Leeds East was quoted as saying "I cannot see how they can say lack of evidence when many prominent members of the public were looking on in horror". Fabian Hamilton, MP for Leeds North East, also said he was very surprised by the decision (*Yorkshire Post*, 29.4.02 p. 1).

The so-called gang leader saw the Miah arrest as part of a wider pattern of events. He was quoted as saying: "Asians are always getting stopped by the police. They see us as an easy target" (*YEP* 7 June 2001 p. 2). Exactly this view was reported to me as the cause of the events by a British Asian youth worker, born in Harehills, who works with youths involved in these events. He describes these youths as experiencing police harassment "for no apparent reason" as they sit in their cars, "chilling out" or driving around the area. "The majority just smoke weed", and they get picked on, "while the street sellers are just ignored" (NS, interview 20.3.2002). Significantly, NS was emphatic that this was not a 'race riot', contradicting the newspaper editorial's 'theories of racial feuding' (*YEP* 6.6.01 p. 4), and also distinguishing the events in Harehills from those in Oldham a few days before. The gang leader quoted above was similarly explicit. He was quoted as going on to say: "The police are trying to turn this into a race issue but it's not. It's about police intimidation" (*YEP* 7.6.01 p. 2). But when I asked NS if the root of the grievance was that British Asian youth felt

they were being singled out because they were Asian, he said that was the case, and in that sense 'race' was operating in this affair. Banton's concept of racialisation therefore applies very well here. Building on Banton's early statement of this concept (see Miles 1982, p. 11), and on the work of Colette Guillaumin (1995), Robert Miles has defined the concept of 'racialisation' as follows. It refers

to those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities (Miles 1989 p. 75).

'Harehills' in inverted commas has been differentiated from the electoral ward called Harehills by the process of racialising this space and its inhabitants. The young Asian British men who use this space for recreational purposes are, they say, being differentiated by the police from other users, white and African Caribbean, by the signifiers of their hair and skin colour. The implications of this structural process of differentiation is understood by those who participated in the Harehills protests as having life-changing implications when it is deployed by an agency with the structured power of the criminal justice system – and they decided on this occasion to signify their rejection of those processes. Thus the specific sense in which Asian-ness is being deployed by these young men seems to be this. They mobilise themselves as 'men who are being treated unfairly by the police who racialise them as Asians and thus as easy targets'. On other occasions, such as their attendance at Mosque on Fridays, they exemplify their identity as Muslims. On many other occasions, they can be seen living out their lives in much the same way as low-income, inner-city men of all ethnicities.

Additionally, it would be a mistake to simply concur with the media that only British Asians were involved in these events. Of the 25 sentenced in March, one was white and another was Caribbean. Informal reports say that there were larger proportions of white and Caribbean youth involved than the arrests imply. There is no space here to discuss the report that Caribbean youth escaped arrest because their street clothing – particularly the use of hooded garments and baseball caps – allowed them to evade the extensive use by the police of video surveillance cameras in making arrests. The main point to stress is that the process of racialisation of Asians needs to be analysed in the context of the similar processes of racialising people of African-Caribbean origin, as well as noting the identification of white youth with their British Asian and Caribbean peers.

Attention must also be paid to another social signifier of biological origin: masculinity. In both the press reports and in the account presented by the British Asian youth worker the notion that Asians are a soft touch, or an easy target, is prominent. NS said that the young men were making a statement of the form:

“We’re not going to take anything they’re [the police] are going to give us. You can’t treat us like this. We’re going to take a stand”. He pointed out that, about ten years ago, when he was growing up, British Asians used to be scared of the British African-Caribbeans who lived nearby. There seems to be no need for him to specify the gender here – it is obvious to us all that he is talking about males. “Then there was resistance from the young Bangladeshis. It’s their turf now” (NS, interview 20.3.2002). Here we should note processes which simultaneously construct and enforce ideas about ‘race’ and about masculinity. To control your turf, to frighten off your aggressors, whose ethnic identities are as marked as yours, is to re-classify your identity from soft-Asian to hard-Asian man. Locally, it is known that this turf is Bangladeshi, while another segment might be Pakistani, and another Caribbean, but the public definition they seek to enforce when both British Bangladeshi and British Pakistani young men join in battle with the police on the streets is that Asian men are as tough as Caribbeans. In fact, the police know this very well. An officer told me several years ago that they don’t like to get into fights with Asian youths. “Unlike the Caribbean youth”, he said, “Asians won’t stop fighting. They don’t know when to give up.” So there’s more danger to the police, to say nothing of the youths. But when it comes to masculinity, just as with racialised identities, the symbolic apparatus is constructed from the most fragmentary information. In the violent urban protests, then, we witness the construction and enactment of a hard masculinity, the performance of which is structured by racialised assumptions of soft masculinity. As they strive to conform to the widely enforced Western norm of masculinity as tough, combative and territorial, it could be argued that they are seeking to be included within one important stream of the cultural life of the white population.

>>>> modify in light of Claire Alexander’s point about ‘soft’ masculinity [18.5.02 Seminar <<<<<<<< check Alexander (2002)

I will now move to a discussion of the disruption of social relationships in this part of Leeds, and I return to the analysis of violence as one of the main symbolic markers of the divisions that are increasingly apparent. These are preliminary thoughts, since a proper account requires much more attention to the subjective and emotional positions adopted by the participants than I have yet been able to provide. In talking to a wide range of British Asians and others about these events, it is clear that the discourse of ‘riot’ falls into three camps which have minimal overlap. One we have already encountered in the media and from the Home Secretary. These are the acts of criminals. Local MP Fabian Hamilton put it even more strongly – these criminals are wicked, in the religious sense of the term: “I think that the arrest [of Hosein Miah] was used as an excuse by some very angry/wicked elements in the Asian community. Somebody wanted a riot and was determined to lure the police into the area, which they did” (Email

communication, 8 May 2002). This view is most easily established because violence against people and destruction of property has taken place. The use of missiles and fire take these events outside the conventional parameters of politics. The argument that these were criminal acts was reinforced by the British Muslim salesman at the Madina Book Shop, which specialises in Islamic literature, who said that the protesters were “hooligans” and “criminals” who “know nothing of Islam” (Interview 19.4.02). At one of the local Asian video shops, a British Hindu young man, who went to school with several of those arrested, said that those who took part were “idiots” and he was pleased that their leader was sentenced to five years in jail, since he was well-known locally as a criminal (Interview 19.4.02). The absence of any type of defence campaign, or even of appeals against the draconian sentences (a total of 73 years, spread over only 25 cases, with most receiving between two and five years in custody), is one indicator of the power of this discourse within the British Asian communities in Leeds. I have written elsewhere of the increasing divisions between the various ethnic groups in Leeds during the 1980s and 1990s, largely stimulated by the neo-colonial activities of the city council in response to the 1981 protests in Harehills and Chapeltown (Farrar 1999, 2002). What we are witnessing now is the internal segmentation of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, as the leaders of their religious and social organisations and even some of their contemporaries adopt the discourse of riotous criminality. A less acute version of the same process took place among British African-Caribbeans after the 1975 protest in Chapeltown, when the established black organisations were extremely reluctant to offer any social and political support to their youth. I have argued that it was the adoption of the tactic of violence which reinforced existing divisions among British African-Caribbeans in Chapeltown (Farrar 2002), and it would seem that the same process is taking place in Harehills. According to NS there is such a feeling of shame among the parents of those who were sentenced that there is no possibility even of a complaint against the severity of the sentences.

Another discourse on these events is framed by the notion of pleasure or excitement. Both a British African-Caribbean probation officer who supervises those who were under 19 when they were arrested (DL, interview 24.4.02) and the British Hindu referred to earlier said that this is what drew people into the events and swept them along. The Carnavalesque element in street violence has been noted before. I referred to observing ‘an atmosphere of jubilation among many of the youth’ on the day after the burning of Chapeltown Road in July 1981 (Farrar 1982 p. 9). Gilroy referred to interviews conducted with people who took part in the 1980 events in St Paul’s (Bristol) where it was found that ‘joy, freedom and pleasure’ were widely expressed (Gilroy 1987 p. 238). Here we can decode an alternative semiotic of fire. Just as the bonfires and fireworks in the UK on November 5th each year are symbols of pleasure and excitement, so the torching of a car or flames on the street as military-style police advance towards them represents a triumphant and delightful moment for the participants in the protest.

It is this element in the emotional configuration of these events which is beginning to appear even in discourse promoted by the criminal justice system. After what *the Guardian* referred to as ‘the most violent football disturbance seen in Britain for years’ at Millwall football club in early May 2002, in which 47 officers were injured, Chief Superintendent Mike Humphrey spoke of “recreational violence” (*Guardian* 4.6.02 p. 4). In sentencing the 25 at Leeds Crown Court after the Harehills protests, Judge Norman Jones said this was “violence for the pleasure of violence” (*Yorkshire Evening Post* 7.3.02 p. 1). While no-one in the establishment is on record as referring to violent urban protest as ‘recreational’, or as just another form of pleasure to be placed alongside clubbing, sex, smoking weed and such like, it is now widely recognised that this activity makes certain people very happy. But, I would argue, it is relatively short moment of joy, and it permeates only a small section of the community. I noted after the 1981 events in Chapeltown that ‘many of the older people seemed worried and upset’ (Farrar 1982 p. 9). But I did not record the fact that a young black woman I knew, who was a contemporary of those who had engaged in violence the night before, burst into tears when she talked to me about her feelings as we stood in front of the burnt-out petrol station. That information did not fit easily with the discourse of ‘uprising’ I was formulating. The men who were sentenced after the Harehills events are reported to be emotionally crushed. At least one of them will not allow his mother even to visit him in prison. Some of those who took part are currently meeting with a youth worker in an effort to seek non-violent solutions to the problems they identify in Harehills, being particularly keen to ensure that their younger siblings do not undertake anything similar, but they do not yet feel confident enough to discuss this even in private with any outsiders (NS, interview 20.3.2002). On reflection, the pleasure of the night does not seem to replace the pain of the days that follow.

Those who have made some attempt to establish the third discourse, that these are understandable protests against racist policing, have not, so far as I know, offered any explicit legitimisation of the tactic of violence. This has been offered in the past by British African-Caribbeans, both in terms of Rastafarian eschatology, and in terms of the pragmatic result, highly evident in Chapeltown, that material resources follow ‘riots’ much more quickly than they follow reasoning. The shock of violence combined with extremely harsh sentencing has probably combined to close down the discursive space required for the adoption of the latter position. Their own silence is replicated by the silence of their ‘community leaders’, just as they are silenced by newspaper editorials and by establishment politicians who refuse to acknowledge their grievances. Yet contradictions are apparent in the discourse of officialdom. In making his judgement, Norman Jones QC was reported as follows: ‘a “surprising feature” of the case was the number of defendants with good characters, jobs and from good families . . . “What caused their involvement is frequently difficult to ascertain”’ (*Yorkshire Post* 8.3.02 p. 1). Whether social and political organisations will emerge again among young Asians, as they did in the Asian Youth Movements of the 1980s and among

African-Caribbeans in the 1970s to articulate the grievances of 'men of good character' is a question which requires much further examination.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the term riot, routinely employed in the media and in the official enquiries into the violence in several Northern cities in the summer of 2001, forecloses proper sociological analysis of the meaning of these events. It proposes that 'violent urban protest' should be substituted as the framing concept for interpreting these events. It has further argued that the term 'race riot' is also misleading in the case of Harehills, but that it is equally wrong to assume that 'race' was irrelevant. The widespread perception that they are racialised and unfairly treated by the West Yorkshire Police was the structure of meaning which operated for many of the British Asian and Caribbean participants during these protests. The additional presence of whites in these events is an indication of the increasing mutual identification that is operating between young, inner city men, regardless of ethnicity. For the British Asians, an assertion of hard masculinity in contradiction of the racial assumption they believe to be held by the police (that they are soft) is equally significant. In sum, violent urban protest in Harehills cannot be understood without close attention to the persistence of racialised thought and practice in the city of Leeds.

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