

# Reflections and Resistance

NPMP MAGAZINE 2022



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# Editorial

ILYAS NAGDEE AND KERRY PIMBLOTT, NORTHERN POLICE MONITORING PROJECT (NPMP)

**In July 1981, Moss Side was ablaze. A group, reportedly led by a nine-year old boy, converged on Moss Side Police Station following days of racist taunts and police inaction in a community plagued by racist policing and mass unemployment. All the windows in the police station were broken and 12 police vehicles set alight.**

This uprising, along with the uprisings that swept the nation that year from Toxteth to Brixton to Bradford to Bristol, take their place as a crucial part in Britain's radical and militant past. Now, just like then, Britain's racialised and working class were under siege from the state. Facing down fascists and the police, the courts and the bosses, Britain's racialised and dispossessed masses revolted against the system. Very quickly afterwards, the British state set in motion the processes to ensure such fire would never be felt again, that the rage of the masses would never smash their windows, and the youth of the day would never again stand atop the burnt out shells of police cars and stare at them with defiance.

The Home Secretary immediately commissioned an inquiry into the

disturbances led by Lord Scarman and, in Manchester, the Hytner Inquiry came up with all the tired recommendations that have littered every inquiry into policing since: a representative police force, better training and improved community-police relations. We learned more from the community stance on the Hytner Inquiry than the inquiry itself.

Laying out their refusal to participate in the Hytner Inquiry, the Moss Side Defence Committee stated they would boycott it. It is worth quoting their rationale at length:

*"The Defence Committee sees the Hytner Inquiry as:*

- *Riddled with inconsistencies*
- *Suffused with condescending ignorance about the people of Moss Side and particularly about its Black population*
- *Deeply biased in its identification of the cause of the riots*
- *Evasive of all issues which the people of Moss Side would see as central and decisive, and in its comments and recommendations*
- *Blatantly concerned to conceal those issues behind a facade of cosmetic operations designed to reconcile the people of Moss Side*

*to a form of policing that which would remain substantially unchanged”<sup>1</sup>*

The final point echoes the same reasoning stated by their comrades in Brixton who refused to participate in the Scarman review for the same reasons. Many of today’s movements lose energy in expecting the state to gift them a reckoning.

Our movements must no longer be defined by their engagements with the state. They must no longer remain overly-concerned with the electoral arena where any hope of a transformative agenda has been rapidly tempered. They must capture the anger fostered by the uprisings of summer 2020 and – as discussed in this magazine – the increasing light shone on how institutional misogyny and racism define policing.

To do this, we must reflect on where we find ourselves as a movement and on the ways we can meaningfully advance resistance. This reflection is what we hope is prompted as you read through the pieces in this volume. Collecting the voices of individuals and movements, and reflecting on defining moments of the last few years, this collection hopes to present a humble account of where we are to help us navigate where we go ahead.

This issue is organised into five parts and begins with a series of articles that reflect on the current crisis of policing, as both an extension and deepening of past struggles. We open at

the national level with a contribution from Hajera Begum of Abolitionist Futures, who situates popular mobilisations following the murder of Sarah Everard – combined with Black Lives Matter and #KillTheBill movements – as marking a watershed in public distrust of the British police. As Scarlet Harris shows in the second article, this growing distrust has been further fuelled by COVID-era restrictions and increased police powers, which are used disproportionately against racially minoritised groups and communities. As if that weren’t enough, recent revelations from the Spycops inquiry raise real concerns – as Connor Woodman observes – about the potential for police infiltration and disruption of past and present resistance movements against such state violence. These developments resonate with Begum’s assertion that police are the crisis.

*Our movements must no longer be defined by their engagements with the state. They must no longer remain overly-concerned with the electoral arena where any hope of a transformative agenda has been rapidly tempered*

<sup>1</sup> The Hytner Inquiry, a preliminary critique of the report by Ben Hytner QC on the disturbances in Moss Side, Manchester, on 8/9 July 1981 by the Moss Side Defence Committee. Quoted in Gus John (2011) *Moss Side 1981: More than Just a Riot*. New Beacon Books, London, p5.

Part two shifts the lens to Greater Manchester, with Remi Joseph-Salisbury and Katy Sian of Northern Police Monitoring Project (NPMP) reflecting on the local character of this crisis in policing against the backdrop of a force in 'special measures' and a new chief constable touting a tough on crime philosophy. NPMP's Laura Connelly probes Greater Manchester Police's (GMP) record on institutional misogyny and sexual violence, and Kerry Pimblott explores the escalating number of police pursuit deaths involving the force's officers.

In part three, we turn to strategies of resistance, with contributors reflecting on the perils of looking to the state for solutions along with the specific need for independent, people-led reviews of state violence. Deborah Coles provides a five-year retrospective of the Angiolini Review, a landmark independent review into deaths in police custody forced by family campaigners in tandem with INQUEST, many of whose recommendations have

Holmwood and Dr Layla Aitlhadj.

Part four continues the theme of strategies of resistance with a focus on the recent revival and expansion of independent police monitoring and copwatching initiatives, which have roots in the current policing crisis as well as longer histories of struggle. Black Protest Legal support provide an account of their creation, following BLM protests in 2020. Cops off Campus document their initiation of legal observer training and patrols in response to COVID-era policing at the University of Manchester. And Sisters Uncut Mcr discuss the formation of local copwatching initiatives and facilitation of Know Your Rights trainings in the wake of popular mobilisations following Sarah Everard's murder, and the introduction of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

In addition to monitoring state violence and policing practices, many of these new initiatives also point toward a politics of abolition. In our closing section, Siobhan

*We must pick up our compass from the mobilisations of 1981. Our north star is justice.*

yet to be implemented. The persistence of deaths in police custody was the focal point of the 22nd annual United Families & Friends Campaign's (UFFC) rally and remembrance procession, held in London in October 2021. In Kerry Pimblott and Remi Joseph-Salisbury's account of the procession we learn more about UFFC's alternative proposal for a People's Tribunal on Police Killings, in 2022. A similar approach has been championed recently by the *People's Review of Prevent*, described in article nine by Professor John

O'Neill and Liz Fekete each reflect on the problems and potentialities of this discourse, and on how we can move towards a language and movement, not only of abolishing the police, but also towards building alternatives together.

The uprisings of 1981 were prevented from being replicated with the same force, in part because of the machinations of the state after 1981. We must pick up our compass from the mobilisations of 1981. Our north star is justice. The journey goes on.



# 1. The Police are the Crisis:

THE BROKEN ILLUSION THAT THE POLICE KEEP US SAFE

HAJERA BEGUM, ABOLITIONIST FUTURES

**The sentencing of disgraced police officer Wayne Couzens left the police in a public relations frenzy. Suddenly, it wasn't just the communities that they police that were calling out the harms of the police, but individuals – some very well platformed individuals.**

Couzens, known as 'the rapist' amongst his peers, was now distanced by the leadership. He was said to be 'off duty', a 'rotten apple' and of course all of this was said to be a 'betrayal' of the force. This is despite several police officers attending court to support him.<sup>1</sup> The outrage, it seems, is saved for our TV screens.

## **In police we trust**

Despite having six months to prepare for the Couzen's trial, the police's

response to the case was almost surreal. Neither the vetting process nor equipment use process were officially reviewed. When women stated they felt unsafe, they were told more police officers would be placed in the streets;<sup>2</sup> when they said it was the police themselves who made them feel unsafe, they were told to ask police officers to verify their identity. The reality is, if someone had tried to verify Couzens' identity, he would have passed the check. Even more absurd was the advice to run away, flag down a bus or go into a stranger's property asking for help. Worst of all, a now-resigned police commissioner blamed Everard herself for not being 'street-wise' enough.<sup>3</sup>

The police themselves have admitted they cannot be trusted; we would be fools not to believe them this time.

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1 Butterworth B (2021) Sarah Everard: Met Police officers spoke in support of Wayne Couzens, judge reveals. *I News*. 1 October.

2 Dunne J (2021) Police to deploy 650 new officers to protect women in wake of Sarah Everard murder. *Evening Standard*. 1 October.

3 Doody K (2021) Sarah Everard: police boss who said women need to be streetwise resigns, *The Northern Echo*. 14 October.

## The broken illusion

For many people the illusion that the police keep us safe began to shatter after the brutal attacks at the Clapham vigil to mourn the death of Sarah Everard. Kate Middleton was pictured attending and paying her respects earlier in the day, but as darkness fell, officers used well-known anti-protest tactics: they threw women onto the ground and knelt on them as they handcuffed their hands behind their backs.

Many of the people attending had never been to a vigil or protest before. To the mainstream media, the overzealous response of the police had politicised the event.<sup>4</sup> It looked like they were trying to protect their friend, Couzens, or perhaps even themselves. One woman screamed: “You’re supposed to protect us.”<sup>5</sup>

While Home Secretary Priti Patel said she backed the police in their handling of the Sarah Everard vigil, many of her peers were not so supportive. Tory MP James Wild said: “Policing is by consent. Tonight, the Met Police have failed, and the scenes of women being manhandled at a vigil are appalling.” London Mayor Sadiq Khan and Labour Opposition Leader Keir Starmer also joined in their disapproval.

It was this that began to dispel the illusion and perhaps encouraged many people to start following the case more closely. The insulting response to the sentencing were the nails in the coffin.

## Seizing the moment

Distrust in the police has re-emerged throughout the last decade. A series of events, including the killing of Ian Tomlinson at G20; a number of murders in state custody, for example of Smiley Culture, Kingsley Burrell and Mark

Duggan in 2011; the Spycops revelations (see Woodman, article three); and the heavy-handed response to the 2010 student protests, garnered a high level of scepticism about the police. At about the same time, the then-Home Secretary, Theresa May, was pushing through changes to policing in the face of fierce opposition from the Police Federation.<sup>6</sup> This moment of frayed alliances could have been a moment to hold wider discussions about the role of policing and the need for funding in communities.

Unfortunately, much of the political left, then as now, used the moment to try to fashion a closer relationship between the Labour Party and policing officials, for example by calling for more police funding and the infamous pledge for ‘20,000 bobbies on the beat’.

As ever, time and the media cycle seemed to heal all. An illusion is created that only communities that need “controlling” care about policing powers, while the majority trust the status quo. Any changes that have been made have bolstered policing powers. Suggested solutions to police violence against women include a tracking app,<sup>7</sup> which once again places the onus on women to ensure their own safety while handing over tracking data to the police (and perhaps the Home Office and BT). This would allow police to continue to focus on crimes after the fact – with a little more information to make their lives easier – while nothing is done to stop the harm from taking place.

## Police are the crisis

The Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 pushed forward the arguments for defunding the police – and indeed their abolition – while rejecting police reform. After all, the police were not

4 It should not be understated that the gathering of women after a violent attack, and the fact that the gathering took place only after SistersUncut had provided crucial organising support following the response by Reclaim These Streets, meant the event was political to its core. My point here is that, to some attendees and viewers of the aftermath, it didn’t feel that way until after the fact.

5 Nelson S (2021) ‘Deeply disturbing’ clashes at Sarah Everard vigil. *HuffPost*. 13 March.

6 Travis A (2012) Police could face annual fitness tests and compulsory redundancies. *The Guardian*. 15 March.

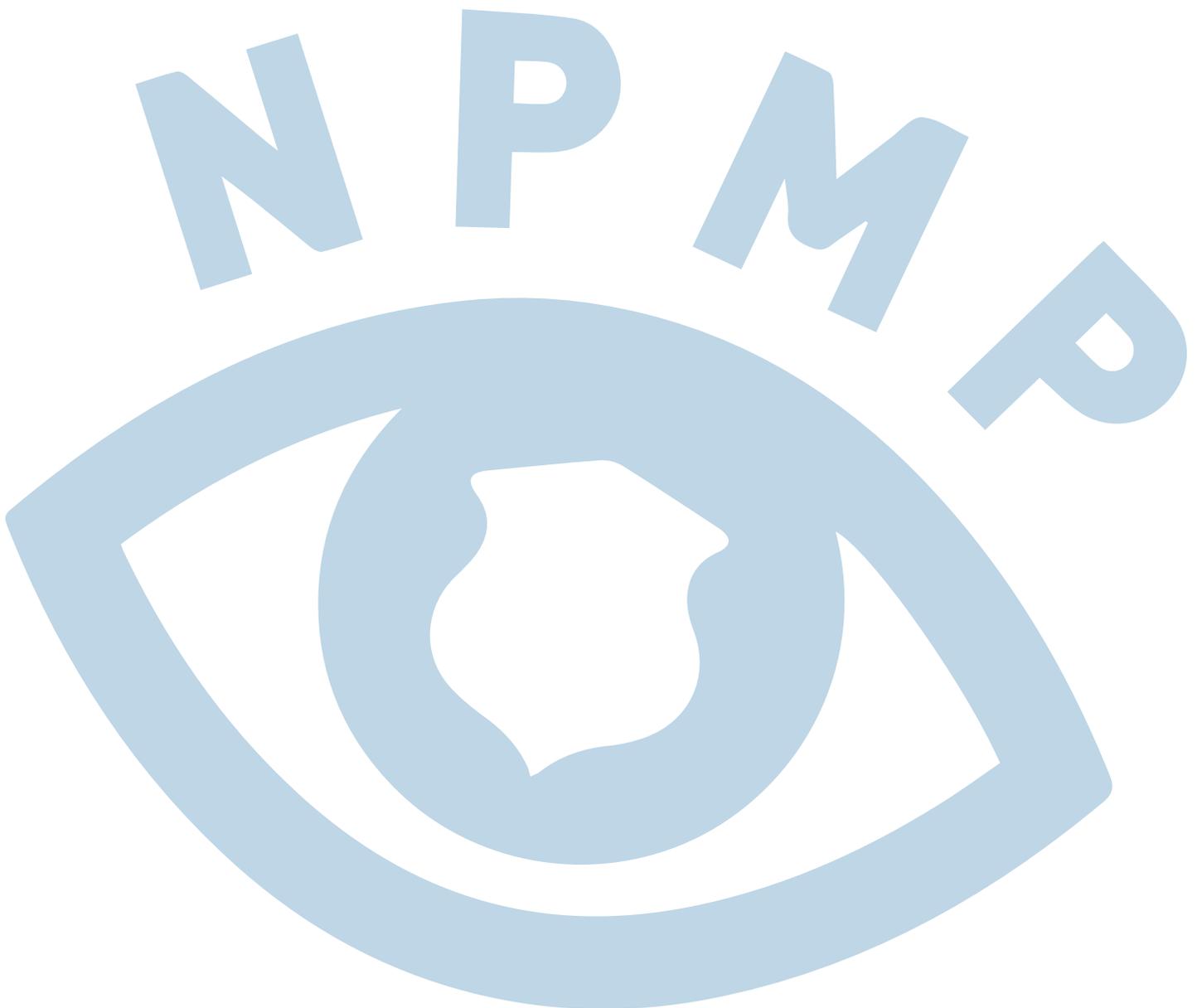
7 No author (2021) 888 number for women’s safety: campaigners criticise proposed phone service to track women walking home, *Sky News*. 9 October.

originally established to protect the general public, but to protect the property and interests of the rich and powerful (see O’Neill, article 13). Working class communities labelled the new police as “Blue Locusts” and ever since then, the police’s attempts to portray themselves as impartial servants of the people have been compromised by the reality of their role.

At a time when the police’s lack of credibility is being exposed so blatantly, the government has responded by introducing new, dystopian laws to outlaw dissent while providing

more powers to the police and the state. Resistance to these laws (such as #KilltheBill) again highlights the need for alternatives to the current way society is controlled. It is paramount that we build on this momentum to bring forward lasting changes and hold the state to account.

When trust in the police is faltering, it is our duty to provide an alternative vision; when they murder people in their custody, it is our duty to be outraged. When the police are in crisis, we must show that they are the crisis.



# 2. A threat to public safety:

## POLICING, RACISM, THE PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

SCARLET HARRIS

### **H**ow has the Covid-19 pandemic shaped experiences of police racism and racialised police violence, and what might new police powers mean for communities beyond the pandemic?

As part of a collaboration between the Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE) and the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), we published a report that explores experiences of policing amongst racially minoritised groups across England at this critical juncture.<sup>1</sup> The report draws on in-depth conversations with 22 individuals who had interactions with the police during the pandemic, focusing on the testimonies of those subjected to policing. The findings from the research demonstrate that, rather than contributing to public safety, policing during the pandemic has reproduced profound harms for those from racially minoritised groups and communities.

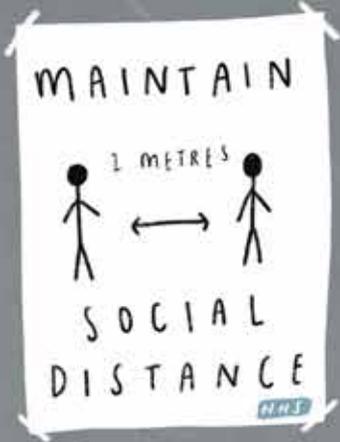
Safety is a prominent theme throughout the report, but – in a challenge to dominant police

narratives – it is the police themselves who appear as a major threat to the safety and wellbeing of research participants and their wider communities. For instance, a number of those who took part in the study recount how police officers they had interacted with over the course of the pandemic had failed to socially distance or wear adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). In a particularly disturbing case, one woman described being stopped multiple times while heavily pregnant, and repeatedly having to ask police officers to socially distance and wear masks. We now know that unvaccinated pregnant women are amongst the most vulnerable to severe illness from Covid-19.

But risk of Covid-19 transmission due to police negligence is just one of the ways in which the harms caused by over-policing have been exacerbated in the context of the pandemic.

Policing was made central to the British government's response

<sup>1</sup> Harris S, Joseph-Salisbury R, Williams P, White L (2021) *A Threat to Public Safety: Policing, Racism and the Covid-19 Pandemic*. Institute of Race Relations, London.



to Covid-19, and police forces were granted extraordinary powers to enforce restrictions on movement and social gatherings, administer fines and detain potentially infectious people. This raft of legislation was rushed through parliament with minimal scrutiny, having severe consequences.

The racialised impact of these increased police powers has been well-documented. For example, Black and Asian people have been issued Covid-related fines at a rate 1.8 times higher than white people,<sup>2</sup> while the initial months of the pandemic saw a marked increase in police use of force, and stop and search practices, which continue to disproportionately affect racially minoritised groups and communities.

Discussions with research participants reflected these patterns, revealing how new police powers have interacted with long-standing forms of racial and class inequalities to further criminalise those communities already subject to forms of violent over-policing. The report documents a number of experiences in which Covid-related powers were used to stop or even arrest individuals in conjunction with other highly racialised police practices, such as drug-related police stops. One individual described policing under Covid as: “Like a golden ticket to [...] go out there in Black communities and just ridicule us.” The use of Covid-related regulations in the kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer, which took place during the course of the research, was yet another heart-breaking reminder of how particular groups are rendered

more (not less) vulnerable when police are granted exceptional powers.

Despite pleas from leading civil rights organisations to respond to the pandemic in a way that prioritised both public health and the upholding

## *Policing was made central to the British government’s response to Covid-19*

of civil rights,<sup>3</sup> the government’s approach to policing reflected their ongoing commitment to an increasingly authoritarian agenda. Even as certain police measures are now scaled back while the pandemic develops, they have helped to pave the way for a massive expansion of policing in the coming years. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (also known as the policing bill) currently in its final stages of approval will increase a multitude of police powers, ensure even less police accountability and hit racially minoritised communities hardest, all while clamping down on our legal right to protest.

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the extent to which we do and must depend on each other – for our health, well-being and ultimately our lives. Now is the time to connect various struggles around a common message: policing is not a public service, but another critical threat to our collective safety.

2 Joint Committee on Human Rights (2021) *The Government Response to Covid-19: Fixed Penalty Notices*. House of Commons & House of Lords.

3 Liberty (No date) Protecting everyone during the coronavirus crisis. *Liberty*.

# 3. Spycops

CONNOR WOODMAN

**A young Black man is murdered by a racist white gang. The local police deliberately tank the investigation, working to protect their long-standing allies in the supremacist group. The bereaved family, with dignity and poise, begin a campaign to expose the killers and their allies in the police. In response, high-ranking officers begin their own campaign to infiltrate the family's supporters. Undercover agents are despatched, tasked with finding any 'dirt' capable of defaming the key witness.**

Although these details are taken from the ordeal Stephen Lawrence's family was subjected to by the Metropolitan Police, the tale has been repeated against many family campaigns, especially those of young people of colour let down or even killed by the police. At least 18 family justice campaigns have been infiltrated by spycops: full-time undercover officers using fake or stolen identities. One of these campaigns concerned Joy Gardner, a student and mother killed in 1993 by immigration officials who shackled, gagged and restrained her, wrapping 13 feet of surgical tape around her head. Metropolitan Police officials saw it appropriate to despatch their undercover officers into the grieving family's camp to weaken any challenge to the authority of the coercive border regime.

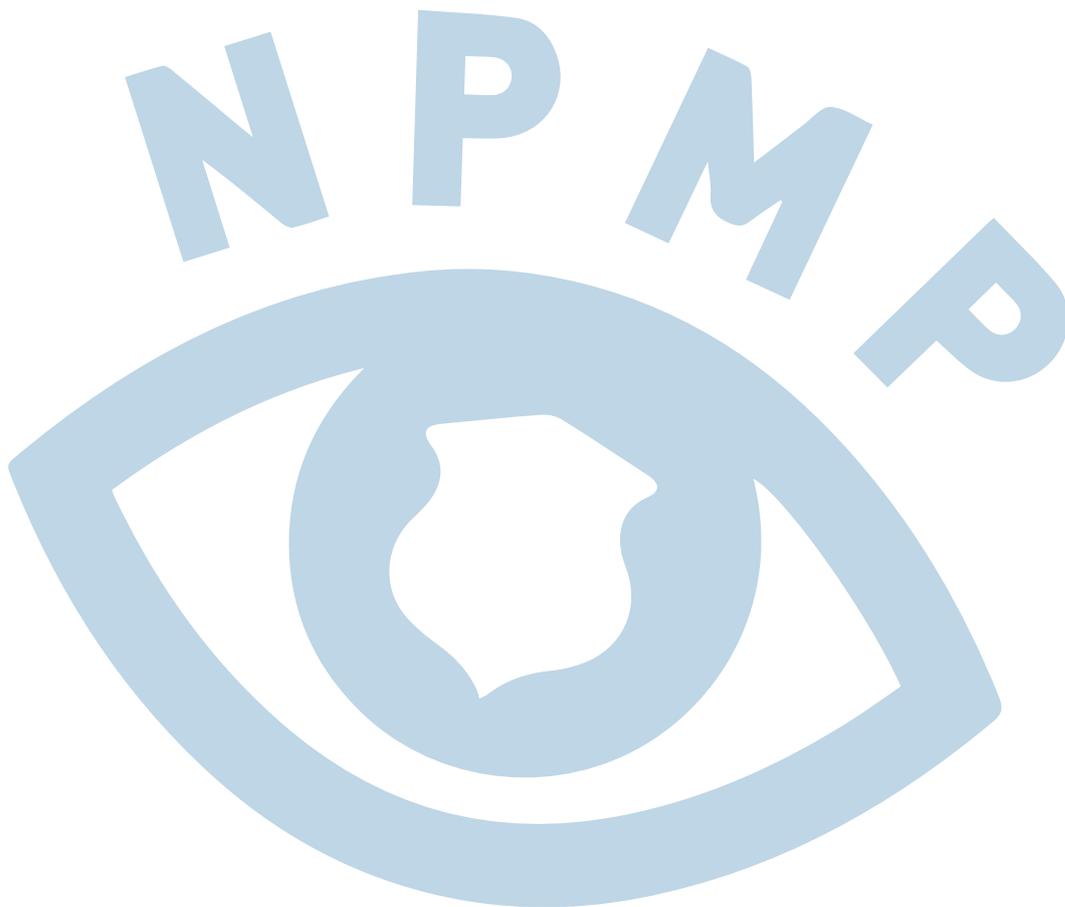
These activities stand in a long line of directly political anti-Black police programmes in the UK. Once the empire collapsed and formerly colonised subjects began migrating to the motherland, newly enlarged racial minorities in Britain posed a fresh dilemma for the guardians of social control. Black and Brown citizens were the object of particular suspicion by the UK state's policing apparatus: they were subjected to renewed border policing, internal racialisation, and exclusion from the relative esteem and welfare begrudgingly granted to the white working class.

As the wave of Black Power finally broke on British shores, the Metropolitan Police Special Branch – with Mi5, the agency mandated to monitor and break internal dissent – set up an entire Black Power Desk that infiltrated, harassed and arrested its way through the burgeoning liberation movement. Centres of Black cultural life, such as the Mangrove restaurant in Notting Hill, were raided on fraudulent pretexts concerning drugs, and Black leaders were imprisoned and tried, as has been memorably portrayed in Steve McQueen's recent *Small Axe* series.

In fact, any organisation that has sought to weaken or undermine the British state's imperial strategies – whether the Vietnam Solidarity

Campaign of the late 1960s or the Stop the War Coalition this century – has come under the watchful eye of the police and intelligence services. Black liberation, anti-imperialism, even something as seemingly straightforward as a campaign to apprehend a racist murderer, have always been considered a threat to the racial social relations underlying the British polity. The police, the sharp edge of racial enforcement, have sought to slice this resistance down to a manageable size. As Adam Elliott-Cooper put it, the conclusions of the MacPherson Inquiry into Stephen Lawrence’s murder: “Do not point towards a simple case of police corruption and collusion with criminal gangs. Instead, they show a close relationship between violent white supremacist groups that have been terrorising Black communities, and an institutionally racist police force.”<sup>1</sup>

What manoeuvres in the dark have the police and intelligence agencies been making against the latest iteration of racial resistance, Black Lives Matter? The nature of intelligence work – its protection of sources, mantra of ‘plausible deniability’ and technological sophistication – means these manoeuvres will likely remain shrouded in shadows for years to come. These shadows, by virtue of their lack of illumination, allow paranoia and conspiracy theory to thrive. This is, perhaps, one of the very functions of infiltration and surveillance. As the FBI under its long-time master J Edgar Hoover wrote: “Enhance the paranoia [...] get the point across there is an FBI agent behind every mailbox.”<sup>2</sup> Purging this fear from our own minds is as important as a clear-sighted awareness that some of our worst nightmares about the police are in fact true.



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- 1 Elliott-Cooper A (2011) The anti-imperialist: Stephen Lawrence, Lord MacPherson and Sergeant XX. *Ceasefire*. 20 December.
  - 2 Medsger B (2014) Just being black was enough to get yourself spied on by J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI. *The Nation*. 22 January.

# 4. Policing as Crisis

REMI JOSEPH-SALISBURY AND KATY SIAN, NORTHERN POLICE MONITORING PROJECT (NPMP)

**Greater Manchester Police (GMP) have recently come under unprecedented scrutiny. In December 2020, an investigation into the force found ‘serious cause for concern’.<sup>1</sup> The force was placed into special measures, and along with negative media coverage, a range of changes followed. Most notable among these was the introduction of a new Chief Constable, and the setting out of GMP’s ‘strategic delivery plan’ and ‘promises to the public’.<sup>2</sup>**

GMP’s placement in special measures was the culmination of a series of concerns raised over several years. In 2016, the force was deemed to be inadequate in terms of the recording of crime. A subsequent report in 2018 found that the force still required improvement in several key areas, particularly regarding its service to ‘vulnerable victims of crime’, including the recording of rape crimes and domestic abuse (see Connelly, article five). In 2019, concerns were again raised that the force was putting ‘victims’ and vulnerable people at risk. It was suggested that, despite needing to improve, GMP’s performance had declined further since the last inspection. It was in this context that

the 2020 report found over 80,000 crimes had gone unrecorded over the latest one-year period.

Recognition that GMP is in crisis should be welcomed, as should increased public scrutiny of police forces. However, a narrow focus on faulty computer systems and crime (under)recording practices obscures the true nature of the crisis.

The socio-political backdrop of the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings, alongside the protests following the police murder of Sarah Everard, and ongoing Kill the Bill mobilisations signal a more fundamental crisis. This reframed understanding of ‘crisis’ draws our attention to endemic racism, sexism, and violence in policing. It also points to the devastating effects of the persistent criminalisation of certain communities, and to an institution that stands in the way of the pursuit of social justice. This is evident in the brutal tasing of Desmond Ziggy Mombeyarara in front of his young son, in the growing number of killings following police pursuits (see Pimblott, article six), and in the persistent efforts to undermine and thwart social movements.

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1 HMICFRS (2020) *Greater Manchester Police’s Service to Victims of Crime is ‘A Serious Cause of Concern’*. HMICFRS, London.

2 GMP (2021) Chief Constable Stephen Watson unveils plan for the future of GMP and announces ‘promises to the public’. *GMP*. 10 September.

This stark contrast in definitions of ‘crisis’ is significant because it shapes proposed solutions, outcomes and implementation. GMP’s response has been to adopt a ‘tough on crime’ stance, with promises of a ‘relentless’ pursuit of ‘criminals’, more policing, and more arrests and ‘high-profile operations’.

However, taking heed of the crisis as recognised by social movements allows us to see that rising authoritarianism and criminalisation will deepen, rather than address, the fundamental crisis of policing and the crises *caused* by policing. And, as the impact of the expansion of police powers under Covid attests (see Harris, article 2), increased and tougher policing will be felt most harshly by minoritised communities, those who historically and presently remain at the sharp end of policing. The new Chief Constable’s forceful denial of the presence of institutional racism in the force,<sup>3</sup> even in the face of insurmountable evidence, suggests he and his force will be ill-equipped and unwilling to recognize and address these issues as they deepen. Indeed, the issue of institutional racism in GMP continues to be brushed aside, with superficial ad campaigns to recruit more people of colour and women. These empty gestures are merely cosmetic, unable to tackle the structural issues of embedded racism and sexism that persist.

By turning to the uprisings and cross-community mass mobilisations of recent years we can see that solutions to the fundamental crisis of policing cannot be solved by having more police on our streets, or through superficial measures that fail to address decades of discrimination and violence in the force. Rather, we need to question the logic that sees us repeatedly turn to the police to solve social problems. This is what is invoked by calls to ‘defund the police’: calls to shift power and resources away from policing and

into the development of supportive social infrastructures, particularly in communities that have been most deprived by austerity and an unjust economic system.

When we think critically about the role of the police, we see that the very ‘victims’ of crime that GMP claims to want to serve are better supported through the funding of women’s centres, youth clubs, community centres, mentoring schemes, counselling and mental health services, and community-driven and led programmes. Of course, there is a need for us to remain critical about how oppressive tendencies can (and do) manifest in these spaces too, particularly those tied to the state, but this is an ongoing task.

The answer in tackling the police crisis lies not with more policing or diversity recruitment drives. Rather, it centres on investing in marginalised communities to empower and enrich them. For too long, these communities have been overpoliced, harassed and subjected to violence by GMP. And while we are doing the long-haul

*We need to question the logic that sees us repeatedly turn to the police to solve social problems*

work of imagining, building and resourcing alternative institutions, we need to fight back against efforts to expand police powers via the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, the encroachment of police in schools and universities (see Virgo, article 11), and the rising militarisation of the police. We must also continue to develop our survival programmes in the form of police monitoring, collective solidarities and community empowerment.

<sup>3</sup> Pidd H (2021) Manchester police chief rejects claim of institutional racism. The Guardian. 27 July

# 5. The police cannot keep us safe:

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISOGYNY

LAURA CONNELLY, NORTHERN POLICE MONITORING PROJECT (NPMP)

**From the state-facilitated kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard and the Metropolitan Police’s brutality towards women attending the vigil in her honour, to the degrading and sexist treatment of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman’s bodies, recent events have shone a light on police violence against women.**

These events – alongside a resistance movement sparked by a rallying cry from Sisters Uncut – have attracted the attention of a wider public to the long-standing problems of state-sanctioned harm and institutional misogyny in the police (see Begum, article one). These problems are both deep-rooted and endemic. They’re often felt most by those from racially minoritised communities, those with precarious immigration status, and/or those belonging to other marginalised populations, such as sex workers.

In response to rising public concern over physical and sexual violence against

women, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) has instructed officers to “do more to reassure the public, particularly women and girls, that [they] are here to *protect*”.<sup>1</sup> But we would be foolish to listen to their reassurances, for GMP has a long history of misogyny, racism and violence.

GMP did not protect Jackie Berkeley, a 20-year-old Black woman who accused two male officers of rape whilst two women officers restrained her, at Moss Side police station in 1984. Instead, they detained her for longer than legally required, preventing collection of physical evidence of the rape. Despite being able to identify three of the four perpetrators in a line-up and the fourth from a description of his clothing, Jackie was held up in court on charges of wasting police time and making a false complaint. In court, the prosecution set about assassinating Jackie’s character and, using the four officers’ (contradictory) testimonies, constructing

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<sup>1</sup> Slater C (2021) GMP gives advice for women who are stopped by a male officer after Sarah Everard murder. *Manchester Evening News*. 1 October.

a web of lies that resulted not only in the conviction of Jackie but – as Gus John, member of the Jackie Berkeley Defence Committee, describes – the psychological destruction of Jackie.<sup>2</sup>

GMP-perpetrated sexual violence is not, however, confined to the past. According to data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, there have been allegations of sexual misconduct against 158 serving GMP officers in the past five years.<sup>3</sup> The number of allegations against GMP is higher than that for any other police force in England and Wales. In November 2019, a GMP officer was found guilty at a misconduct hearing of sexual assault, one count of assault by penetration, twelve counts of voyeurism and two counts of taking indecent images of children. At a hearing in June 2021, it was found that an officer “gained authorised access to police data regarding known sex workers, one of whom the officer then met”.<sup>4</sup> We know from organisations such as the English Collective of Prostitutes that police too often abuse their power to demand free sex, steal sex workers’ money or perpetrate violence with impunity.

Unsurprisingly, the state has taken up the well-worn ‘few bad apples’ narrative to explain away officers’ violence against women, but the systemic nature of the problem also manifests in GMP’s treatment of women when they experience victimisation. A recent Inspectorate report found that GMP fails to record more than one in four reported violent crimes, with particularly notable recording gaps concerning domestic



*Supporters of Jackie Berkeley outside of court. Photographer. Denis Thorpe, The Guardian, 25 February 1985*

abuse, harassment, stalking and coercive control – harms known to be gendered in nature.<sup>5</sup> Victim-blaming attitudes among officers are rife, and contribute to women’s reluctance to report victimisation: a recent poll by YouGov found that 96% of women aged 18–24 who had experienced sexual harassment chose not to report it to the police.

In response to an awakening to institutional misogyny in the police, some, including women ex-officers, have pointed the finger at gender imbalances in the police, with two-thirds of officers across all ranks being male. But we must be clear: just as more Black officers won’t end institutional racism, more women officers won’t end institutional misogyny and the police perpetration of violence against women. To think that it will is to grossly underestimate how deeply embedded misogyny is in the culture, policies and operations of (the institution of) the police, and wrongly assume that gendered solidarity exists between women police officers and the women that they police. More women officers won’t end state-sanctioned violence against women but it will create

<sup>2</sup> John G (1985) The trials of Jackie Berkeley. *Race Today*.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfe-Robinson M (2021) At least 750 sexual misconduct claims against UK police officers in five years. *The Guardian*. 11 October.

<sup>4</sup> Greater Manchester Police (2021) GMP misconduct outcome’s Jun-Sept 2021. *GMP*.

<sup>5</sup> HMICFRS (2020) *Greater Manchester Police: An Inspection of the Service Provided to Victims of Crime by GMP*. HMICFRS, London.

the dangerous illusion of change and, in turn, legitimise the police.

The police have proven time and again, not only that they are ill-equipped to protect women, but also that they are quick to abuse their status to engage in violence against women and girls. With this in mind, we must resist calls for new laws and 'better' policing to address the epidemic of sexual violence and harassment. That Sarah Everard's rapist and murderer probably used his knowledge of Covid police powers (alongside his warrant card and police-issued handcuffs) demonstrates the inherent problem of giving the police more powers, particularly for women

and those from marginalised groups – a point that is particularly pertinent as police are set to receive more powers through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (see Sisters Uncut Mcr, article 12).

Just as the Jackie Berkeley Defence Committee organised around GMP's sexual violence and brutality in the 1980s, we will continue to play our part today in a growing and powerful anti-racist and feminist infrastructure to fight back in Greater Manchester and beyond. The police cannot keep us safe, but by coupling the development of a strong resistance movement with community-based programmes for public safety, we – collectively – can.





## 6. The Escalating Crisis in Deaths Following Police Pursuits in Greater Manchester

KERRY PIMBLOTT, NORTHERN POLICE MONITORING PROJECT (NPMP)

**O**n 6 October 2021, friends and family gathered for a vigil and march in south Manchester to mark six months since the death of 17-year-old Ronaldo Johnson.

In April, Ronaldo died in hospital from injuries sustained when a vehicle in which he was a passenger collided with a taxi following a pursuit by Greater Manchester Police (GMP). GMP

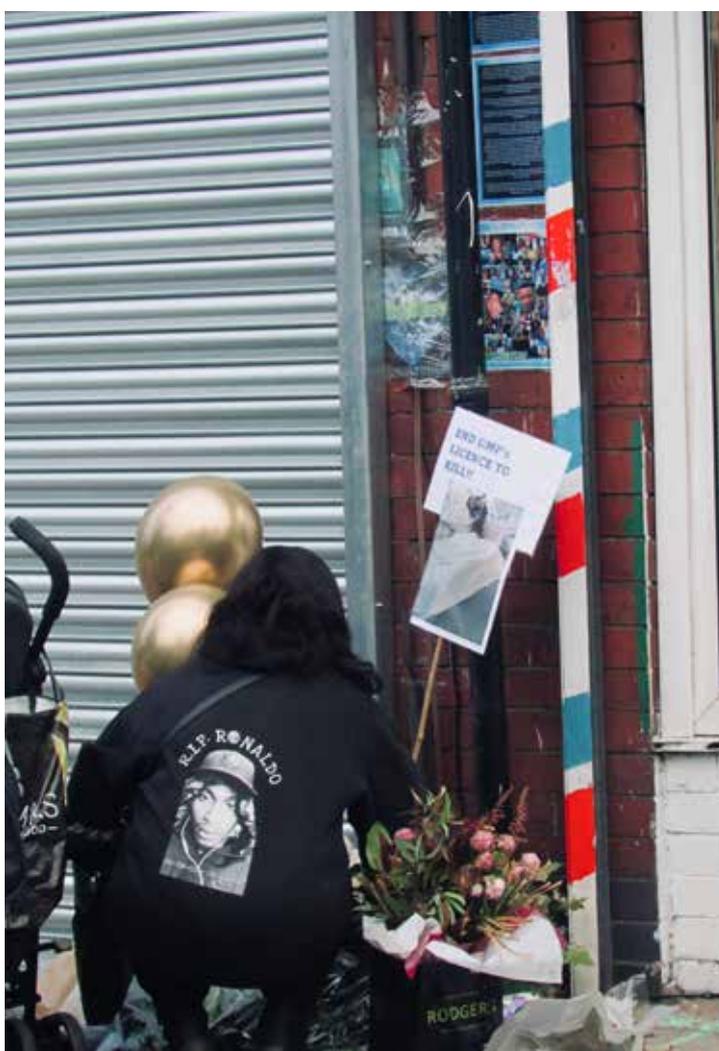
alleged initially that the driver of the vehicle was ‘acting suspiciously’ before later stating that the car had run a red light.

In the aftermath, Ronaldo’s family – including his mother, Lorraine, and sister, Keshia – were left distraught and desperately seeking answers about what exactly had taken place in south Manchester that night. “I’ve buried my son, but I can’t grieve because I

don't know what happened," Lorraine explains. "I want to know the truth."<sup>1</sup>

Ronaldo's family is not alone. GMP is on track to report a record high number of fatalities arising from police pursuits, with at least seven other people – Patrick 'Paddy' Connors (36), Thomas 'Tommy' Sharp (29), Shae Marlow (16), Kyle Hudson (16), Diyar Khoshnaw (24), Devonte Scott (18) and Brandon Geasley Pryde (18)

*Ronaldo Johnson's mother, Lorraine, places flowers and balloons at the scene of her son's death.*



– having died following pursuits by the Force's officers since September 2020. To put that figure in context, the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC) reported a total of 20 fatalities following police pursuit in England and Wales between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting national trends, most of those who lost their lives in Greater Manchester were young men, disproportionately from racially minoritised populations including Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) communities.

Understanding this rapid escalation in deaths following police pursuit is a matter of extreme urgency. However, the experiences of Ronaldo's family and others demonstrate the inherent limitations of existing structures and processes. At the vigil in south Manchester, family members carried home-made signs alluding to their sense of abandonment by the state and other purportedly independent agencies tasked with protecting the victims of the state's power. Speaking with journalists, Keshia explained that support from the police and the IOPC had been "non-existent" over the past six months. No GMP liaison officer was assigned in the first 24 hours as required and, in the days following the crash, attempts by the family to secure information from police at the hospital were rebuffed, with officers even suggesting Keshia perform her own investigation. Keshia did just that, obtaining CCTV footage from a local

1 Robson S (2021) 'He was just a lovely boy': Family demand answers six months after teen died in police chase crash. *Manchester Evening News*. 10 October.  
2 Independent Office for Police Conduct (2020) *Annual Deaths During of Following Police Contact: Statistics*. <https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/research-and-learning/statistics/annual-deaths-during-or-following-police-contact-statistics>

shop owner that raised questions about GMP's account.<sup>3</sup> These matters are now subject to an investigation by the IOPC, but the organisation's track record makes disciplinary action or prosecution unlikely. As a result of the 97 investigations into road traffic incidents completed between 1 April 2012 and 30 September 2018, only two officers were prosecuted for pursuit-related incidents and five for other emergency response driving incidents. None was convicted.<sup>4</sup>

Ronaldo's family believe that some of the problems highlighted by these events lie in the failure and opaque character of existing policies and procedures governing police pursuits. "The police need to value our right to life when considering initiating a pursuit," Keshia asserts. Keshia also contests the double system of justice, calling on the Crown Prosecution Service to treat police officers "like a regular person who has committed a crime". However, the Conservative government's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill proposes reforms to the Road Traffic Act 1988 that are likely to make it even harder to hold police accountable by creating a separate set of standards for police drivers to that of other drivers.<sup>5</sup>

At the vigil in south Manchester, Ronaldo's family and friends decried the new legislation by holding up home-made banners calling on the UK Parliament to 'Kill the Bill!' As the march reached the junction where the collision had taken place, Ronaldo's mother placed flowers and balloons at a makeshift memorial. Cars slowed,



*"It's got to stop. Ron has to be the last. It's too many, and until police are held accountable it's going to continue."*

Keshia, sister of Ronaldo Johnson

taking in the scene. Some honked their horns in solidarity. One woman with a car filled with young children asked what had happened to Ronaldo.

"And it was never in the news?" she exclaimed.

"I hope you get some justice."

<sup>3</sup> Robson S (2021) 'He was just a lovely boy': Family demand answers six months after teen died in police chase crash. *Manchester Evening News*. 10 October.

<sup>4</sup> Independent Office for Police (2018) *Consultation Response (Home Office Consultation on the Law, Guidance and Training Governing Police Pursuits)*. IOPC. 13 August.

<sup>5</sup> NPMP (2020) Police pursuits: we must kill the bill. *NPMP*.

# 7. Deaths in police custody:

REFLECTIONS FIVE YEARS ON FROM THE SEMINAL ANGIOLINI REVIEW

DEBORAH COLES, INQUEST

**The protests and outcry that followed the killing of George Floyd, as well as the murders of Sarah Everard, Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, have placed the issues of police accountability, brutality, misogyny and racism firmly on the public agenda.**

For INQUEST these issues are all too familiar. For four decades we have worked alongside families bereaved by contentious deaths, including deaths in custody and detention. We have seen a longstanding pattern of deaths of men, women, and children synonymous with state violence, neglect, structural racism and discrimination and impunity.

The state would rather silence, pathologise and patronise bereaved people than take action to change. INQUEST has stood alongside families to open these systems up to public scrutiny. We have shone a light behind the closed doors of police custody, prisons, mental health institutions, immigration detention, and we have challenged state

and corporate bodies.

The state continues to perpetuate a culture of denial, delay and defensiveness. Bodies such as the police are often more concerned with reputation management than preventing deaths. They discredit or demonise the dead, to obscure their role. In contrast, bereaved families have been powerful advocates for change, turning their grief into resistance and galvanising action against injustice.

Marcia Rigg and Aji Lewis are two women at the centre of this. Alongside INQUEST, their campaigning forced the government to set up the 'Angiolini Review'. Published five years ago, the Report of the Independent Review of Deaths and Serious Incidents in Police Custody by Dame Elish Angiolini QC made important recommendations for change.<sup>1</sup>

The report's launch was seen as a watershed moment. It was the first review of its kind, directly informed by family testimony. It was an opportunity

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<sup>1</sup> INQUEST (2017) Blog: First ever review on deaths in police custody supports key INQUEST recommendations and is an opportunity to save lives. *INQUEST*. 31 October.

to challenge the repeated failure of the state to prevent deaths and harm, and gave specific and tangible recommendations for change.

A key aim of the review was to address dangerous and deadly use of force and restraint by police, particularly against people in mental health crisis. It also highlighted the disproportionate deaths of Black men in police contact. And aimed to ensure police would be held to account for wrongdoing.

Five years on, in its latest Progress Update,<sup>2</sup> the government stated that it has delivered 65 of the 110 Angiolini recommendations. A further 20 were apparently delivered in part and 12 were rejected (13 recommendations are not mentioned at all.) The government doesn't state which recommendations are completed and which aren't, raising serious questions about transparency and evidence for these claims.

We are left asking: if meaningful action is being taken by the government, police forces and public bodies then why do preventable deaths and harms keep occurring? (see Pimblott, article six; Pimblott and Joseph-Salisbury, article eight).

The latest data shows the number of deaths in or following police custody has remained stubbornly similar for the past ten years.<sup>3</sup> The latest statistics on police use of force indicate there has been a 13% increase on the previous year.<sup>4</sup> Black people are five times more likely to have force used against them and are more likely to die after police use of force.

We have consistently seen repeated recommendations from investigations, inquests, inquiries and reviews on deaths in custody and detention. Promises of lesson-learning and action are made. Yet we do not see change.

What families tell us over and over again is that, more than anything else, they want to ensure no other family has to face what they have been

through. So, what needs to happen to truly prevent future deaths?

INQUEST is calling for: an end to the inequality of arms at inquests through automatic, non-means tested public funding for bereaved families; a statutory duty of candour that would create a legal requirement for agents of the state, such as the police, to be open and truthful about their actions; the creation of a national oversight mechanism to follow up and monitor action taken in response to recommendations from inquests and inquiries; and an end to impunity for police and other state bodies.

We also need to see radical, transformative change across society: a social and racial justice agenda that prioritises meeting people's needs rather than relying on punishment and prisons. Change will not come from actions such as 'better police training'. It will come when we start funding more services to build communities, address mental ill health, poverty and housing issues (see O'Neill, article 13; Fekete, Afterword).

The focus of this government is denying structural racism and inequality, and preventing resistance. Like successive governments before them, they ignore the evidence and repeat failed policies that focus on criminalisation and more prison places. Their political agenda perpetuates and reinforces structural inequality.

This all contributes to the continued death toll at the hands of the state. The government may not wish to take action, but we must continue. INQUEST stands alongside a powerful alliance of bereaved families, grassroots organisations, academics, lawyers, and other charities and campaigners. With an increasingly authoritarian government, the fight for state accountability has never been needed more.

<sup>2</sup> Home Office (2021) *Deaths in Police Custody: Government Update – 2021*. Home Office, London.

<sup>3</sup> INQUEST (2021) Media release: INQUEST response to new data on deaths in police custody. *INQUEST*. 29 July.

<sup>4</sup> Home Office (2020) *Police Use of Force Statistics, England and Wales: April 2019 to March 2020*. Home Office, London.



# 8. Bearing Witness at the Annual UFFC Rally and Remembrance Procession

KERRY PIMBLOTT AND REMI JOSEPH-SALISBURY, NORTHERN POLICE MONITORING PROJECT (NPMP)

**On Saturday 30 October 2021, hundreds descended on Trafalgar Square in London to mark the 22nd annual United Families & Friends Campaign's (UFFC) rally and remembrance procession.**

Since its inauguration in 1999, the UFFC event – organized by a coalition of the loved ones of people who have

died at the hands of the police – has called on the nation to bear witness to the injustice and suffering caused by the British state.

This act of 'bearing witness' matters.<sup>1</sup> Since 1990, 1,800 people have died in police custody or following other forms of police contact in England and Wales.<sup>2</sup> Black and other racialised people are disproportionately

<sup>1</sup> Clarke B, Chadwick K, Williams P (2017) 'Critical social research as a 'site of resistance': reflections on relationships, power and positionality. *Justice, Power and Resistance*. 1, 2, 261-282.

<sup>2</sup> INQUEST (2022) Deaths in police custody. *INQUEST*.

impacted by the police's lethal use of force.<sup>3</sup> Yet justice remains elusive with only three successful prosecutions of serving police officers on charges of murder or manslaughter in the past 35 years.<sup>4</sup> Two of those convictions came last year with the prosecution in June 2021 of West Mercia Police PC Benjamin Monk on manslaughter charges for the killing of former footballer Dalian Atkinson. This was followed in September by the prosecution of Metropolitan Police officer Wayne Couzens for the kidnap, rape, and murder of Sarah Everard. During sentencing, we learned that Couzens had detained Everard by deception, using COVID powers, and his police-issued warrant card and handcuffs, to effect a false arrest.

The names of Dalian Atkinson and Sarah Everard were among many called out by UFFC chair Marcia Rigg as the procession moved slowly down Whitehall to Downing Street. Rigg's brother Sean died from a heart attack in Brixton police station in 2008, after being violently restrained by officers during a mental health crisis.

*"We remember Joy Gardner."  
 "We remember Seni Lewis."  
 "We remember Ronaldo Johnson."  
 "We remember Moyied Bashir."  
 "We remember Sarah Everard."  
 "We remember Brian Douglas."  
 "We remember Sheku Bayoh."*

As the procession called out the names of the people stolen from their loved ones by the British state, they reminded all of us not to forget. Their calls urged us to widen the circle of those standing in resistance against

police violence, and draw on the wellsprings of solidarity to build mass movements for justice and abolition.

Hopes of such a movement have grown in the year since the unprecedented transnational Black Lives Matter demonstrations that followed George Floyd's killing by Minneapolis Police last summer. Yet a recurrent theme in the speeches delivered outside Downing Street was the need to bear witness to the racialised violence of the British state. "Don't think America, think of England," entreated Ajibola Lewis, mother of Seni Lewis who died after being restrained by 11 police officers while a patient in a mental health facility. "Bad, bad things are happening here." Minkah Adofo, founding member of UFFC, agreed: 'We don't have to look to America, we can look on our own doorstep!'

In their speeches, bereaved families sought to shatter the strategic silence surrounding state violence in Britain that enables the process of forgetting on which national mythologies about matters of race, citizenship and justice rely. "We need to educate people about what's happening here in the UK," asserted Mohannad Bashir,

*The UFFC procession makes its way from Trafalgar Square to Downing Street*



<sup>3</sup> Inquest (2022) BAME deaths in police custody. *INQUEST*.

<sup>4</sup> Full Fact (2020) We know of one successful conviction of a police officer for the killing of someone in police custody since 1971. *Full Fact*.

brother of Mouayed Bashir who died after being restrained by Gwent Police last year.

Outside Downing Street, the voices of family members left the crowd in no doubt about the gross injustices carried out 'on our own doorstep'. Recurrent themes were evident across a number of the testimonies shared by family members. Most notably, perhaps, was the prevalence of mental health crises among those who have died at the hands of the police: people in need of support, but met with heavy handed responses from police officers that resulted in their death. "We need to stop the police having anything to do with people with mental health issues," said Anna Susianta, mother of Jack Susianta who drowned in the river Lea after fleeing Metropolitan Police officers in fear during a mental

*Family and friends of Ronaldo Johnson join the rally against police violence in Trafalgar Square*

*Outside Downing Street, the voices of family members left the crowd in no doubt about the gross injustices carried out 'on our own doorstep'.*

health episode in 2016. There were also a number of accounts that detailed the lies and deceit of police officers, and the wider state apparatus, further compounding the hurt of those seeking justice. That these accounts span deaths that occurred over several decades attests to the chilling intransigency of these injustices.

The recent convictions of serving





police officers could be viewed by some as a belated sign of progress. But UFFC campaigner Ken Fero cautioned strongly against looking to the British state for solutions (see the NPMP editorial). Rather than rely on the police to police themselves, Fero announced that UFFC was collaborating with Migrant Media, 4WardEverUK and BLM UK to hold a People's Tribunal on Police Killings in 2022, which will hear evidence directly from families and other relevant parties. Following in the tradition of an earlier generation of campaigners, such as WEB Du Bois, Malcolm X and William L Patterson, UFFC intends to internationalise the struggle against

racialised state violence by taking the tribunal's findings to the United Nations.<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, organisations such as UFFC, Inquest, the National Mikey Powell Memorial Fund, and the growing ranks of local police monitoring groups continue the important survival work of delivering financial, legal and emotional support to affected families, as well as strengthening local mechanisms of self-defence against police violence through political education and copwatching initiatives. As powerfully expressed by Mohannad Bashir: "The power of the people is greater than the people in power."

*The UFFC rally and procession congregates in front of Downing Street, 30 October 2021*

5 Peoples Tribunal. [peoples-tribunal.org](http://peoples-tribunal.org)

# 9. People's Review of Prevent

PROFESSOR JOHN HOLMWOOD AND DR LAYLA AITLHADJ,  
CO-CHAIRS OF THE PEOPLE'S REVIEW OF PREVENT

**Prevent is one of the four component parts of the government's counter-terrorism strategy, which is purportedly aimed at preventing people from being drawn into terrorism.**

The other strands are concerned directly with offences or the interception of offences using surveillance and intelligence methods, whereas Prevent concerns what criminologists have called the 'pre-criminal space'. In 2015 after a decade of being policy, Prevent was placed on a statutory footing, which meant that all public sector workers, from teachers to opticians, were mandated to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. To fulfil this duty, the Home Office – and later, third parties – developed training grounded in the highly contested pseudo-science that forms the basis for the signs of radicalisation used in the training.

Concerns and criticisms about Prevent have been raised, documented and evidenced by MPs, UN special rapporteurs, civil society groups and community members since its inception. However, the government has failed to

acknowledge these concerns and has continued to shroud Prevent in secrecy. Prevent's expansion means that it has become a convenient weapon against those who oppose it, or any other government message of the day, so that activist groups, including those drawing attention to climate change, have been targeted.

Despite its wide remit, the origins of Prevent, as a tool to target the Muslim community, must never be forgotten. Whether they have been directly referred to Prevent as a result of their normative Islamic beliefs and practices, or whether they have indirectly suffered as a community through self-censorship and surveillance, the entire Muslim community has become suspect, and this suspicion and bias has been normalised and institutionalised via Prevent. Of course, when one community is targeted and this is accepted it becomes easier to expand the abuse to other parts of society, and this is exactly what we have witnessed with the harms of Prevent.

In February 2019, at the tail end of Theresa May's minority government, the government finally conceded on the need to conduct an independent review

of Prevent (to be completed within 18 months). It was part of a ‘deal’ necessary to pass a new Counter Terrorism and Border Security Bill.

Ben Wallace, the Security Minister, announced the review by challenging critics of Prevent to provide solid evidence that it causes harm, or otherwise be accused of ‘spin and distortion’.<sup>1</sup> It was left to his successor, Brandon Lewis, to announce the appointment of the reviewer, Lord Carlile. Carlile was hardly independent: he had endorsed the 2011 Prevent strategy that initiated the approach that is at issue. Furthermore, the government had failed to appoint Lord Carlile in line with their own procedures. This, with his lack of independence, led to a legal challenge by Rights Watch.

Consequently, Lord Carlile stepped down. The review fell into abeyance until, finally, William Shawcross was appointed in January 2021 by the new government of Boris Johnson. Shawcross had been a Director at the Henry Jackson Society, a Senior Fellow at Policy Exchange and was Chair of the Charity Commission between 2012 and 2018, when it disproportionately targeted Muslim charities<sup>2</sup>. The immediate response by Muslim organisations and civil society advocacy groups, alike – for example, Prevent Watch, MEND, CAGE, Rights Watch, Liberty and Amnesty International – was to call for a boycott of the review.<sup>3</sup> Not only have 17 organisations signed up, but more than 500 Muslim organisations and prominent individuals unanimously agreed that they would boycott the Shawcross review.

As the boycott gained momentum, so did our desire to organise what has always been

there, the evidence of the impact of Prevent – evidence that the government has ignored and will continue to ignore, evidence from the people affected by Prevent rather than those who rely on it financially and have a vested interest in its expansion. The People’s Review provides an alternative platform that those who boycotted the review can utilise, and those who have never spoken before can use as a safe space to contribute their experience and evidence about the harms of Prevent.

We hope that such reviews will become more commonplace as the government loses the trust of the people in what appears to be a worrying trend where bodies designed to provide a view independent of government and to hold public bodies to account are increasingly acting as agencies in the implementation of governmental policy. Worryingly, William Shawcross will go immediately from his appointment as independent reviewer of Prevent to take up the post of Commissioner for Public Appointments.<sup>4</sup>

‘Spin and distortion’, then, is the government’s approach, not that of its critics. This is now ‘baked in’, as alignment with government policy has become the primary consideration in public appointments, rather than independence and concern for good governance. We can no longer rely on the people who have injected harm into our society to relieve us of its consequences. It is time that communities, including those who implement Prevent against their moral conscience, come together as part of the People’s Review of Prevent and expose the truth.

1 Grierson J, Dodd V (2019) Prevent strategy on radicalisation faces independent review, *The Guardian*, 22 January.

2 Scott-Baumann A, Perfect S (2021) *Freedom of Speech in Universities: Islam, Charities and Counter-Terrorism*. Routledge, London.

3 Liberty (2021) Rights groups boycott Prevent Review. *Liberty*. 16 February.

4 The Commissioner for Public Appointments (No date) *About the Commissioner*.

# 10. Black Protest Legal Support

## BPLS

**Black Protest Legal Support (BPLS) was set up amid the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in May 2020. It is the first legal observer group focussed on anti-racism, and the treatment of protestors and legal observers from Black, Brown and Racialised Groups (BBRG).**

The primary aim was to monitor policing at BLM protests and assist those who were arrested through the work of our legal observers. There are a number of key themes we have experienced while legal observing, but the two most prominent and concerning are: the aggression of the police when dealing with BBRG legal observers and protestors, and the police's misuse of power as they manipulated COVID regulations, used egregious methods such as kittling, and asked for inappropriate information to create a sense of threat and danger.

The hostility from police has also been directed at our legal observers. Since BPLS began its work in May 2020, BBRG legal observers have disproportionately and consistently

been beleaguered by police through intimidation, aggression, and violence at protests. Our legal observers have also been subject to arrest and held against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which endorses more police brutality at protests with impunity. The treatment of BBRG protestors and legal observers was disproportionately aggressive throughout the 'Kill the Bill' protests, when it became apparent that the police were behaving in a substantially more aggressive manner than usual. BPLS published a press release about the threatening nature of the police throughout the Kill the Bill protests, as well as during the arrest of five of our legal observers.<sup>1</sup>

Particularly grievous was the racially biased conclusions that the police were making on deciding who was part of the BLM protests. In one instance, a young Black man who had sought the aid of the police was instead subjected to a 'stop and search'. On Parliament Street a young Black woman was knocked unconscious by a police horse during

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<sup>1</sup> Black Protest Legal Support (2021) Press release: BPLS condemns the police's and government's attempts to erode our right to protest. *BPLS*. 16 March.

a kettling. Another Black woman was injured when a police officer lost control of her horse and it went charging into a crowd of protesters. There was a complete disregard for Black lives and bodies.

The heightened levels of police aggression and intimidation throughout the Kill the Bill protests were also apparent during other protests we attended during summer 2021. At the 'Shut Elbit Down' protest police were observed performing an active and purposeful display to protect the Elbit Office, including cordoning off entrances to the offices, the use of force and the threat of arrest. The fact that during this protest three people were arrested despite the crowd being peaceful exemplifies the heavy handed, aggressive and over-reaching tactics in play.

Later on the same day, BPLS legal observers were present at the Colombia and Palestine Solidarity protest, which

bolster their threats.

However, the police's abuse of power does not just include their manipulation of COVID regulations, an issue explored in more detail by Scarlet Harris (see Harris, article two). Throughout the BLM protests the police used tactics such as kettling, collecting the names and addresses of protestors, and physical violence to create a sense of threat and panic. These tactics of violence, hostility and aggression are all too familiar when it comes to BBRC protestors, and are routinely witnessed by our legal observers.

The police have routinely failed to respect the right to legal observation of their behaviour and have moved to bolster their own powers through the current imposition of the PCSC Bill, despite the fact that no current or future legislation can impose a blanket ban on protest. The aggressive response of many police

*The police have routinely failed to respect the right to legal observation of their behaviour and have moved to bolster their own powers through the current imposition of the PCSC Bill*

started at 5pm. There was a heavy police presence and extreme aggression was again deployed, this time from the outset of the protest. The police were observed threatening protestors to leave, using the COVID regulations to

officers at the protests we have observed indicates how much they rely on an imbalance of power to quash resistance movements. Their actions demonstrate systemic racism as it operates on the ground.

# 11. Cops off Campus

GEORGE VIRGO

**We formed Cops Off Campus at the University of Manchester in response to University Security's assault on black student Zac Adan in November 2020.**

We were a group of students with campaigning experience and in contact with each other through a rent strike and a tower occupation. In the same week, the university called the police on its own students' peaceful protest. A riot van arrived and the level of harassment students faced that night caught the attention of local MP Afzal Khan, who denounced it on Twitter. We held a protest demanding 'cops off campus' in December 2020, and launched our social media pages, @Uomcopsoffcampus on Instagram and @UMcopsoffcampus on Twitter.

As a result of our appeals for students to share their experiences with the police and security staff on campus through these pages stories came flooding in. Some were from as long as

seven years ago, when students in their rooms had been physically assaulted by security staff with the excuse they were conducting 'drug searches'; others concerned homophobic and transphobic abuse, or were from female students who had overheard security make objectifying comments about them. The vast majority of these experiences were from too long ago or did not include identifying details of security staff members so we did not follow them up. I interviewed students on my legal observer shifts and collated their stories into a 27-page report on the abuses of power by the police on campus. The Network of Police Monitoring (NetPol) helped us edit and published the report on their website.

This is a summary:

- Proactive police patrols of campus, in which the police are let into flats by University of Manchester security, have no legal grounds. We have compiled evidence that unlawful

*“There was no conversation. They just pinned me up against the wall and said I looked like a drug dealer. Why? Because I am black and wearing a hoodie.”*

Zac Adan, interviewed by BBC news after his assault.

*“Around midnight, six to eight police officers stormed into our flat and started demanding our details. We tried to be co-operative from the beginning, but they were really rude. At one point two police men started shouting at my flatmate because they didn’t believe she was giving the right details (even though she was) and caused her to have an anxiety attack once they left.”*

Anonymous student interviewed by Cops Off Campus.

searches of student properties have happened on many occasions, using the pretext of noise complaints, and that the university is working with the police to enable them to enter. Covid regulations do not include a power of entry into private residences for police investigating lockdown breaches.

- Police are demanding to take personal details and ID from students, despite having no legal grounds to do so. The police can ask for personal details to issue a fixed penalty notice (fine) for breach of Covid regulations, but they have no legal basis to take personal details from students who are inside their own homes and not breaking any laws. This appears to be nothing more than a tactic of intimidation.
- Police and university security have racially profiled and assaulted black students. The threat that police pose to people of colour, as demonstrated by incidents such as the racial profiling and violent search by security of a black University of Manchester student and the arrest by police (on tenuous legal grounds) of another black University of Manchester student, is a pressing issue that the university urgently need to address.

- Active police patrols on campus are having a serious impact on the mental health of students. Locked down in accommodation blocks with little support, the intrusive police presence on campus has created an atmosphere of fear among students. Many students have reported feeling unsafe, some to the extent of having panic attacks, due to the ability of staff and the police to enter their homes at any moment.

Initially, we hoped that press attention would motivate the University of Manchester to stop working with the police, but though we were featured in several major national papers the university continued to deny working with the police and the illegality of their actions, and refused to acknowledge the evidence in our report. They maintained this position throughout our three-week occupation of the Samuel Alexander building from April to May 2021.

Inspired by the tradition of community defence groups, such as the Black Panthers, we also took a more direct approach: cop watching. Manchester Green and Black Cross trained a group of 12 students as legal observers, with additional specific

*“I was playing Monopoly with my flatmates in our shared kitchen when the police walked into our flat. They must have been given keys by staff or been let in by staff because we did not consent to let them in. They saw we weren’t breaking any rules and told us to go to bed. It was a disturbing intrusion, which has made me feel like I can’t be safe in my own home. I couldn’t believe they thought they had a right to tell us when to go to bed.”*

Anonymous student interviewed by Cops Off Campus.

training in COVID laws and their application on campus. We bought pink high-vis vests, which quickly became recognised by students as we followed the police every Friday and Saturday night. Our aim was to never allow an officer to be on campus without a legal observer nearby to hold them accountable. The first night we were on shift we put on our vests as the police came out of a flat that had ‘acab’ written in the window. It was completely silent and dark from outside, but the police cited a noise complaint as their reason for entry. We spoke to the residents, who said they hadn’t been liable for any fines, but their names and details had been taken by the police anyway. When we realised this was a common intimidation tactic also later used against a flat with ‘BLM’ written in the window, we distributed a digital leaflet encouraging students to quote the law to police who try to enter their flats without permission from the occupier and take their details without reason. Students were generally intimidated by the police and feared physical violence if they were not compliant so this approach had limited effect.

We learned to time when we became visible by wearing our vests tactically. When we were wearing them the police would try to get out of our sight, often getting into their cars and leading us in circles or driving off campus and re-entering elsewhere. Sometimes they became verbally aggressive with us or students who questioned their presence in such large numbers. For a force recently put in special measures for under-recording crimes, it was clear to even middle-class white students that Greater Manchester Police were more concerned with invasive control of student night life than crime victim safety.

We discussed taking the university to court over their actions and Levin’s Law offered to represent us for free. But we decided the trial would be too long and the costs if we lost too high.

Raids of flats stopped completely as Covid regulations became less strict and as we became better at not letting the police out of our sight. They still patrolled, sometimes in groups of about ten officers as well as several security staff, but our presence successfully deterred raids.

# 12. Kill The Bill

## SISTERS UNCUT MCR

**We are Sisters Uncut Manchester, an intersectional feminist direct-action collective fighting against state violence and austerity. It's painfully clear to us that the police do not help communities solve the problem they face. Communities need resources and support, not surveillance and punishment.**

Greater Manchester Police are institutionally racist and misogynist (see Connelly, article five) and many people cannot trust them enough to call them for help. They are also incompetent and unaccountable, failing to record 80,000 crimes in the course of a year (see Joseph-Salisbury and Sian, article four). Despite this, our local government has seen fit to place police officers permanently in schools without consulting parents or teachers, and has given the GMP a leading role in its new strategy for tackling gendered violence.

The GMP are sanctioned and emboldened by oppressive legislation rolled out by our governments. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill is the latest such piece of legislation.

The bill will give police officers more power in a huge range of situations. There will be an increased police presence in schools, increased targeting and criminalisation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities,

increased stop and search powers, and the power to effectively shut down any protest or picket line. It is a draconian piece of legislation that this government tried to fast track through parliament in the middle of a pandemic. The bill will have a huge impact on groups of people who are already harassed by the police every day, but it will affect absolutely everyone.

This is why we've fought as part of the #KillTheBill movement, which swept the country this year.

As part of the National Kill the Bill Coalition we have marched the streets of Manchester. We have run 'know your rights' and self-defence workshops, we have been out speaking to people on the streets, we have spread the word. We have built connections between groups that have never worked together before, and we have shared skills, resources and ideas. There is a majority Conservative government and some form of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill was always going to pass through parliament, but we must now make the bill ungovernable on the streets. In doing this, we must also move towards abolishing the police force and replacing it with something that actually serves our communities (see Fekete, Afterword).

Last year, Sisters Uncut asked the

nation whether it would be interested in police intervention training and the response was astonishing. More than 5,000 people of all ages signed up for this urgent and practical training. Communities across the country started to question whether the police can ever be a force for good. Next up: CopWatch Patrols, and then our communities will have the space to start talking about what we deserve and how we're going to build it.

On 2 November 2021, Sisters Uncut MCR, alongside the Northern

Police Monitoring Project, ran a two hour CopWatch training session that explored GMP violence, our rights as bystanders, what to do if you are searched or arrested, and why community responses to police violence are essential. This training will not be the last you will hear from us: there will be more actions, interventions, training and organising, and as we come together to resist escalating state violence in the UK.

Get involved, the movement needs you.



# 13. Questions for Abolitionists

SIOBHAN O'NEILL, NORTHERN POLICE MONITORING PROJECT (NPMP)

**As someone who claims ‘I am an Abolitionist’, I find myself asking questions about what this means and what questions come with taking up this position. While I am yet to have the answers – and perhaps need not have them all to imagine an alternative world – I share my ‘Questions for Abolitionists’ here in the hope that writing them down will help me think them through and perhaps be helpful for others too. I also hope that posing these questions might spark reflection and conversation amongst those of us interested in abolitionism. I frame these questions with police abolition specifically in mind – and in the context of the UK in particular – but it is important to note that police abolition is one part of a larger, global picture. Police abolition is linked, not only to prison abolition and the transformation of the criminal justice system, but also to the abolition of state violence in all its forms (for example border enforcement and migration controls) and, more broadly, of structures of global racial capitalism.**

Abolitionism, and police and prison abolitionism in particular, are not new. They have, however, become more widespread in popular discourse

in recent times. Following the global Black Lives Matter mobilisations in 2020, which were ignited by widespread outrage at George Floyd’s death at the hands of police officer Derek Chauvin in the US and the continuity of police violence this case represented, conversations about defunding, divesting and abolishing the police have become ever more prevalent. While the violence and harms of policing are also not new, more and more people are recognising and critiquing how problematic policing and the cultures embedded in police forces are.

According to figures based on Home Office, IOPC and other governmental agency data, there were 1,804 reported deaths in police custody and/or following other forms of contact with the police between 1990 and 2021.<sup>1</sup> Racially minoritised people die disproportionately as a result of use of force or restraint by the police and “in the past ten years, 8% of those who died in custody were racialised as Black, despite representing only 3% of the population”.<sup>2</sup> Racially minoritised people are “disproportionately represented in the CJS at every level, from stop-and-search to arrests,

<sup>1</sup> INQUEST (2022a) Deaths in police custody. *INQUEST*.

<sup>2</sup> INQUEST (2022b) BAME deaths in police custody. *INQUEST*.

conviction and imprisonment and deaths in custody”.<sup>3</sup> It has also been reported that “there were 1,500 accusations of sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, exploitation of crime victims and child abuse)” against police officers between 2012 and 2018.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, “at least 15 women have been killed by police officers” and “one woman a week comes forward to report a serving police officer for domestic or sexual violence” with “700+ reports of domestic abuse” being made against police officers between April 2015-2018.<sup>5</sup> Not only is it clear that “at every level, racism defines UK policing”,<sup>6</sup> evidently, sexism too is a constituent part of UK policing (see Connelly, article five). As well as the statistical evidence, specific cases – such as the murder of Sarah Everard by Met Police Officer Wayne Couzens (and the excessive use of police force at the vigil held for her) as well as the (racialised) policing practices throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (see Harris, article two) – have demonstrated tangibly just how problematic the institution and cultures of policing are here in the UK (and beyond).

These are not problems that can be ‘reformed’ away, they are systemic and entrenched in the foundations of policing. From its emergence, policing has always been about ‘discipline and control’, ‘protecting private property, quelling social unrest, putting down strikes’ and disciplining the unruly poor rather than preventing crimes and protecting ‘the people’, as is commonly argued.<sup>7</sup> Given these roots, refining and improving such an institution – one designed with these racialised, classed and gendered

power dynamics embedded in it – is an extremely limited intervention. Rather than addressing the problems of policing through superficial reforms that make policing friendlier and more diverse, and seek to hold ‘bad apples’ accountable for their individual wrongdoings, abolition offers us a transformative solution to the problems of policing, by understanding those *individual* wrongdoings to be *institutionally* mediated. Thus, abolition is a process of dismantling the institution as a whole and the logics that underpin it, it pushes us to open up our political imaginations beyond the systems, structures and institutions that we take for granted. This, however, is not simple and there are a lot of challenging questions that arise through considerations of abolitionism, below I consider just a few.

### What do we do in the meantime?

For abolitionists, building an alternative world is the goal. Yet building such a world is a challenge that takes time and a lot of work. The goal can feel a long way off so what do we do in the meantime? I begin with this question because it feels the most immediate.

In a context where policing is taken for granted and deeply embedded in our societies and cultures, what is best practice for abolitionists in the meantime? For instance, if I were to witness a man being violent and threatening towards a woman in public, and if that man were armed and I felt unequipped to intervene and that my safety might also be at risk, what should I do? Though I would feel conflicted about doing so, in such a situation

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3 Shankley W, Williams P (2020) Minority ethnic groups, policing and the criminal justice system in Britain. In Byrne B, Alexander C, Khan O, Nazroo J, Shankley W (Eds) *Ethnicity, Race and Inequality in the UK: State of the Nation*. Policy Press, Bristol. 51-72, p52.

4 Sisters Uncut (2021) Sisters Uncut protest Wayne Couzens sentencing, say “Police don’t keep women safe”. *Sisters Uncut*.

5 Ibid.

6 Joseph-Salisbury R, Connell, L, Wangari-Jones P (2021) ‘The UK is not innocent’: Black Lives Matter, policing and abolition in the UK. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*. 40, 1, 21-28. p24.

7 Axster S, Danewid I, Goldstein A, Mahmoudi M, Tansel C, Wilcox L (2021) Colonial lives of the carceral archipelago: rethinking the neoliberal security state. *International Political Sociology*. 15, 415-439, p422-423; Vitale A (2021) *The End of Policing*. Verso, London. p36.

and in a context in which policing seems to be the only option (or at least the most available option), I would be inclined to call the police, even as I acknowledge the inadequacy and risks of doing so. Similarly, if someone were to break into my flat late at night and I felt I was in immediate danger, what should I do? As a young woman of colour, the police don't invoke a sense of safety and security for me. However, in a situation where there is immediate danger and no established alternatives to turn to, calling the police seems like an action I might have to take. As abolitionists how can we reckon with this? What is the best course of action when there are not alternative and legitimate channels available? What is best practice for abolitionists in societies where we are yet to establish alternatives and in which we are striving for, but have not yet reached, abolition?

### What are the alternatives to policing?

Following this, what are the alternatives to policing – and the current criminal justice system – and do we need to know what they are in order to be abolitionists? As Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues, “abolition is not *absence*, it is *presence*, it is “building the future”.<sup>8</sup> As well as setting out to dismantle the institution of policing, we must adopt “proactive, visionary positions that centre alternatives to policing”.<sup>9</sup> With this in mind, what are the processes, practices and institutions we would want to see in the quest to build alternative, better and more just societies?

Some of the alternatives should be structural solutions that tackle the issues at the root of ‘crime’. Investing in education and health services, building up and providing accessible mental health and counselling services,

decriminalising and destigmatising drugs and sex work, as well as broadly tackling poverty would drastically transform our societies, opening up opportunities to those who have been disadvantaged and excluded from the formal economy. If people are denied access to or success in the formal economy, and if they are constrained to living in areas that have been neglected by the state, ‘crime’ can be the only option for survival. Dealing with the structural causes in this way would massively reduce ‘crime’ and thus the need for policing. This is especially pertinent given that, in policing and the popular imagination, the label of ‘crime’ is primarily reserved for the actions and behaviours of the poor and working classes.<sup>10</sup> As such, the police – and criminal justice system more broadly – tend to ‘excuse and ignore’ the crimes of elites while ‘intensely criminalising’ the poor and working classes.<sup>11</sup> An example of this is the way that those whose actions led to the endangerment of tenants’ lives and actual deaths when Grenfell Tower caught fire in 2017 – the Kensington Tenants Management organisation, local and central government, and the companies that supplied the flammable cladding to Grenfell Tower – have not been held accountable.

As well as these systemic alternatives, are there alternative institutions we want in our abolitionist future? While abolitionists and those who have had bad experiences with the police take issue with the police’s self-appointed role as ‘protectors of the people’ who keep us safe, there is a question to be asked about what kinds of institutions and people we want to keep us safe, and when interpersonal violence does arise, what kinds of non-punitive and non-carceral processes might we have in place?

There is no singular or simple alternative to policing and the current criminal justice

8 Gilmore RW, Lambert L (2018) Making abolition geography in California’s Central Valley with Ruth Wilson Gilmore. *The Funambulist*. 21(Space & Activism), np.

9 Joseph-Salisbury R, Connelly L, Wangari-Jones P (2021) ‘The UK is not innocent’: Black Lives Matter, policing and abolition in the UK. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*. 40, 1, 21-28. p.26.

10 Reiman J (2000) *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison: Ideology, Class and Criminal Justice*. Allyn & Bacon, Boston.

11 Vitale A (2021) *The End of Policing*. Verso, London. p52.

system. As Angela Davis says, we should look for “an array of alternatives that will require radical transformations of many aspects of our society”.<sup>12</sup> What are some of the various options we might want? And relatedly, do we need to know exactly what our alternatives are to be abolitionists or is it enough to want to dismantle policing without having alternatives in mind?

### **What does justice look like after abolition?**

Related to the idea of alternatives, there is a question to be asked about what justice looks like after abolition. What might we imagine justice to be when it is not punitive or carceral? In an abolitionist future, what does justice look like for those who have been subjected to violence and harm? What might a community-based system of justice look like and what steps must we take to implement such a system?

When thinking about these questions about abolitionist justice – particularly in terms of the way we approach the perpetrators of violence and injustice – I think especially about those police officers who have been responsible and/or involved in the unlawful killings of people like Sean Rigg, Christopher Alder, Joy Gardner, Leon Patterson, Sheku Bayoh, Ronaldo Johnson (see Pimlott, article six) and many others (see the United Families and Friends Campaign)<sup>13</sup> who have died at the hands of the police. How can we hold these police officers – and others in the criminal justice system – to account? How do we seek justice while also being abolitionists who oppose the current structure and punitive ideology of the criminal justice system? How, as abolitionists, can we balance our goals with the immense grief and need to see those who have committed serious harms held accountable for their actions? In what ways can we give space to those who have lost loved ones and been so deeply harmed by violence and injustice that they might turn to carceral responses?

In an abolitionist future – which is one in which we no longer dehumanise those who have caused harm to others as the current criminal justice system does – what does justice look like when we recognise the humanity in those who we are holding accountable for their wrongdoing? How can we simultaneously hold people accountable and honour those who have been the victims of wrongdoing while recognising the humanity of perpetrators?

### **Does alternative language help or hinder abolitionist goals?**

Following this idea of alternatives through, I wonder how using alternative language might help or hinder abolitionist goals? Often, the language of divestment and defunding comes alongside (or instead of) abolition. These terms may be useful as they might be less alienating to those for whom the idea of complete abolition is unimaginable, intimidating or too extreme. The idea of diverting money away from policing and channelling it into education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, youth centres and so on seems to be more compelling to a wider public and to those who are critical of policing but think that there might be a role for such an institution in our societies – even if that role is reduced or reformed.

In this way, it seems valuable that a wider range of people can be brought into conversations about the problems of policing, and perhaps these people might be likely to ‘get on board’ with abolition given that they are already have some shared ideas of defunding and divesting and looking for alternatives to practices of policing. However, I wonder how using alternative (more palatable) language might dilute some of the radical intentions behind abolitionism. With this in mind, as abolitionists, should we use alternative language and, when we do, what is best practice to ensure that it is effective and,

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<sup>12</sup> Davis A (2003) *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Seven Stories Press, New York. p108.

<sup>13</sup> United Families and Friends Campaign. [uffcampaign.org](http://uffcampaign.org)

simultaneously, allows us to retain the radical and transformative nature of abolitionism?

### Can we abolish the police without abolishing the state?

If the police function, as many abolitionists argue, to protect and uphold the state as agents of state violence and control, should we shift our abolitionist focus from the institutions of the state to the state itself? If the state has shifted from the “(potential) provider of social goods to [...] security machine pre-emptively weeding out threat”,<sup>14</sup> does it have a place in the abolitionist future? And in what ways might we organise our politics if we are to move away from this?

Returning to policing and the criminal justice system as the focus, is it possible to abolish the police (and prisons) without abolishing the state? Perhaps, but as Ida Danewid articulated when I asked her the same question, if we abolish the institution of the police without dismantling the state, its violence will likely be carried out by another institution and/or in different forms. In which case, abolishing the state seems necessary. A secondary question that emerges from this is, should (or can) our solutions include the government? Given that the government can be understood as the particular group of people who govern the state and who have control over state apparatuses, is a solution that includes the government necessarily limited in that it does not extend to the state? While the concept of government is different from that of the state – the state is a political organisation that has jurisdiction over a particular territory and the government is one part of that organisation – the two are inseparable. I’m thinking about Alex Vitale’s ‘The End of Policing’ here, in which he argues “we need to build the capacity of communities to solve problems on their own or in true

partnership with government”,<sup>15</sup> and “we can use the power of communities and government to make our cities safer without relying on police, courts, and prisons”.<sup>16</sup> Vitale imagines the government to be a “non-punitive” one,<sup>17</sup> but does the inclusion of a government, no matter how non-punitive, necessarily limit abolitionist goals because of its inseparability from the state?

For those abolitionists who are in favour of abolishing the state, there is another question about where our focus should lie. If we decide that it is in fact necessary to abolish the state, should we work from the bottom-up (abolishing various institutions in order to abolish the state) or from the top-down (abolish the state and the rest will follow)? Maybe it’s both or somewhere in between. There does not seem to be a clear answer. Referring back to the first question I posed – concerning ‘what we do in the meantime’ – might be useful here too. If state abolition is an unimaginable, far-off and contentious goal, to what extent can and should we include non-punitive governments in our steps towards abolishing the police while we are striving toward a broader, more radical abolition? Can we work with the state and/or governments in the meantime?

### Concluding Remarks

These are big questions, to which I don’t have the answers, however, it is clear that we should continually engage with and grapple with these (and more) questions as we work toward abolitionist goals. There are no singular or simple answers to these questions, but it is important that we think about them collectively, not only for ourselves, but also that we might be better placed to respond to those who oppose abolition or who are yet to be convinced that we can imagine other societies.

14 Bhattacharyya G (2018) *Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival*. Rowman & Littlefield International, London. p142.

15 Vitale A (2021) *The End of Policing*. Verso, London. p172.

16 Ibid. p222.

17 Ibid. p173.

AFTERWORD

# The Abolitionist compass: anti-racism and policing

LIZ FEKETE, INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS

*“When we talk about abolition, we do a shorthand: for we’re not just talking about abolishing, we’re talking about building.”<sup>1</sup>*

Professor Barbara Ransby

**F**rom the vantage point of resistance, recent times have been extremely positive for anti-racism. Those of us active in police monitoring groups in the 1980s have been encouraged to see the new, locally based police monitoring groups – Bristol and Cardiff Copwatch, for example, and Sisters Uncut’s Cop Watch initiatives – adding their voices to a more national, less fragmented conversation. New opportunities for unity in action are opening in a culture of solidarity.

But in case we need reminding of what we are up against, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill will soon be given royal assent. With measures to further surveil, harass and criminalise young Black people, Gypsy Roma and Travellers, and other racialised communities, the legislation paves the way for paramilitary-style policing, with a multi-agency approach that draws other statutory agencies under the police’s command to become the ‘new normal’ in policing.

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<sup>1</sup> Bourne J (2020) ‘This is what a radical intervention could look like’: an interview with Barbara Ransby, *Race & Class*, 62(2), pp.14-23

And there is another danger. For the threat of creeping law and order authoritarianism does not just come from legislation or the government (or opposition for that matter), but from the bottom up. At the IRR we are researching whether a Blue Lives Matter movement is taking root in Europe. In the US, Blue Lives Matter emerged as a reactionary riposte to BLM demands about police violence and deaths in custody. Now, in the UK, we see the Blue Lives Matter slogan (and the thin blue line twitter avatar) appearing more regularly on social media accounts in response to BLM and in defence of police weaponry, such as Tasers. The trial of Wayne Couzens for the murder of Sarah Everard, as well as the Hampshire Serious and Organised Crime Unit revelations, show us that police officers are coming together in private chat groups to share misogynistic, homophobic and racist content. The police leadership know



these cases are just the tip of the iceberg, yet they brush criticism aside in an arrogant display of police authority; totally confident that current and future governments rely on them to police the crisis. The dehumanising racist, sexist and homophobic messaging on What's App groups, as well as daily evidence of police brutality arising from the use of excessive force in everyday encounters propel us towards one conclusion. Structured racism, structured denial and a culture of impunity are so entrenched in policing that the only way forward is through a fully-fledged 'defund and divest' strategy. But if we are to move forward, we need to be mindful of internal weaknesses, learning too from the US where 'defund and divest' is seen as incomplete without the full-throated demand to 'defund the police, fund our people'.

The struggles that I was involved in in the 1980s, that organisations like The Northern Police Monitoring

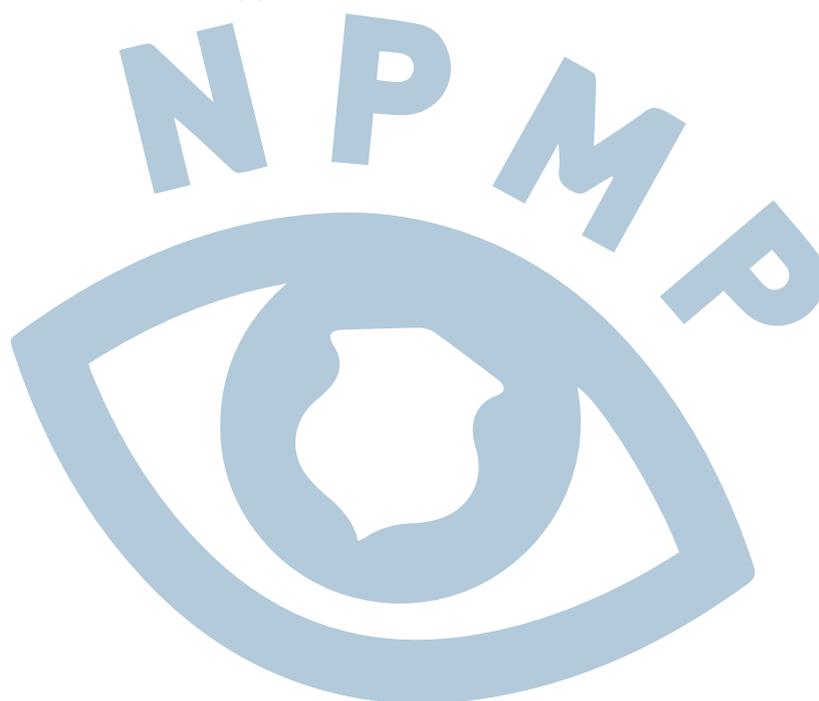
*Abolitionism today needs to provide real concrete alternatives to those hate crime forums that are situated in multi-agency policing.*

Project keep alive, were directed, not only against police violence that arose from the targeting of inner-city Black communities, but also against the police racism and indifference that left communities exposed to the violence of racist attack and fascist incursion. Uncomfortable as it may be for those who take a dogmatic approach to abolitionism, the demand to arrest and prosecute racists who poured petrol through the homes of Asian families or attacked schoolchildren on the way to school or murdered Stephen Lawrence, were made by family- and community-led campaigns (see O'Neill, article 13). The struggle against police violence and the lack of protection for racialised communities were seen as two sides of the same coin – with both calling up the right to self-defence. Abolitionism today needs to provide real concrete alternatives to those hate crime forums that are situated in multi-agency policing. For, as Barbara Ransby has warned, to 'abolish without building, leaves us vulnerable'.

Abolitionists' daring response to social crises is to suggest divestment

from 'law and order' and redirecting resources upstream to address mental ill-health, fund youth clubs, build affordable homes, and counter the harms done by racism and sexism at their roots. That's not 'nonsense', or 'anti-police', it's a simple demand for a more rational and more humane use of resources. But defunding the police means thinking proactively about what makes a community safe, how to create an infrastructure of practical community-led projects that empower people to own local care, and deal with harm and violence, whatever its source.

Abolitionism must not become a kind of lapel pin to signal virtue. We betray its transformative creative power if we turn it into yet another anti-racist orthodoxy. But if we see abolitionism as a compass that can orient us towards a more just society, and if we come together in forums that allow for democratic participation of all, irrespective of background or generation, we will have a really radical and transformative programme in our hands.





**Northern Police Monitoring Project (NPMP) is a Greater Manchester-based grassroots organisation working to build community resistance against police violence, harassment and racism.**

Amongst other things, NPMP delivers Know Your Rights training and workshops educating people on their legal rights, initiates and/or supports campaigns to raise awareness and publicly discuss policing in communities, and provides advocacy and support for people who have suffered at the hands of the police. We work in coalition and collaboration with a range of (inter) national organisations and local groups and communities.

We welcome the support of volunteers. Some of the ways you can get involved include:

- Police monitoring at key events
- Court watching
- Distributing online resources and physical materials, such as Bust Card
- Fundraising
- Blog writing
- And via the No Police in Schools campaign.

The No Police in Schools is a community campaign united by our shared concerns over the increasing presence of police in schools in Greater Manchester and beyond. Led in partnership with Kids of Colour and the NEU North West Black Members Organising Forum, the No Police in Schools campaign is made up of parents, teachers, young people, youth workers, community members, academics and activists. We believe that there should be no police in schools. Email us to get involved in the campaign and you can find out more about the campaign by visiting the website:

**<https://nopoliceinschools.co.uk>**

You can get in touch with us at [npolicemonitor@gmail.com](mailto:npolicemonitor@gmail.com) and you can keep up to date on what we're up to through our website:

**<http://npolicemonitor.co.uk>**

You can support NPMP in challenging police violence, brutality and racism by donating, here:

**<https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/npolicemonitor>**

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