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# **The Political Communication of Crime**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is of my own composition, based on my own work, with acknowledgement of other sources, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Gemma Flynn

4<sup>th</sup> November 2015

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to develop our understanding of the contemporary crime communication landscape. While this landscape is considered in its constituent parts, including specific features of current British politics, the evolving media sphere and the voice of the public, this thesis argues for a conceptualization of this realm that grasps its fluid and dynamic character. Original research is conducted through case studies of the 2010 UK General Election, the Phone Hacking Scandal and the 2011 Riots. Discourse analysis is employed in order to enhance our awareness of supralinguistic behaviour and of the play of power in the construction of crime narratives. This is contrasted with influential current accounts of 'populism' which, it is argued here, tend to be unduly deterministic and to err towards the dystopian.

The research suggests that structural shifts in the media landscape, specifically the recent ubiquity of new media coinciding with an undermining of the singular tabloid narrative, have enabled a redistribution of power in the symbolic construction of crime which can make it harder for political actors to capture the crime question for populist purposes. Furthermore, this shift has empowered the public voice and has infused political debate with a chaotic plurality of views.

Nevertheless, the symbolic weight of crime issues remains prominent in this landscape and Randall Collins' Interaction Ritual Chains (2004) is employed to add a microsociological picture of the escalation from small scale narrative to broad righteous anger. This requires an adaptation of this model to address interactions that occur outside the context of physical co-presence. Such perspectives on the plurality of mediated communication today both broaden and update our grasp of the political communication of crime and in so doing argue for a degree of optimism concerning the scope for democratic debate about criminal justice issues.

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Political language - and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists - is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase - some *jackboot*, *Achilles' heel*, *hotbed*, *melting pot*, *acid test*, *veritable inferno*, or other lump of verbal refuse - into the dustbin, where it belongs.

George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language* (1946)

The interaction between social media and conventional media today means that what used to be a building wave of opinion, which if you intervened in the right way it would then ebb again, now reaches tsunami force within hours sometimes, days certainly and can capsized a government, it can literally wash a government away.

Tony Blair, Leveson Inquiry 28<sup>th</sup> May 2012

## INTRODUCTION

Simply put, the primary interest of this thesis is the construction of crime narratives and as such, the central aim of this project has been to capture the crime communication landscape in a manner which provides a meaningful, original contribution to knowledge in this area. I have consistently felt that to best serve this subject matter would require an acceptance of the dynamic nature of this realm and as such, have prioritised fluidity in the research design here. A natural tendency in considering ‘The Political Communication of Crime’ would be to focus wholeheartedly on political speech, on the everyday behind-the-scenes pressures infused into the construction of criminal justice in politics. However, as has been commonly accepted since before Orwell bemoaned the deceptions of political speech in 1946, this is a realm within which it is difficult to derive certainty of intent, other than electoral success. A research project on this subject which focussed only on political cultures would have been limited in scope and undermined by the inevitable upheaval of this world which occurs every five years. More crucially here, I have asserted since the outset that the role of the media and the public ought to be given equal billing in a project of this nature. This facilitates a view of this realm which takes into account more enduring social structures and connects discussions of the meaning of crime in society to criminal justice outputs. As we will see, the political communication of crime today has evolved from our traditional view of the politician sermonizing from the podium to a vibrant, chaotic conversation in which manipulative narratives are derailed and the intentions of governments are capsized, are washed away by the wave of opinion. As such, the focus in this project is on these constituent elements as integral to the political communication of crime and I hope that I have approached the research and the theoretical discussion in a manner which best provides a sense of their evolving role and the impact that this will have on the future construction of ‘crime’.

An interest in this area and a sense that further research was required was prompted not only by the criminological literature which I will discuss in detail, but by a consideration of the field more generally. In reading broadly in criminology, I increasingly became aware of rich bodies of research that seemed to experience a



frustrating disconnect from practice. Indeed, we take for granted the solidification of truths self-evident only to those privy to the criminological canon, such as the negative impact of imprisonment which sits in direct opposition to the political maintenance of soaring prison populations in the UK and the still potent public desire for the retributive role of imprisonment. Beyond criminal justice policy, the lack of correlation between rising fear of crime and falling crime rates presented another divergence, a problem for criminology. These compelling examples, the lack of connection between research and policy and between fear and reality suggested that the contested meaning of crime in society was actively defining it away from reality and loading it with meaning which seemed not to prioritise rational policy decision-making which could ultimately reduce criminal activity. It seemed evident that if we wish to address these kinds of issues, if we wish to better understand the role of 'crime' in society, that a more detailed, forcefully modern view of the construction of crime narratives could better facilitate the negotiation of this landscape. Beginning with this premise provided another argument in favour of broadening focus to the public and the media, as it seemed clear that a view of criminal justice politicking alone could not explain the significant gap between research and policy outcomes.

Indeed, it has been a key aim of this project to move accounts away from the overly critical and at times conspiratorial views of criminal justice politics that present the communication of crime as a top-down linear process of the forceful delivery of manipulative crime ideas on to a willing, fearful public, rabid with 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens 1991). As I will discuss in Chapter 1, the tendency in criminological works has been to consider this realm as not only linear, but also intrinsic, immovable even. From the outset, my aim here has been to add detail to these accounts and challenge the overly dystopian and deterministic nature of the arguments they espouse. Not only can a clearer picture of the crime communication landscape challenge the intrinsic nature of these links, but it can infuse some optimism into accounts by providing detail and thus by providing an approach by which we might reconnect research and policy. As the project has progressed, it has become clear that shifting structures have altered the narrative landscape in immeasurable ways and I have aimed to approach these alterations with my original

aims in mind. This thesis embraces the chaos of such changes and aims to appreciate how they might infuse a sense of optimism into the crime conversation.

## ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

It is hoped that this project will provide an original contribution to research in a number of ways. Firstly, my aim will be to develop our account of this relatively unexplored and contemporary subject matter, specifically the crime communication landscape and its constituent elements, including specific features of current British politics, the evolving media sphere and the voice of the public. I will argue for a progression of crime and politics literature beyond limiting dystopias and furthermore, beyond a constrictive conceptual determinism. The research conducted here will update our perspectives on media and crime by introducing accounts of the power and potential of the evolving new media sphere and by considering these shifts within the context of established literature. A theoretical account of the public voice will be developed in which a microsociological account of interactions, specifically Randall Collins' *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) will be employed in order to better account for the progression of crime narratives at the public level. The employment of Collins' work will build on a perceived need to utilise a symbolic interactionist perspective in this realm, integrating Goffman's view of 'the self' and 'negotiated meaning' and Durkheim's account of symbolic power and which will constitute a distinctive expansion of literature in this area. I will apply Collins' model to today's evolving media sphere and suggest a necessary development in light of particular alterations in the structures of social interactions. Ultimately, I will hope to contribute an account of our narrative landscape which is fluid and modern and which can provide cause for optimism.

Original data has been collected in pursuit of an enhanced account of our crime communication landscape and the research approach employed here was designed in order to capture this potentially wide-ranging subject matter. A case study approach has been utilised which will assess varied forms of crime communication taking place as part of unique, sometimes unexpected events; the

2010 UK General Election, the Phone Hacking Scandal and the Riots of 2011. Each provides findings which will facilitate the observation of crime communication at its extremes and it is hoped that this body of data, which moves accounts beyond political cultures towards moments of scandal, of uproar and of the increased activity of electoral politics, will enrich our capacity for analysis. Furthermore, discourse analysis has been employed in order to enhance our appreciation of the context within which narratives are constructed and in turn to contribute to the fluid conceptualization of communication that is argued for. As such, I have chosen particular research tools and framed this approach towards what is at times new methodological terrain and would argue that the approach to the project can also be considered somewhat original in its constitution.

## THESIS OVERVIEW

Chapter 1 presents a discussion of the key criminological works which evolve our recent understanding of the interaction between the political realm and ‘crime’. The aim of this chapter is to assess the utility of these approaches, to test them out with the context of present day evolutions and to focus instead on the potential conceptual developments which might enhance their argumentative force. While these works add an enormous amount to our understanding of this vital realm, it is proposed that a useful development of this body of literature might move away from criminal justice dystopias, which have been limiting in their determinism.

Chapter 2 will contend that theoretical progress in pursuit of a more optimistic perspective of this realm can be found in moving towards microsociology. Arguments are made in favour of a reinvigoration of Symbolic Interactionism. In particular, Goffman’s account of ‘the self’ and ‘negotiated meaning’ is proffered, which along with an approach to Durkheim’s account of symbolic power that eschews ‘Durkheimianism’, can begin to develop accounts of the crime communication landscape. It is then argued that the model provided by Randall Collins’ *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004), which integrates these perspectives to

form a detailed microsociology of the natural escalation from small scale interaction to broad righteous anger, can enhance our understanding of the fluidity of this realm and can begin to move perspectives away from criminal justice dystopia.

Chapter 3 pays attention to the significant role of the media in the political communication of crime by considering classic texts in this field and providing a consideration of their enduring relevance. However, this chapter also introduces an account of the evolution of the media landscape, which is portrayed as newly defined by immediacy, choice, symbolic force and interactivity. This new realm is then applied to Collins' model and a development away from the necessity for physical co-presence is suggested, taking into consideration such influential structural shifts.

Chapter 4 discusses some of the methodological decisions that were made in the process of conducting this research. An argument for the power of case study research in capturing a vast, constantly fluctuating subject such as political communication is made and justification is given for the prioritisation of scandal, or outrage, of capturing the crime narrative landscape at its extremes. An awareness of the value of discourse analysis is given, as an approach to understanding the potency and meaning in acts and inferences beyond spoken or written language. Some necessary discussion of the utilisation of online newspaper sources as data is also provided.

Chapter 5 consists of a case study of the 2010 UK General Election. Justification for studying this particular event is given, along with a chronology of events, a discussion of the data considered and how it was collected and assessed. Academic literature on this event is assessed with the hope of providing some thorough analysis of the issues of the election. The central focus of this chapter, however, is the data gathered on the Leaders' Debates, the party positions on criminal justice and the presentation of 'crime' through traditional media outlets. Conclusions are presented

on the vast uptake and seemingly substantial power of new media frameworks and the mobilization of non-elite narratives, supporting the public voice as a new force in the construction of crime. Reinforcement of the ‘second order consensus’ notion of crime in politics is highlighted, which contrasts the forceful, inevitable nature of previous ‘populist’ accounts.

Chapter 6 presents a case study of the Phone Hacking Scandal of July 2011 and a similar approach is adopted, in which explanations are given regarding the choice of this event to serve as a case study. I then provide a chronology of events and academic literature on the area. The data focuses on the high profile Culture, Media & Sport Committee hearings and the Leveson Inquiry and conclusions are made on the unveiling and disabling of power sources in traditional populist political communication of crime. In particular, there is discussion of the potential strength of public expression through new media outlets to derail destructive, manipulative, dystopian narratives and to allow public outrage to have a serious impact on previously unfettered power relationships.

Chapter 7 is a case study of the Riots of August 2011. There is some discussion of the choice to study an incident of public outrage and the benefits of case study analysis to the researcher concerned with these unpredictable events. Again, there is a chronology, a consideration of academic literature in the area and analysis of the political statements of that period is presented. This case study reflects on the public voice as empowered. The riots provide a potent example of the mobilization of the public voice through new media, in which rioters congregated through Blackberry Messenger and clean-ups were organized via Twitter and ultimately the force of these new formats as the tools for a challenge to established power is demonstrated. Furthermore, we see the ability for public narratives and a weakened traditional media to force nuance into the debate and to disempower traditional populist approaches.

Chapter 8 serves as a final discussion and conclusion. The themes of each case study and the theoretical discussions from the earlier parts of the thesis are drawn together to make several concluding assertions. Firstly, it is suggested that viewing the crime narrative landscape from this more fluid, microsociological perspective can move accounts away from dystopia towards optimism. Furthermore, the findings suggest that structural shifts have enabled a redistribution of power in the construction of narratives, in which political attempts at punitiveness have been overwhelmed and have prompted a reversion to the ‘second order consensus’. It is also argued that developments in new media have coincided with an undermining of the singular tabloid narrative to empower the public voice and infuse political debate with a forceful, chaotic plurality of views. Bearing this in mind and considering the continuing symbolic weight of crime issues, the case studies present a compelling argument to utilise Collins’ framework to demonstrate the development of narratives. I also argue that they suggest the need for an extension of the *Interaction Ritual Chains* approach beyond physical co-presence, that to take into account the legitimacy of virtual communication unlocks an appreciation of meaningful debate in today’s public realm. Ultimately, I propose that this is a fluid and modern depiction of our narrative landscape and one which encourage a degree of optimism concerning the scope for democratic debate about ‘crime’ in today’s society.

# CHAPTER 1

## BEYOND DYSTOPIA IN THE CRIMINOLOGY OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

This chapter explores the body of literature that locates recent conditions of criminal justice within shifts towards Neoliberalism and ‘Late Modernity’. The aim of this chapter is to consider the continuing force of these arguments, to test them out with the context of present day evolutions and to focus on the potential conceptual developments which can be made. Particular focus is given to seminal works in this area, by David Garland, Loic Wacquant and the broader project of ‘Penal Populism’. It is argued that in recent years this body of literature has, through a reasonable preoccupation with the defining societal arrangements of Neoliberalism and ‘Late Modernity’, been prone to sweeping pessimism which it is argued, can be overly dystopian and unrealistic in its determinism. Furthermore, the central tenets of ‘Penal Populism’ are challenged, in particular, that the pursuit of electoral success as intrinsically linked to the public desire to restore moral order, is so powerful that it will continue to undermine the capacity for rational criminal justice debate. Ultimately, it is argued here that a move away from broad functionalism and towards an account which can incorporate optimism can better serve this project.

### The Culture of Control

Within criminological considerations of law and order politics, several key texts have alluded to the significance of communication processes as part of any assessment of crime in today’s ‘late modern’ society. Indeed, much discussion of the notable politicization of criminal justice has been framed around this suggested temporal shift, described by Young as essentially “a situation of contradiction and of paradox [where] the major institutions have both repressive and liberative potentials” (2007: 4). In ‘late modernity’ this institutional counter intuitiveness is supported by a society-wide “sense of insecurity, of insubstantiality, and or uncertainty, a whiff of chaos and a fear of falling” (Young 2007: 12), or as Giddens has termed ‘ontological

insecurity' (1990). The effect of these chaotic societal tendencies on criminal justice issues and in particular, penal values, is the focus of Garland's seminal 'Culture of Control' (2001).

Garland's work observes the relatively recent and unpredicted shift away from penal-welfarism, the formerly dominant veneration of the 'rehabilitative ideal' (Allen 1981) within criminal justice institutions which tended to espouse welfarist approaches to sentencing such as participation in treatment programmes, as dictated by accepted criminological wisdom. In Garland's account of the late modern shift, this approach is replaced with what he deems the 'crime control complex', in which "responsibilities for control are simultaneously both more dispersed and more intensely politicized" (Sparks 2009: 294). Indeed, he suggests that the public or private role in crime control developed from this 'whiff of chaos' into an urgent sense of risk-aversion and personal responsibility, while political answers adopted a tone of "regret and a firm determination to rewind the clock" (Daems 2008: 35). Coinciding with a rise in Neoliberalism and dominant centrist politicking, the 'crime control complex' fostered "a strikingly *anti-modern* concern for the themes of tradition, order, hierarchy, and authority" (Garland 2001: 99).

Garland argues that the social and institutional arrangements of late modern societies tend to produce higher crime rates as a by-product (2001: 106). The subsequent awareness of crime rates tends to challenge the validity of the state which leads to what Garland terms 'acting out', through "gestural penal politics as decision makers strive to demonstrate their strength and display solidarity with victims and their angry and indignant supporters" (Sparks 2009: 294). Indeed, within the context of this 'acting out', Garland suggests that the "political reaction has become more pronounced as the conditions of political speech have changed over time" (2001: 131). He details the particular shifts in conditions of political speech of the 1980s and 1990s in the UK and the USA, referring to a notable politicization of law and order which re-defined crime as politically dangerous, particularly during election periods. In line with the bifurcation previously mentioned, the political communication of crime issues at this time veered away from the behind the scenes "neo-liberal agenda of privatization, market competition and spending restraints"



(2001: 131) and instead presented a vociferous neo-conservative assertion of the need for moral discipline in order to “restore public confidence” (2001: 132). This trend facilitated the move away from rehabilitative approaches which were previously embraced and continued a pattern of rhetoric which flagrantly contradicted actual practice:

Of the many examples of this pattern, the most clear-cut is British Home Secretary Michael Howard’s *volte face* of 1993, which introduced new mandatory sentence laws with the declaration that ‘prison works!’ –shortly after his own government had publicly declared that ‘imprisonment is an expensive way of making bad people worse’.

(Garland 2001: 132)

Indeed, Garland demonstrates that during this period, this kind of political rhetoric begins to form the basis of pieces of legislative action, functioning primarily as a Foucauldian reinforcement of “the myth of sovereign power” (2001: 133), the quality of which consisted of no more than “impulsive and unreflective action, avoiding realistic recognition of underlying problems, the very fact of acting providing its own form of relief and gratification” (2001: 133).

As such, the legacy of this period appears to have been a total breakdown of the notion of bipartisan cooperation around crime matters, making way instead for “a highly charged political discourse now surround[ing] all crime control issues, so that every decision is taken in the glare of publicity and political contention and every mistake becomes a scandal” (2001: 13). Garland argues that due to the prominence of ‘sound-bite statements’, such as ‘Prison works’, ‘Three-strikes and you’re out’, ‘Truth in sentencing’, ‘No frills prison’, ‘Adult time for adult crime’, ‘Zero tolerance’, ‘Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’ (2001: 13), criminal justice policy decision-making has recently been constructed more for political events such as party conferences and television interviews, than in concurrence with the remit of longer-term evidence-based approaches as advised by policy elites. The result is an erratic but symbolically charged populism, both ‘volatile and

contradictory' (O'Malley 1999) valuing 'common sense' and a certain level of 'toughness', in essence; "the centre of political gravity has moved, and a rigid new consensus has formed around penal measures that are perceived as tough, smart and popular with the public" (Garland 2001: 14). Within Garland's Culture of Control, the emergence of the 'crime control complex' in the last 30 years has seemingly been propelled by the politics of late modernity and these trends towards a certain shallowness, an ill-supported populism in the communication of crime ideas.

Garland's view of crime in society as portrayed within The Culture of Control not only provides detailed analysis of crime and punishment as interlinked phenomena but also usefully avoids reductionism despite a vast subject matter (Young 2002). The landscape around which law and order politics are conducted is vividly portrayed, while we are introduced to the key theme that "the responses to crime are cultural adaptations by actors within the criminal justice system" (Young 2002: 232), essentially enhancing our view of the public in this discussion, by portraying them anew as active responders to an ever-changing situation (Young 2002).

However, the dystopian and all-encompassing nature of the Culture of Control argument has also been criticized for linking these political trends too readily to "a larger master pattern" (Zedner 2002: 341), one which seems unstoppable and of which Garland provides inadequate suggestion of counterbalance. Zedner argues that Garland's final suggestion in The Culture of Control, that the future of these seemingly unrelenting criminal justice practices "is not inevitable" (Garland 2001: 201), is too flimsily expounded and that this does a disservice to his argument more generally. She adopts Braithwaite's admonishment that "while criminologists take explanatory theory increasingly seriously, they do not take normative theory seriously at all" (Braithwaite 2000: 87) and that by her assertion, Garland is singularly placed to "suggest a way out of the current abyss" (Zedner 2002: 366), but that his lack of detail in this area displays an "abandonment of political commitment" (2002: 364). Indeed, there is a certain dystopian finality to Garland's argument, that the current configuration of crime control is so intertwined with the structural boundaries of the sovereign state, now limited in its abilities by "the denials and

expressive gestures that have marked recent penal policy” (Garland 2001: 205). Zedner’s critique seems to focus on the political purpose of Garland’s approach, which leaves the vast explanatory force of the Culture of Control largely untarnished. However, the dystopian nature of the Culture of Control argument derives largely from its emphasis on the irreversible structural changes undertaken as part of the shift towards late modernity, changes which dramatically undermine the sovereign state as a whole and the crime control project. What this account underemphasizes in this crumbling Neoliberal dystopia are the structures of communication and interaction which operate within this sphere. In doing so, it fails to acknowledge the potential for total upheaval in broad societal trends that can be mobilized beyond the political realm. The Culture of Control argument portrays a powerful, broad-ranging dystopia, however, as we will see, the ‘crime control complex’ beyond this account does have the potential to be reshaped significantly.

### **Punishing the Poor**

Loic Wacquant’s ‘Punishing the Poor’ (2009) presents another comprehensive reflection on the communication of penal politics, with significant explanatory force given once again to the power of present day trends towards Neoliberalism. However, Wacquant’s notion of the Neoliberal society is quite distinctly political where the Culture of Control was not, indeed in his analysis of the eruption of the American penal state, he goes so far as to characterize Neoliberalism “as a transnational political project carried out by an emerging global ruling class” (Wacquant 2009: 291 in Piven 2010: 112). Wacquant’s version differs from similar accounts of penal politics in that he proposes that:

the flexibilization of labour, the transformation of welfare policies toward workfare and stricter sanctions, and the expansion of policing and punitive powers and practices are forming constituent ingredients of the neoliberal state- which the prevalent theories of neoliberalism fail to acknowledge

(Mayer 2010: 93)

Wacquant is explicit in declaring ‘Punishing the Poor’ to be a selective excavation of fact which utilizes a materialist analysis of Marx and Engels as well as a symbolic approach derived from Durkheim and Bourdieu. Therefore, whereas Garland’s view of the Neoliberal sovereign state and its subsequent penal practices is understood as “one of the manifestations of a deep-seated cultural shift, Wacquant sees it more as something purposefully pursued to consolidate the dominance of neo-liberal rule” (Sparks and Loader 2011: 80). Punishing the Poor thus espouses a significantly divergent account in its understanding of the role of politics in strengthening the sovereign state. In ‘Crafting the Neoliberal State’ (2010) Wacquant acknowledges the “sweeping and stimulative” (2010: 207) account put forward in the Culture of Control, that “the distinctive social, economic, and cultural arrangements of late modernity’ have fashioned a ‘new collective experience of crime and insecurity’, to which the authorities have given a reactionary interpretation and a bifurcated response combining practical adaptation via ‘preventative partnerships’ and hysterical denial through ‘punitive segregation’ (Garland, 2001:139–147 in Wacquant 2010: 207). As previously outlined, Garland’s argument follows that this predicament seems to highlight the ‘limits of the sovereign state’ as high crime rates become normal and previous approaches at maintaining order seem lacking. In Wacquant’s words, this both “marks and masks a political failing” (2010: 207), which brings us to the essence of disparity in these two accounts.

The view of the Neoliberal sovereign state in ‘Punishing the Poor’ is not one of failure, but of success, of revitalization through the strategy of “punitive containment” (Wacquant 2010: 207):

On the contrary, Punishing the Poor asserts that punitive containment has proved to be a remarkably successful political strategy: far from ‘eroding one of the foundational myths of modern society’, which holds that ‘the sovereign state is capable of delivering law and order’ (Garland, 2001:109), it has revitalized it. (Wacquant 2010: 207)

Within this context, Wacquant demonstrates the revitalization of the sovereign state with the use of law and order posturing. He takes us through the political circumstances which ultimately reorganized social services into an instrument of surveillance while describing the massive and systematic recourse to incarceration, which in effect, warehoused the poor. We see President Clinton's political positioning as a 'New Democrat' move him towards Republican welfare policies, an approach which is replicated around the world:

This is true not only in the United States, where the leaders of both parties have reached complete consensus over the benefits of punitive penal policies targeted at the inner city (Chih Lin, 1998), but also in Europe: Blair in the United Kingdom, Berlusconi in Italy, and Chirac and Sarkozy in France have all parlayed their martial images of stern "crime fighters" intent to clean up the streets into victories at the polls. (Wacquant 2010: 207)

*Punishing the Poor* provides a startling exposition of political speeches from around this period which serves to highlight the influence of American law and order policy around the world, particularly when political capital is at stake. This features as part of a broader history of the events surrounding the 'penal upsurge' and demonstrates that the rolling back of the welfare state in America has been coupled with the immense expansion of the penal state in a turn of events which has inflicted a binary punishment on the poor members of American society.

This is an account which pays attention to the significance of political circumstances and yet the picture is one of knowing dystopia, of a global trend towards oppression through the penal state and through a weakening of welfarism, as a result of such conditions. Various criticisms have been leveled at 'Punishing the Poor', for instance that the discussion of welfarism gives a selective view of relevant poverty policies (Mayer 2010: 93). However, I would argue that for the purposes of understanding the political communication of crime landscape, we ought to consider that this selectiveness is coupled with an overstated account of global political trends to portray Neoliberalism as a sweeping dystopia, an unstoppable force in the penal realm, as delivered by a knowing, weak political class. For instance, the Clinton example in 'Punishing the Poor' addresses the political pressures felt at the time which led to a shift to the centre and which was indeed replicated by Blair in the UK,

but it views this shift as more than motivated by circumstance or the political climate of the time. While the repressive approach to welfarism that resulted from this centrist politicking has certainly had the effect of heralding a punitiveness which Wacquant portrays as characteristic of the Neoliberal state, too much is given to Neoliberalism as the driving force or the political landscape as inevitably punitive or repressive in pursuit of success. While Garland's dystopia is a product of lamentable circumstances, Wacquant's reflects on the shame of a politics which would subscribe to a model of success which would knowingly repress and utilise the penal landscape as an arm of repression.

### **Penal Populism**

If these accounts have erred too far on the side of broad functionalism, of penal dystopias, I would argue that a consideration of this realm which does not view Neoliberalism as the driving force, which focuses closely on political realities might move towards an account which can better understand the political construction of crime narratives. A consideration of the criminological body of work focusing on the phenomenon of 'Penal Populism' constitutes a central element of this project and of the introductory argument that conceptual development is required in this area. Much like the already discussed works of Garland and Wacquant, the literature on 'Penal Populism' is grounded in political circumstance but also suggests that a particular approach to criminal justice has developed as part of a broad ranging societal shift towards 'Late Modernity'. However, 'penal populism' adds to these accounts by honing in on forces beyond Neoliberalism, such as the media, in accounting for the political circumstances which can produce repressive criminal justice policy.

'Penal Populism' has become prominent in the study of punishment and is widely cited as the underlying cause of what criminology has termed the 'punitive turn' (Muncie 2008). Loader's article on the development of this field, 'For Penal Moderation' (2010) describes the prominence of the 'punitive turn' as a fertile subject for criminology:

For some time now analysts of punishment have been drawn-like bystanders to a car crash-to what has become known, perhaps a little complacently, as the ‘punitive turn’. Article after article, and book after book, has sought to document and explain the rise and consequences of the penal state in the USA and UK- as registered by such indicator as record levels of imprisonment... and the generally shrill tone of political and popular debate about crime.

(Loader 2010: 350)

Indeed, ‘the generally shrill tone of political and popular debate about crime’ gives an idea of the one-note perspectives on this realm, regularly dismissed as simply noise, as largely inconsequential in the pursuit of a greater understanding of this field. My argument here is that our focus ought to move away from article after article on such broad-ranging, intangible notions as ‘the penal state’ and move towards understanding what exactly is happening in that noise and its very real effects on for instance the construction of a piece of repressive welfare legislation.

Nonetheless, much of the work which aims to address this ‘punitive turn’ has been conducted under the guise of ‘Penal Populism’, which views crime in the political realm as “the pursuit of a set of penal policies to win votes rather than to reduce crime or promote justice” (Pratt 2007: 3). The regular political employment of this cynical practice was explained by Tyler and Boeckmann’s (1997) work which proposed that “penal populism emerges out of concerns to restore a disintegrating moral and social cohesion... rather than a specific response to crime problems” (Pratt 2007: 37). Therefore not only did this discussion re-emphasize the significance of electoral politics in the construction of crime, but it suggested that this practice had been intrinsically linked to the perception of a need to heal our damaged social fabric. This work proposed that ever-escalating law and order grandstanding at elections had not only fed into a general rise in punitive sentiments, but that this practice was linked with electoral success through a perception that a strong stance on law and order would heal our ‘ontological insecurity’ (Giddens 1991), would restore our society to a perceived golden age of moral and social cohesion, an essentially false but powerfully conjured image of better times. The penal populism argument, therefore, was that the forceful and emotional nature of this relationship

would ensure that law and order issues would continue to remain at the forefront of electoral politics, feeding into an ever-escalating populist punitiveness which would be extremely difficult to derail, so strong was its intrinsic link to ‘ontological insecurity’. In essence, this work views the electoral success of punitive criminal justice policy-making as assured, as inherently connected to a public desire to “reassert community commitment to those values” (Tyler and Boeckmann 1997: 240). This work argues that rule-breaking is threatening in that it “poses a threat to the moral cohesion of society” (Tyler and Boeckmann 1997: 240). Pratt (2007) argues that penal populism derives its success in criminal justice politics by appealing to ‘commonsense’ in policy decisions. The rhetorical approach is to allude to the notion that other parties had failed to champion the victim, the everyman. This is a potent tactic that seems to build on Downes and Morgan’s notion of the ‘second order consensus’ (2002: 317).

Downes and Morgan’s definitive account of elections and ‘law and order’ outlines the development of this trajectory; a 1960s rise in crime rates were employed by the 1970s Conservative Party who ended the post-war consensus by laying blame for the first time with the opposing party; Thatcher’s 1979 campaign criticized Labour’s undermining of the ‘rule of law’ and “dispelled the last vestiges of the bipartisan consensus on law and order” (Downes and Morgan 2007: 204). The Labour Party approach of viewing social development as a legitimate method of dealing with crime was now viewed as too weak, which led to a ‘second-order consensus’ that “no party could any longer afford to cede law and order ground to the opposition” (Downes and Morgan 2007: 205). The Labour Party ‘tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’ slogan which followed, served to reinforce this ‘second-order consensus’ by proving that this was also a powerful vote-winning strategy and the argument is that this firmly set the precedent for electoral politics and criminal justice in the political realm generally, that desperately ensuring that the party did not ‘cede the ground’ on law and order became the singular priority of law and order politics. The argument of the ‘second-order consensus’ is intuitively appealing in the face of broad-ranging accounts. It is grounded in the political realities that can be dictated by circumstance and can then crystallize to form an enduring political truth. Although a product of centrist politicking and the seeming



prioritization of success over rationality, the second-order consensus is not motivated by Neoliberalism or by the conditions of Late Modernity. Downes and Morgan's account is grounded in the language of "fateful twists" (Downes and Morgan 2007: 213), in the development of a "hegemony on law and order" (Downes and Morgan 2007: 215) which existed but was not necessarily certain. It is more optimistic in that it espouses an approach to the political realm which states that here were the political occurrences and this was the result, rather than focusing on societal movements which by dint of their overarching nature suggest an unstoppable, forceful continuation of repression.

Penal Populism, while not necessarily as broad-ranging as the accounts provided by Garland and Wacquant, argues more than the second-order consensus in that it views the link between public fear, the 'ontological insecurity' and the political desire to succeed as intrinsic, as so potent that it dooms law and order to continued, unflinching politicization. The argument here is that this link is overstated, that it gives too much power to the notion of the crime communication landscape as defined by a manipulative political class, supported by a singularly minded tabloid narrative, defining crime on to a fearful public, rabid in their desire for punitiveness. This is a hopeless account and one which gives too much credit to an imagined hierarchy of narrative construction. We will see that to view the media as a mouthpiece of any kind is to grossly underestimate the forces which propel this sprawling realm and gives too much credence to the now obsolete notion of a singular tabloid narrative. Furthermore, this account provides an overly simplistic sense of the public, as shrill, as panicked, as receptors of law and order information. Penal Populism and each of these accounts omits any sense of the public as active in this realm. These works see clearly defined, impenetrable boundaries around legitimized knowledge creators. They see politics, the media and the public as separate identities and a central aim of this thesis is to infuse some fluidity into these accounts, to view the spilling over from one realm to the other, to see this relationship as increasingly equal and fluctuating rather than bound to a linear hierarchy.

## From 'Cultural Criminology' to a 'Criminology of Political Culture'

The cultural criminology project defines itself as “the placing of crime and its control in the context of culture; that is, viewing both crime and the agencies of control as cultural products- as creative constructs” (Hayward and Young 2004: 259). Also basing itself temporally in the “late modern socio-cultural milieu” (Hayward and Young 2012: 114), cultural criminology aims to capture the fluidity of culture; its constant transformation of meaning, yet invariable force of presence within our social interactions. Furthermore, it is portrayed as understanding our distinct late modern anxieties, while attempting to address our emotional responses to crime from a more personal perspective. As such, this collection of works might seem to offer a perspective within which the fluidity of narratives could be appreciated, in which a grounding in culture could capture the conditions of Late Modernity while allowing a more nuanced understanding of the public role to emerge. Ultimately I have opted not to conduct this project under the guise of ‘Cultural Criminology’, despite sharing several of its central aims. In the next chapter, I will discuss the theoretical model which I argue can best capture this realm, one which is grounded in Symbolic Interactionism, also a key element of Cultural Criminology. However, I will argue here that elements of this movement render it not wholly suitable for this project and in doing so, I will aim to clarify what this project *is*, by clearly stating what it *is not*.

While the subject matter of cultural criminological works is broadly defined as crime and deviance, the theoretical approach takes centre stage, being described as “a loose federation of outlaw intellectual critiques” (Ferrell 2007: 99), which imbues the advantage of “keeping cultural criminology open and invitational” (Ferrell, Hayward and Young 2008: 210). Indeed, a number of theoretical perspectives are cited in the expositional chapters and articles which form the inception of the project. Merton’s Strain Theory is explicitly referenced, along with Shaw and McKay and ‘the Chicago School’. Also featuring prominently are Taylor, Walton and Young’s ‘New Criminology’, the ‘Birmingham School’ of 1970s cultural studies as well as

postmodernist perspectives mixed with “a structurally and politically informed version of labeling theory” (Cohen 1988: 68). These cherry-picked theoretical perspectives add a diverse layer to the *mélange* and aid the attempt to reframe accounts towards a consideration of cultural forces.

The cultural criminological approach to understanding the communication of crime in our politicized society is set out by Jeff Ferrell in ‘Cultural Criminology’, an expositional paper from 1999. He posits that the mixture of cultural studies and postmodernism promotes “a journey into the spectacle and carnival of crime” (Ferrell 1999: 397) and allows cultural criminologists to explore:

networks...of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface” (Baudrillard 1985:127; see Pfohl 1993) out of which crime and crime control are constructed, the intertextual “media loops” (Manning 1998) through which these constructions circulate, and the discursive interconnections that emerge between media institutions, crime control agents, and criminal subcultures (Kane 1998).

(Ferrell 1999: 397)

Certainly, in attempting to evaluate the political construction of crime narratives within today’s late modern society, this dynamic cultural criminological approach appears to move beyond a preoccupation with Neoliberalism. Furthermore, there is a notable inclusion of Symbolic Interactionism on the vast list of theoretical perspectives on offer, which seems to present some further utility:

In examining the mediated networks and discursive connections noted above, cultural criminologists also trace the manifold interactions through which criminals, control agents, media producers, and others collectively construct the meaning of crime. In so doing, cultural criminologists attempt to elaborate on the “symbolic” in “symbolic interaction” by highlighting the popular prevalence of mediated crime imagery, the interpersonal negotiation of style within criminal and deviant subcultures, and the emergence of larger symbolic universes within which crime takes on political meaning

(Ferrell 1999: 398)

Indeed, among the various expositional papers and introductory texts presented by proponents of cultural criminology, there is certainly an initial stance to be found which aims to move discussion towards considering the relevance of communication in understanding the construction of crime in politics.

Since its inception, cultural criminology has vociferously operated under these loose terms, as a self-styled miscellaneous and eclectic collection of works. Its initial proponents were quite clear in their establishment of the 'notion' of cultural criminology and invitation for subsequent developments from like-minded contributors; "cultural criminology posits a manifesto, but not a unified theory; it is a perspective rather than a school" (Webber 2007: 146). However, once 'unleashed', cultural criminology in practice has proven somewhat unwieldy, wandering away from the specifically cultural, emotional aims and resulting largely in internecine critique, with "a series of criminologists interested in culture, rather than a cultural criminology" (Webber 2007: 146).

While its original proponents, Hayward and Young, make a particular effort to not only establish the movement and more recently defend it (Hayward and Young in Maguire, Morgan and Reiner 2012), the results of this movement have largely been "fascinating stories of edgework and transgression, [which] leave the conclusion unfinished" (Webber 2007: 154). Quite typically, we are introduced to a great many innovative and loosely cultural texts, but due to cultural criminology's resistance, the aims specified are never concluded. There is no opportunity to fulfill the task proposed, as this would conform too rigidly to theoretical dogma. "The outcome is that those policy makers, agents of social control and less sympathetic academics are able to write their own conclusions" (Webber 2007: 154). Indeed, research produced under the guise of cultural criminology tends to vary significantly and rarely comes close to addressing the initial aim of merging late modern existential anxieties with an account of culture. Perhaps more damaging still is that this lack of unity has allowed stronger voices, with distinctly politicized views, to

dominate and steer cultural criminology in a direction which is in many ways counter-intuitive to its aims. This work contrasts significantly with the neutral and measured stance of *The Culture of Control*, yet its over-politicization seems to yield few answers to the questions posed of Garland's work.

More specifically, it is the ever-present Marxist, (former) left-realist voices which remain as a residue from 1960s and 1970s radicalism and the previously mentioned 'New Criminology' which find cultural criminology appealing, many having integrated their views into the cultural criminology movement. This can tend to damage the project, not only because "not everyone in cultural criminology shares the same political outlook" (Webber 2007: 139), but also because the focus of cultural criminology too-frequently becomes some kind of resolution of these previous movements. This politicized approach is consistently emphasized; "If ever we could afford the fiction of an 'objective' criminology- a criminology devoid of moral passion and political meaning- we certainly cannot now" (Ferrell, Hayward and Young 2008:13), infusing the movement with an overly provocative nature, which is surely the reason that some commentators reduce its worth to merely "a necessary antidote to the boredom of criminology" (Webber 2007: 154). A great deal of energy is expended on provocation, both towards the field and towards traditional targets of Marxist outrage. In the introduction to the self-styled 'audaciously and suggestively' titled 'Cultural Criminology Unleashed' (2004), Ferrell, Hayward, Morrison and Presdee admit, "Cultural Criminology Unleashed is meant to be provocative, irreverent, even confrontational, both in title and in content" (Ferrell et al 2004: 1). However, while these particular proponents make vocal attempts to court controversy, we become ever-aware of the lack of focus on the fundamental theoretical aims. O'Brien (2005) criticizes the tendency within the much lauded ethnographic endeavours to favour those considered victims within a Marxist framework, rather than applying a rigorously similar method of evaluation to all parties. He cites the key work 'Crimes of Style' (1996) by Jeff Ferrell, which provides an account of graffiti artists in Denver and notes a disparity in the accounts of the noble, wronged graffiti artist against the oppressive property owner:

the only justification there can be is political... what is less clear is whether

this anarchist-cultural approach is capable of advancing criminology's more general grasp of who is on the receiving end and what it means and feels like to do being punched. (O'Brien 2005: 604)

To frame the question in terms of Becker's 'whose side are we on?' (1967), Webber argues that "cultural criminologists are more likely to be found in support of transgressors" (Webber 2007: 142).

Furthermore, by placing "a stress on the interpretative rather than the mechanistic; the naturalistic rather than the positivistic" (Hayward and Young 2004: 260), proponents of the perspective insist on the utilization of ethnographic methodologies, while explicitly denouncing positivist, statistical endeavours which in their minds produce; "a mess of figures, techno-speak and methodological obfuscation" (Hayward and Young 2004: 262). Indeed, to oppose these methods is proudly cited by many as a mission; "for cultural criminologists, the possibility of effectively moderating, if not curing the blind obsession with quantitative (in)significance, is in large part a question of method" (Kane 2004: 304). While we might assume that this support of qualitative methodologies could assist cultural criminologists in their aims of appreciating the expressive, emotional and personal elements of crime, the reality found in the work produced again veers towards confrontational politicization and loses sight of this opportunity. Even in methodology, we cannot escape the fact that "cultural criminology is a political, rather than analytical orientation" (O'Brien 2005: 600).

Indeed, the sheer volume of cultural criminological work which is dedicated to the fervent anti-positivism is gratuitously large for a theoretical pursuit and risks the movement becoming "a useful but ultimately ineffectual staging post for an argument against technocratic risk-management criminologies". Furthermore, it is largely due to the loosely defined structure as previously outlined, that those proponents who feels passionately about the problem of the over-statistical in criminology, are freely able to come to the fore:

And what sort of discipline results from this contemporary triumph of the bureaucrat and the survey statistician?... what then does criminology become?... It becomes lifeless, stale and inhuman.

(Ferrell et al 2008: 165)

This particular impunity around the subject of methodologies does a disservice to the rest of cultural criminology, in that it becomes the loudest voice among a collection of potentially very useful ideas.

The aim of this project, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, is to move beyond the rigidity of researching within particular established theoretical movements. I will employ Symbolic Interactionism and Durkheim, as well as Randall Collins' *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004), with an eye on their place in sociology and criminology, but with the express aim of circumventing the limits of theoretical dogma. Certainly my approach does share some similarities with the central tenets of Cultural Criminology and as we will see in the conclusion, does end on something of a radical note, yet I have aimed throughout this project to adopt the approach which best fits progress in this area, rather than one stymied by anti-positivist tendencies or a preference for Marxism from the outset. My criticism of Garland and Wacquant and to an extent Penal Populism has been that their approaches have been limited by their overly broad functionalism and their belief in some intrinsic, deterministic link. Therefore, to conduct this project under the guise of Cultural Criminology would not move our perspective far enough away from these criticisms. Instead, I will focus here on microsociology, the power of adding the inter-personal experience to this account, which is not ultimately in keeping with the spirit of structural Marxism.

## CHAPTER 2

### A THEORETICAL ACCOUNT OF SYMBOLIC FORCE IN THE COMMUNICATION OF CRIME

This chapter discusses the potential for present-day applications of ‘Symbolic Interactionism’, by way of Goffman, Durkheim and Randall Collins’s *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004). Symbolic Interactionism is presented as a useful re-emphasis of ‘the self’ in today’s context, with the ideas of ‘negotiated meaning’ as specifically human and central to our personal development (Mead 1934). Furthermore, the potential for the symbolic force of crime today to feed into the ‘generalized other’ is proposed. The particular applicability of Goffman’s ‘Presentation of Self in Everyday Life’ (1959) is demonstrated, as offering a distinct focus on the symbolic relations outwith internal thought, as well as developments and applications in ‘Asylums’ (1961) and ‘Stigma’ (1963). I will also examine the links that this work may fruitfully share with a classic Durkheimian account of symbolic power which “is attentive to the capacity that the state has to... produce social reality” (Wacquant 2009: xvi) and which is similarly aware of group interaction through rituals, as linked now by Randall Collins in ‘Interaction Ritual Chains’ (2004). In this work, Collins takes us beyond Durkheim and Goffman-influenced definitions of ritual, to detail the processes in which the participants develop a mutual focus of attention and become entrained in each other’s bodily micro-rhythms and emotions (Collins 2004: 48). I will argue for the *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) model as enhancing our understanding of the fluidity of this realm, which can begin to move perspectives away from criminal justice dystopia. Finally, I will argue for the development of Collins’s model beyond the necessity of physical co-presence. This is an exploration of the communication of symbolic force through ritual which aims to understand the progression from small scale interaction to broader righteous anger and which is integral to this account of the public role in the construction of crime narratives.



## Symbolic Interactionism

The Symbolic Interactionist approach examines how our notions of ‘the self’ and personal identity can be developed and in turn disrupted. It is therefore my contention that a re-examination of the work conducted under this guise may provide us with a more nuanced understanding of the microsociology of ‘ontological insecurity’ (Giddens 1991), and that an updated account, as applied to today’s specific circumstances, may provide a contribution to our understanding of the construction of crime narratives in the public realm. I will present a brief trajectory of the ideas of the symbolic interactionism movement with the hope of identifying some specific aspects which can be appropriated for an updated account which seeks to better understand the processing of ‘ontological insecurity’. Having given particular consideration to the Meadian notions of ‘the self’ and ‘the generalised other’, I will attempt to move away from the particular trajectory of ‘symbolic interactionism’ as it has previously unfolded and instead employ the most essential elements of the theory in understanding this crime narrative landscape. Ultimately, I will aim to apply these fundamental propositions to our current circumstances in order to move towards a more nuanced understanding of the public role in political communication.

## The Foundations of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism initially manifested itself as a movement of sociological thought which sought to understand the formation of our notions of ‘the self’ through our relations to one another. According to Blumer, a fundamental premise of this theoretical persuasion “is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them” (Blumer 1969:2). Mead’s work in this area further highlighted a focus on ‘the self’ and how we negotiate meaning as specifically human and central to our individual development.

As a subsidiary of this approach, the second key premise was crucially “that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows” (Blumer 1969: 2). Thus, not only does symbolic

interactionism focus on ‘the self’ as best understood in terms of how we decide to act in particular contexts, it also prioritises our interactions with others as key to our personal development. Again, this view is largely derived from the Meadian concept of ‘the self as a process’ (Mead 1934), which uniquely conceived of a distinct difference between the ‘I’ which referred to the self as an acting subject and the ‘Me’ which alternatively represented the self as an object. In Mead’s conception, the ‘I’ represents the untarnished, subjective, human organism, whereas “the ‘Me’ reflects the attitude of the community since it is viewed through the ‘generalized other’” (Blumer 2004: 66). The essence of Mead’s argument is that as we develop we internalise the reflections we receive from various ‘generalised others’ which in turn facilitates the expected internalisation of societal norms and values. In this model, the role of the wider community is key in facilitating the continuation of norms and we negotiate meaning from these ‘generalized others’ through the symbols which they provide us with. This is the unembellished basis of symbolic interactionism; a theory of how we understand and develop ourselves through interaction with others and the symbols they emit. Blumer’s third premise “is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Blumer 1969: 2). This process is described by Cooley’s classic piece, the ‘Looking-Glass Self’ (1902):

As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass... and are pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another’s mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims... and are variously affected by it.  
(Cooley 1902: 183)

Erving Goffman’s ‘The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life’ (1959) offered a slightly different sociological perspective to the works which had derived their meaning from Mead’s texts. In a sense, Goffman’s alternative sociological account of ‘the self’ offers a version of the approach which answers critics of Mead, such as Garfinkel (1984) who famously disapproved of the portrayal of Mead’s subjects of analysis as “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel 1984: 68). Garfinkel took issue with the suggestion that societal forces are supposedly bearing down upon the subjects and

implanting meanings into their development, without any account of the person's cognition or ability to alter the outcomes. We might level this critique similarly at some of the criminological works on the politics of crime, as discussed in Chapter 1 and it is in this ambition to move beyond a simplistic, linear view of narrative development, of the public as powerless, that aligns this project with Goffman.

Goffman's version is commonly accepted as a complementary text to Mead which can provide an understanding of 'the self' which accounts for a greater sense of the employment of personal control. Furthermore, "Goffman differs from Mead in that he does not assume that the members of society present themselves to others in an unproblematic way" (Fontana 1980: 63). 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1959) thus drew heavily on certain Meadian traditions, concentrating similarly on the way in which people tend to guide and control other people's impressions, but differed with a distinct focus on the testing symbolic relations out with internal thought. In particular, Goffman employed the imagery of theatre and stagecraft to convey that 'the self' ought to be thought of as a performed character:

The issues dealt with by stagecraft and stage management are sometimes trivial but they are quite general; they seem to occur everywhere in social life, providing a clear-cut dimension for formal sociological analysis. (Goffman 1959: 11)

In keeping with this theme, Goffman notes that for an effective presentation of our 'self', we require "stage settings and backstage... dramaturgical skills and dramaturgical strategies" (Goffman 1959 in Lemert and Branaman 1997: 24), in order to effectively carry out our preferred performances. It is therefore Goffman's suggestion that should these circumstances, or lack of, have the unintended effect of hindering our performances, that this can have detrimental effects on the development of our self-conception.

Goffman himself later elaborated on the relationship between individual negotiated meaning and institutions in his work 'Asylums' (1961), noting that:

Each moral career, and behind this, each self, occurs within the confines of an institutional system, whether a social establishment such as a mental hospital or a complex of personal and professional relationships. (Goffman 1961: 168)

He also proposed that when ‘Stigma’ is felt in a particular situation, it is often the result of ‘spoiled identities’, which manifest themselves as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction” (Goffman 1963: 3).

Symbolic Interactionism retains a similar resonance in explaining the psychology of the self today as it had done over one hundred years ago when Cooley first considered the looking-glass. It is therefore my contention that these classic theories of ‘the self’, which form the foundations of Symbolic Interactionism, can and ought to be utilised in the criminological understanding of the non-deviant, of the everyday ‘self’ whose personal psychological development is affected daily by crime.

The classic theoretical Meadian precepts which focus centrally on ‘the self’ and negotiated meaning emphasise the important role that interactions play in our personal psychological development and wellbeing. As discussed, Mead’s concept of the ‘generalized other’ is persuasive in explaining the crucial role of the community and of interactions in our feelings of personal security. As such it is our distance from the community which has created a binary opposition, and a Meadian perspective would emphasise that an uncertainty in the role of the ‘generalized other’ leads to a fundamental unease in our sense of self and personal security. What this approach does not suggest, however, is that there is a direct link between knowing our community and feeling secure. Rather, the symbolic interactionist approach speaks more to our underlying social-psychological ‘selves’, suggesting instead that the relationship between the ‘I’, the ‘Me’ and the ‘generalized other’ is subtle rather than overtly tangible, but that disruption of this crucial relationship can have the detrimental effect of wreaking havoc on our very notions of ‘self’. If we feel subject to such a disruption, a Meadian analysis would suggest that not only are our personal conceptions of ‘self’ challenged, but also, we are forced to question whether the norms and values of society correspond with those which we feel we ought to internalise. I would suggest that in this sense, Symbolic Interactionist approaches can prove particularly useful in allowing us to understand how far-removed social changes can impact on an individual’s sense of ‘self’.

Following from this, the Symbolic Interactionist perspective presents another potentially crucial dimension here in its emphasis on the symbol. As noted, it is

proposed by Mead and others that our norms and values are communicated to us through the symbols which are emitted by the forms of 'generalised other' with which we interact. In this sense, Symbolic Interactionism can perhaps explain how large scale forces like the media can communicate our norms and values through their various outlets and through certain symbolic measures. Thus, we are provided not only with an enhanced understanding of the very personal social psychological relationships which could be augmenting our sense of 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens 1991), but also with a persuasive account of how this can be further influenced by broader forces. Indeed, by understanding that certain important and current 'generalized others', ranging from our local communities and people we know to the government and media, tend to present certain inclinations through symbolic gestures which threaten the core of our personal security, we gain a more nuanced perspective of the fluid construction of emotion and narratives in today's society. In constructing an analysis of wider societal forces, Goffman's interpretation of these Meadian themes can also be utilised in enhancing an understanding of our symbolic relationships with institutions. Whether the subject matter is globalisation, immigration, or crime, it seems that the symbols we are privy to today and that we readily absorb and interpret could act as a disruptive or unnerving influence if they make us question our fundamental norms and values, in that this also forces us to question the presentation of ourselves. The argument here is that Symbolic Interactionism helps us to understand that this challenge to our personal sense of self is so invasive and discomfiting, that it forces us to reach out and indulge our excesses by demanding punitive action. I would therefore argue that in offering us a theoretical vocabulary that enables a more nuanced understanding of personal insecurity, Symbolic Interactionism can provide a significant contribution to our perspectives on the construction of crime narratives and it is the argument of this project that such an understanding can move us towards a more detailed sense of this realm.

## Durkheim

In aiming to account for the role of symbolic power in the construction of crime narratives, I will argue here for the employment of Durkheim's works on morality, ethics and the functional interactions of society which have been utilised throughout criminology. Those constructing comprehensive accounts of crime and punishment have frequently sought a greater understanding of these issues through reference to Durkheim's '*The Division of Labour*' (1893) or within his classic conceptions of society, which have illuminated the role of social interactions; "what are the bonds which unite men one with another?" (Lukes 1973), as well as providing a rich account of crime and punishment as intrinsically linked to such societies.

Here, I will attempt to consider the specific elements of Durkheim's work in its original format which can provide us with a profound and useful perspective on society, and which can be appreciated as instrumental to this specific project, of understanding the construction of crime narratives.

Durkheim's writings on religion, particularly '*The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*' (1912) advances our understanding of symbolic power, an account which it is argued can add further nuance to an approach which aims to understand the role of the public in the construction of crime narratives. Durkheim argued that "society in all its aspects and in every period of its history, is made possible only by a vast symbolism" (Durkheim 1912: 264). Within the religious context, Durkheim focused on the symbolic power imbued in religious totems, the sacred object. He argued that the ritual and symbols of religion provided comfort to society and as such were cherished, infused with meaning to the community. Durkheim's account of symbolic force is not limited to religion, as Durkheim's discussion of religious totems was meant to serve as a consideration of what can cause uproar, can provoke outrage in the collective conscience. This account is particularly useful in aiming to understand the construction of crime in today's society, in which as we will see, the dispersal of media structures puts the power to create or disrupt established narratives back into the hands of the public, which in turn reinforces the significance of the sacred object in society. I will argue in Chapter 6 for instance, that the notion of the

'Ideal Victim' (Christie 1986) is a sacred object of our time and demonstrates the power of symbolism to play a role in the construction of crime narratives.

Durkheim's influence in criminology advanced beyond the text and into the field, particularly through his utilization of the idiom 'Anomie'. This term, taken from the Greek 'anomia', meaning lawlessness, is utilized by Durkheim in his theory of the Division of Labour, when he gives focus to the problem of occurrences which do not adhere to 'the norm' within his theories. As Morrison notes, Durkheim claims that at times of economic or industrial crisis, "when there is widespread commercial failure, this crisis... tends to breach the social solidarity existing between specialized functions and creates a decline in social cohesion" (Morrison 1995: 149). In these situations, social solidarity and cohesion is diluted to such an extent that "a common authority no longer links persons to each other, but only to their private interest" (Morrison 1995: 150). Durkheim described individuals in these situations as taking on an 'abnormal' or 'pathological' role because they "deviate[d] from the path of organic solidarity" (Thompson 1982: 80). This further exacerbates inequalities among different classes, the severe divisions of labour placing some members of society in inordinately powerful positions, while others languish in abject poverty. It is, in Durkheim's view, the creation of these situations which leads to Anomie, and hence, crime. Anomie became an oft-cited idiom which was utilized in criminological theories. In particular, Robert K. Merton's 'Strain Theory' (1952) employed the term to mean a certain normative conflict or friction which is inspired in those whose goals do not correspond with the means they have of achieving such socially constructed aspirations. According to Merton, Anomie in this sense would provoke deviance. However, while Merton's work was critically acclaimed within criminology, it serves as a good example of the beginning of the trend which also occurred within sociology, that of the noticeable shifting away from the text and a moulding of Durkheim's works into something entirely novel.

In David Garland's key text, '*Punishment and Modern Society*' (1990), it is noted that full details of the concept are never really proposed and that its existence is too readily taken as proven, without any exploration as to how or why this 'common mentality' was constructed. In 'The Idea of the Sacred' (Garland 1990: 54)

we are informed of Edward Shils (1982) and Clifford Geertz's (1983) disagreements with Durkheim, in that they would locate Durkheim's notion of 'sacredness' in the strategic interventions of ruling elites rather than something that permeates society in general. Similarly, in 'The Social Necessity of Punishment' (Garland 1990: 58), we are reminded that "In Durkheim's view a failure to punish violations of the *conscience collective* undermines the collective force of social morality and runs the risk of demoralizing citizens" (Garland 1990: 58). However, according to Ralf Dahrendorf (1985); "since the Second World War, the sanctions used against offenders in Europe have become so 'emasculated' and lenient that they have contributed to the collapse of authoritative social order", and that therefore, the conditions do not exist for Durkheim's theory to operate and it is thus extremely limited.

A further criticism of Durkheim's theories is perhaps the suggestion that crimes and punishments do not actually impact on social solidarity as strongly as proposed. In fact, an observer of criminal justice and punishment discourses would note that, rather than becoming more measured and 'organic' as industrialization grows; that crime and punishment today is becoming increasingly hysterical as new forms of societies emerge, we have seen that this is the opinion of the 'Penal Populists' and Loader (2010) who portrays the public voice as 'shrill'. Furthermore, it is arguable that new technologies as well as increasing globalization and immigration issues now represent a new form of economic and societal expansion and change. However, with this transformation, rather than becoming more measured and following Durkheim's model, it seems apparent that our criminal justice policies are significantly more panic-stricken and emotional than they have been in previous years.

However, it is argued here that we can enhance an account of Symbolic Interactionism in understanding the role of the public in the construction of crime narratives. Indeed, if Symbolic Interactionism provides us with an account of the self which is contingent on symbolically loaded external forces, Durkheim's account of the impact of symbols on the collective conscience can tell us the nature of the kinds of totemic symbols which might feed into the generalized other and could have the potential to disrupt our sense of self. Using this mapping of the relationship we have



to society's more ephemeral forces we can start to get a sense of the kinds of issues that can rouse public emotion. It is in this theoretical endeavor that this project becomes more than an understanding of political narratives but also probes what are the particular qualities of a crime narrative which can mobilise the public. We will see some examples of this potent relationship in the case studies which will follow. For now, I would argue that Durkheim's collective conscience and his notion of the power of symbols within a ritualistic context, enriches an account of the force of the public, of the origins of outcry, or as a key passage of Durkheim's is usually translated of "the public wrath" (Giddens, 1972: 128; Valier, 2005: 91).

I will now introduce and discuss the work of Randall Collins, a sociologist who has also found value in combining Durkheim's view of symbolic force with Symbolic Interactionism. As we will see, Collins's work and his model, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) begins with this premise and develops a microsociological account which I will argue can be instructive in an exploration of the crime communication landscape.

### **Interaction Ritual Chains: Randall Collins's Sociology**

Not only was Collins a student of Erving Goffman and Herbert Blumer, but he notes that the circumstances of the time brought out in Blumer an emphasis on the concept of 'the situation' which would stay with Collins throughout his theoretical work. He would go on to create an entire sociology of the situation, based on Goffman's work, which emphasized microsociology and to some extent, Blumer's 'symbolic interactionism'. He viewed himself as taking a different route to other students of Goffman who had mostly become pure ethnomethodologists or had come to focus heavily on deviance, but rather someone who would more regularly connect the fundamental premises of microsociology to macro-political movements: 'connecting Blumer and Goffman's ideas to the political movement put it into a different perspective. It's not just like little things like pickpockets and horse race touts are constructing the situation, the whole political world is being constructed.' (Collins in McLean and Yokkom 2000). These ideas would form the key elements of an important body of original theoretical work by Collins, but in particular, 'On the

Microfoundations of Macrosociology' (1981) which 'not only provide[d] a novel social psychology but also claim[ed] to offer a foundation to the analysis of institutions in the political and economic spheres; that is, foundation to a macrosociology' (Barbalet 2006: 446). Indeed, the article provided the definitive outline of the utility of microanalysis in the sociological enterprise, for instance:

A micro-translation strategy reveals the empirical realities of social structures as patterns of repetitive micro-interaction. Microtranslation thus gives us a picture of the complex levels of abstraction involved in causal explanations. (Collins 1981: 985)

Here, Collins also defines for the first time his term 'Interaction Ritual Chains' as 'chains of micro-encounters [which] generate the central features of social organization... by creating and recreating "mythical" cultural symbols and emotional energies' (Collins 1981: 985).

This emphasis on the symbolic and emotional energies is also explained by Collins's particular approach to the utilization of Durkheim. Crucially for Collins's work, in accordance with Goffman's views, he began to view the Durkheimian model for processes of group solidarity as extremely useful, in that "it's the groups that are in conflict with each other much more than individuals" (Collins in McLean and Yokkom 2000). This solidified Collins's belief that the core point of analysis ought to be the situation and the group rather than the individual.

### **A Radical Microsociology of Emotion in Randall Collins's *Interaction Ritual Chains***

"To see the common realities of everyday life sociologically requires a *gestalt* shift", Collins insists (2004: 5). Perhaps the most central notion of this project is that we must re-frame our analytic starting point by beginning with the 'situation' rather than the 'individual'. Collins argues that previous attempts to focus on the individual throughout sociology have begun with a fundamentally flawed subject, and that influences such as religious, political and cultural trends render "the social actor, the human individual, a quasi-enduring, quasi-transient flux in time and space" (2004:

4). Collins also levels a critique at the unquestioned reification of the individual as ideologically aligned with a “secular version of the Christian doctrine of the eternal soul”, suggesting that we ought to take seriously the various layers of social construction which have polluted our idea of the individual and research based on this notion.

Moving away from the individual towards the situation is not only motivated by the pollution of the individual, but also by a distinctly Goffman-centred approach to analysis and a belief that examining the situation in a meaningful way can provide us with extensive and more consciously neutral information about society: “from this we can derive almost everything we want to know about individuals, as a moving precipitate across situations” (2004: 4). Collins sets out this shift as a fundamental premise of his work early on and continues to challenge the reader not to view it within established theoretical frameworks, but to question ingrained epistemological features of the field. He argues “the agency/ structure rhetoric is a conceptual morass, entangling several distinctions and modes of rhetorical force” (2004: 5).

Having accepted the primacy of the situation over the individual, Collins takes us through his particular use of Durkheim and Goffman, before explaining to us that we are merely the subjects of momentary encounters or rituals, which serve to generate symbols and interactive continuities as part of interaction chains. Collins identifies Goffman’s influence in his theory as that which insists analysis ought to be conducted on the micro level, as part of a social constructionist view that the situation is paramount in that it “makes demands that [individuals] feel impelled to follow” (2004: 16). Collins also adopts Goffman’s famous tenet that our personal notion of self is constructed in relation to the situation, an unprecedented micro-functionalism of Goffman’s time which Collins argues provides unparalleled insight into “the micro-production of solidarities and realities” (2004: 17).

It’s clear that Collins is a proponent of Goffman, not only in his wholehearted adoption of these bold analytical frameworks and particular perspective on the construction of the self, but also in his utilization of the term ‘ritual’. Collins quotes Goffman directly here, stating that:

I use the term ‘ritual’ because this activity, however informal and secular, represents a way in which the individual must guard and design the symbolic

implications of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has a special value for him.  
(Goffman 1967: 57)

This view of the ritual as a key moment of symbolic production will form a central part of Collins's Interaction Ritual Chains theory, but also presents an opportunity for Collins to set out his argument for merging the perspectives of Goffman with particular readings of Durkheim. Collins begins by stating that on the small-scale, the Durkheimian view of rituals was noticeably similar to Goffman's definition: "Rites are the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects" (Durkheim 1912: 56).

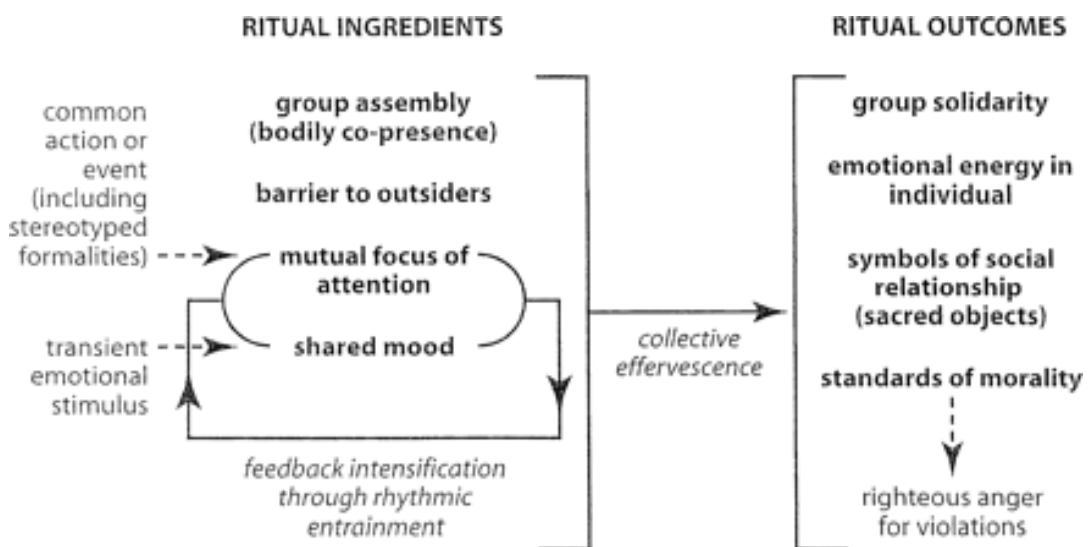
Collins draws similarities here, the acknowledgement of sacred objects and the assertion that the conditions of production of rituals are key: "rituals are the nodes of social structure, and it is in rituals that a group creates its symbols" (Collins 2004: 26). Behr describes 'Interaction Ritual Chains' as a "bare-knuckle defence of Durkheim's legacy" (Behr 2005: 464), which is most prominent in Collins's thorough reconsideration of Durkheim's sociology of religion. Collins's loyalty to the text allows him to clearly link many of Durkheim's concepts to Goffman and creates an interesting new theoretical grouping, which seems well suited to "understanding the social world of flux and variation" (Behr 2005: 464). Indeed 'Interaction Ritual Chains' states immediately that "this book argues for the continuity of a chief theoretical pathway from classic sociology to the present" (Collins 2004: 1), which sets the tone for this linking of Goffman with Durkheim and their intrinsic shared notions that "ideas are symbols of group membership, and thus culture is generated by the moral- which is to say emotional- patterns of social interaction" (2004: 1).

In using Durkheim and Goffman as complementary perspectives, the key focus of analysis is not the individual, but the situation, and that social interaction and subsequent emotionally and symbolically charged interaction rituals ought to be at heart of microanalysis, which in turn is the foundation of abstracted macroanalysis. Chapter 2 takes us beyond the known, into the unfamiliar but fascinating terrain at the heart of 'Interaction Ritual Chains': 'The Mutual-Focus/ Emotional Entrainment Model'. In this chapter Collins materially develops

Durkheim and Goffman-influenced definitions of ritual, to detail the processes in which the participants develop a mutual focus of attention and become ‘entrained’ in each other’s bodily micro-rhythms and emotions (Collins 2004: 48). The four key ingredients of an interaction ritual are detailed as follows:

1. Two or more people are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence, whether it is in the foreground of their conscious attention or not.
2. There are boundaries to outsiders so that participants have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded.
3. People focus their attention upon a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other become mutually aware of each other’s focus of attention.
4. They share a common mood or emotional experience.

(Collins 2004: 48)



(Collins 2004: 48)

Crucially, the elements numbered 3 and 4, the mutual focus of attention and shared mood, are said to reinforce each other; “As the persons become more tightly focused on their common activity, more aware of what each other is doing and feeling, and more aware of each other’s awareness, they experience their shared emotion more intensely, as it comes to dominate their awareness” (Collins 2004: 48). Collins acknowledges that in this part of his theory, he has attempted to map out Durkheim’s collective conscience as “a micro-situational production of moments of intersubjectivity” (2004: 48). The outcomes of interaction rituals are defined as follows:

1. group solidarity, a feeling of membership;
2. emotional energy [EE] in the individual: a feeling of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative in taking action;
3. symbols that represent the group: emblems or other representations (visual icons, words, gestures) that members feel are associated with themselves collectively; these are Durkheim’s “sacred objects.” Persons pumped up with feelings of group solidarity treat symbols with great respect and defend them against the disrespect of outsiders, and even more, of renegade insiders.
4. feelings of morality: the sense of rightness in adhering to the group, respecting its symbols, and defending both against transgressors. Along with this goes the sense of moral evil or impropriety in violating the group’s solidarity and its symbolic representations.

(Collins 2004: 49)

Collins also relates his term ‘emotional energy’ or [EE] to Durkheimian social solidarity.

The essence of the *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) model is that it uses this merging of Goffman and Durkheim to map out a microsociology of the natural escalation from small scale interaction to broader righteous anger. The initial ‘Interaction Ritual Chain’ is set in motion by physical co-presence, a group defining barrier, a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood. A key element in the mutual

focus of attention, a power source in this Interaction Ritual Chain is the Durkheimian notion of symbols, the sacred object which carries high levels of ‘emotional entrainment’. Once these particular elements come together, the Interaction Ritual Chain is set in motion, stoked by symbolic power and progresses through what Collins describes as ‘mutual entrainment’, in other words the shared emotional or cognitive experience. Collins suggests that there is a rhythmic nature to this process, much like the build up of laughter or a conversation, in which meaning is internally heightened and becomes more pronounced. Finally, Collins suggests that these intense micro situational moments of subjectivity feed into the collective consciousness, which produces a strong sense of pleasure, an elation, a sense of membership, of morality and rightness, as well as a reinforced respect for symbols, for the power source.

### **Using ‘Interaction Ritual Chains’ in Analysis of the Political Communication of Crime**

Firstly, Collins’s ‘Interaction Ritual Chains’ provides a more useful approach to functionalism or constructionism from Goffman’s perspective. This model could serve as an argument in favour of this kind of theorizing in criminology, which answers complaints leveled at works like *The Culture of Control* as noted previously in Chapter 1, that macroscopic analysis of this nature is too broad to provide utility for purposes of empirical exploration. Furthermore, it provides support for ‘reframing the analytic starting point’, taking the lead from Goffman to follow ‘the functional requirements of the situation’.

Most prominently, though, the application of the ‘Interaction Ritual Chains’ model to the Political Communication of Crime provides an approach which can utilise Goffman’s Symbolic Interactionism, Durkheim’s perspective of symbolic force and a microsociology of the natural escalation from small scale interaction to broader righteous anger to understand how this expressive symbolism is received and how further external societal factors interact with classic-type communication to influence crime narratives. This is an account which can map the public role in the

construction of crime by understanding how righteous anger around crime issues can develop and emphasizing interaction and ‘the situation’.

As a result, my research will not only focus on the expressive symbolism of political rhetoric, but it will consider the heightening of emotion and crystallisation of symbolic force through media sources. It will then attempt to understand how these processes feed into our many ‘generalized others’, how we negotiate meaning and internalise norms accordingly and crucially how we, as varied members of a pluralistic public, mirror back these norms with increased certainty, thus contributing to the symbolic *mélange* at play in the formation of crime narratives. We will see in the case study research in this project that Durkheim’s ‘sacred object’ also plays a crucial role in the public communication of crime, so much so that it can enable the derailing of established narratives and redresses the power imbalance portrayed by linear accounts.

It is hoped that investigating the research problem through this framework will provide a necessary re-examination and broadening of scope in light of perceived alterations in the communication of crime landscape. Notably, the gradual dilution of power in traditional media sources and the dispersal of communication tools into the public domain has resulted in the weakening of rhetorical force for classic-type emotive crime messages (such as those commonly alluded to by Wacquant 2009). I would therefore argue that an account which recognises this shift by placing greater emphasis on the public role is essential in developing our understanding of the fundamental power of crime as a narrative in society today.

The model I have suggested attempts to facilitate research which considers tangible communication structures and processes of emotion in a specifically non-deterministic manner. This account does not presuppose that there is a broad societal movement towards more or less punitiveness (Pratt 2007) or excess (Loader 2009) and does not aim to challenge or disprove these views. Rather it engages in a quite different task through utilizing the symbolic interactionist approach of engaging microanalysis to move towards macroanalysis, that of mapping out structures, understanding the landscape and allowing assertions to be made about the processes at work. This engagement with symbolic interactionism will also function in a distinctly different manner to recent similar appropriations of the theoretical



approach in cultural criminology, in that this model rejects any preference for structural Marxism (Ferrell, Hayward and Young 2008) and the array of alternative works cherry-picked by cultural criminologists in order to propel this aim.

## Understanding Crime Through Interaction Ritual Chains

Moving beyond an appreciation of the varied and hyper-modern nodes of communication through which we are delivered certain constructions of crime, an attempt to gain the fullest picture of the formation of these narratives must further consider the personal interactions present in this negotiation. Indeed, while the media landscape has evolved to incorporate interactivity through technological advances, there is an argument to be made for the inclusion of personal interaction in any account of crime narratives, that the construction of meaning in society cannot simply be derived from a top-down politics-led, media-enhanced delivery of message, but that there is something crucial in the public feedback and reconstruction of these issues, a regurgitation of meaning which is constantly in flux.

Randall Collins's *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) does this by presenting a model grounded in microsociology which refocuses our gaze on the public and enhances the role of 'the situation' in understanding personal interactions and decision-making (Collins 2004: 4). His detailed vision of the process occurring during interactional situations provides a Goffman-esque view of personal motivations and their reliance on social resources, their re-definition by each personal encounter.

Central to Collins's Interaction Rituals is "the process in which participants develop a mutual focus of attention and become entrained in each other's bodily micro-rhythms and emotions" (2004: 47). His microanalysis of the process of shared meaning draws upon Durkheim's collective consciousness. In this model, this Durkheimian shared cognitive or emotional experience is reframed as the "micro-situational production of moments of intersubjectivity" (2004: 48) and broken down into its discrete elements. Here, as I have noted, Collins's 'Ritual Ingredients' include physical assembly, with boundaries to outsiders, in which this shared

emotional experience is focused upon a particular subject. In understanding the public digestion of crime messages through this model, Collins's approach provides us with a particular level of detail in addition to the Durkheimian 'collective consciousness' idea, that the dynamics of these rituals can render powerful not just traditionally envisioned crowd-based gatherings, but "it is the same on the small-scale level of a conversation; as the interaction becomes more engrossing, participants get caught up in the rhythm and mood of the talk" (2004: 48). Indeed, Collins's assertion that the mutual focus of the group and shared emotional connection can result in a "feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment" (2004: 48) is particularly useful in considering the public consumption and regeneration of crime messages. This approach captures the force of the Durkheimian model while refining its workings for the 'liquid modern' world, for a society in which scandals can erupt and yet they are far less dependent on the formation of a mob, surviving still through the voracity and 'rhythmic entrainment' present in certain visible circles.

I would argue that the feature of physical co-presence is one which would seem to require extension to the virtual world, given the previously discussed shifts in the media landscape and increasing prevalence of online communication. Collins asserts that the "ritual is essentially a bodily process" (2004: 53). His inclusion of the physical in this model aims to highlight the role of our evolutionary nervous systems, which he argues are acutely sensitive to ritual and the surge of emotional entrainment through the comfort of a physical gathering. Indeed, this is derived from a Goffman-esque assertion that we are inherently drawn to act upon the physical reaction of others when constructing our notions of self. Both Goffman and Collins argue that the emotional impact of interacting physically with another person is so strongly intertwined with the formation of deeply held beliefs, touching upon truly life-affirming or undermining sentiments, that it must be considered a crucial element in opinion-making. Indeed, the penetrating nature of this interaction might suggest a certain environment in which the processing of information on crime can take place amidst a 'feedback intensification' which tends towards the reactionary, or the need for reassurance given the sensitive constructions of self within which these rituals are inextricably bound.

In addressing the possibility of virtual emotional entrainment, Collins suggests that we must only take seriously this proposition if it can be argued that within these situations we reach a stage in which “we could compare the amount of shared attention and emotion generated by these various interactional media, and their outcomes in levels of solidarity, respect for symbolism and individual EE [emotional energy]” (2004: 54). I would suggest that the burgeoning world of social media and its inherently personal and interactive nature comes closer to fulfilling these stipulations in a much more meaningful way than virtual communication as perceived more traditionally as telephone calls, TV and newspapers ever did and we will see this demonstrated powerfully in the case study research here. For instance, there are unique functions in social media which allow for shared attention to form around specific issues in society, which will become apparent when I discuss the Phone Hacking Scandal and The Riots. The newspaper comments section, the Facebook group, the Twitter hashtag all provide virtual gathering points for an outpouring of emotion in the company of members of society who find themselves concerned with the same issue at that particular moment. Each of these everyday points of mediation move us beyond the role of the television viewer who might have been dismissed as the passive earpiece of a manipulated message, to a genuinely interactive voice in the construction of narratives.

We will see in the case study findings significant evidence that the Durkheimian sacred object is still potent in this realm, in fact it is a driving force behind the public voice and I would argue that the process of an ‘Interaction Ritual Chain’ still occurs. We see rhythmic coordination happen in a meaningful way, the shared mood and mutual focus of attention set in motion by a shared cognitive or emotional experience. We will see this occur through Twitter in the 2010 election in which the build up of ‘Interaction Ritual Chains’ has the power to completely derail established narratives. Not only have new media developed enormously since *Interaction Ritual Chains* was written in 2004, but we have seen them embraced by large portions of society and integrated into the public construction of narratives in unexpected ways. It will be one of my tasks in this project to demonstrate this through my case study research, but I would note at this point that I would argue for

the development of the 'Interaction Ritual Chains' model beyond physical co-presence.

Taking Collins's original objection into consideration, a slight difference might be observed in the intent of the discussant in relation to the online world. In this case a person seeks out the community in which to share, whereas the Collins and Goffman models see ideas formed as part of naturally occurring rituals. In that case, we might look to the provision of a field of communal discussion in the case of scandals which might take place on the Facebook wall between established social circles. A respect for symbolism is certainly found in the realm of social media. Indeed, the constant din of messages circulated on a daily basis is only transcended successfully by issues which contain symbolic force. In this case, we see crime issues like the phone hacking of victims which are loaded with symbolic force, not only in terms of their immediate resonance but in their accompanying visual imagery, rise more easily to the top of the pile, to move the narrative beyond human rights news story observed by the interested, to modern day scandal experienced more broadly. These crime narratives are driven by their symbolic force through these various virtual interactions, reshaping opinion as they move.

But the question remains, can communications made in this hyper-modern world ever truly emulate the specific sensitivity and allusions to our nervous systems and inherent construction of self that personal interactions could? An updated reading of Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) might include the careful construction of a Facebook profile as part of the props we now utilise in constructing our specific 'self'. Its public nature, its encapsulation of our lives through imagery and its susceptibility to manipulation render it similar to the face to face performances which take place and yet is it truly as powerful? Perhaps there is something more removed and less visceral about the formation of meaning through social media, which means that we are engaging in many Interaction Rituals on a daily basis, but that they are slightly shallower, slightly less affronting to our inner self. I will aim to develop this account using my case study findings.

## Interaction Ritual Chains in Moments of Cultural Significance

I would argue that this model not only helps us to understand the everyday construction of crime narratives through microsociological moments of intersubjectivity, but that it helps us to understand the construction of crime which occurs in moments of scandal and of panic. In this project, as the opportunity to collect data has arisen, the research has naturally evolved in way which has meant an increased focus on moments of scandal and outrage. I will discuss in more detail the particular benefits of this approach and their grounding in a contemporary reading of Hall et al.'s *Policing the Crisis* (1979). As we will see through the case study research, it is in these moments of extremes that we see the crime communication landscape functioning at its most exposed, in which the underlying structures of communication become evident. I would argue that this model is extremely useful in helping us to appreciate these moments of extremes. The development from small-scale 'Interaction Ritual' to a broader 'righteous anger for violations' is articulated by Collins as a natural escalation, a 'collective effervescence' (Alexander and Smith 2005: 215) of the emotional stimulus present in the interactive setting. In the initial 'Interaction Ritual', meaningful co-presence and a group-defining barrier to outsiders are bolstered by a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood. He argues that this correlation of activities naturally progress "as the persons become more tightly focused on their common activity" (Collins 2004: 48). That is, the recognizable features of the interaction ritual when combined set in motion a particular group-specific pattern of elaborations. We might tend to relate this to settings in which the heightening of emotions feature prominently, but Collins suggests that this escalation can move in various directions; "members of a cheering crowd become more enthusiastic, just as participants at a religious service become more respectful and solemn, or at a funeral become more sorrowful, than before they began" (2004: 48). Therefore, just as some communal feeling becomes more outwardly vocalized, so too can emotion concentrate and solidify internally, it is certainly heightened but it is not necessarily audibly so.

Collins demonstrates that this development does not rely on a particularly established form of community setting; the increasingly rare town hall meeting, the

baying crowd, the religious service, but that the ‘rhythm and mood of talk’ make simple conversations an interaction which can also engross and escalate meaning in this way. The key here is not scale, but rather “participants’ mutual entrainment of emotion and attention, producing a shared emotional / cognitive experience. What Durkheim called collective consciousness is this micro-situational production of moments of intersubjectivity” (2004: 48). The setting then for ‘righteous anger for violations’ is, in this model, equally the angry mob, the solemn church service and the infrequent shared conversation.

The detail of small-scale social encounters is examined through a micro-situational linguistic observation of ‘the conversation’ (2004: 65), in an attempt to further demonstrate the power of these elements of interaction in heightening emotion and solidifying meaning. For instance Collins uses analysis of the build up of laughter in a conversation to demonstrate that the collective experience and particular rhythms promote the participants’ entrainment. Crucially, building on McClelland’s assertion that “perhaps the strongest human pleasures come from being fully and bodily absorbed in deeply synchronized social interaction” (1985 in 2004: 66), there is an argument that not only do these ‘Interaction Rituals’ serve as a powerful stimulant in the development of meaning, but that there is something inherently *appealing* about this interactive reinforcement. Collins specifies that his observation of laughter “exemplifies the more general pattern of collective effervescence, and explains why people are attracted to high-intensity interaction rituals, and why they generate feelings of solidarity” (2004: 66). Indeed, moving beyond the features of everyday mutual entrainment and their evident function, it is suggested that there is a known quantity of pleasure which can be derived not only from general interaction rituals, but specifically those which seem to constitute a higher level of intensity. Interaction Rituals then, are an everyday function commonly and easily participated in, a pleasurable experience regularly sought and finally, a key contributor to social solidarity.

In understanding the natural escalation from small scale interaction to broader righteous anger and as such, the construction of crime at extreme moments, the presence of symbols becomes an important factor in the level of emotional entrainment and the subsequent amount of solidarity produced. Collins emphasizes

the dependent nature of this relationship by suggesting that “symbols, in turn, differ as to what kind of group solidarity they invoke, and thus what symbolic / emotional memories or meanings will do in affecting group interactions, and personal identities, in future situations” (2004: 81).

The forum within which symbols are received can have a significant effect on the eventual solidarity produced, the key ingredient being activity over passivity. For instance, Collins describes a spectrum of group circumstances which heighten as activity and focus on a specific ‘Durkheimian sacred object’ increase. From an airport departure lounge, to a crowded bar, to an audience gathered at a show, to sports fans, there are increasingly more collective symbols shared as the focus tightens, but the anonymity of the crowd means that long term solidarity is weaker than, for instance, a conversation between a defined group of friends. As such, for the Interaction Ritual to have force, the symbols shared must “circulate and prolong group membership beyond ephemeral situations of emotional intensity” (2004: 87). In such circumstances, symbols play a key role in defining personal identities and developing established narratives. They appear to constitute the power source with which small scale interactions can grow into broader righteous anger.

With various symbolic power sources heightening mutual focus and emotional entrainment, there are several key outcomes outlined by Collins, which seem to reinforce the notion that this interactive spiral is in some way reassuring, pleasurable, something to be sought. The first is group solidarity, the comforting feeling of membership provided by this reinforcement of the purpose of the group. Furthermore, at the individual level, what Collins defines as ‘Emotional Energy’ also features prominently, namely “a feeling of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative in action” (2004: 49). Thus, we have both reassurance of the validity of self through a role in a now reinforced group setting, with a surge in personal well-feeling, with emotions as strong as ‘elation’ surfacing. Thirdly, the role of the Durkheimian ‘sacred object’ becomes important. Having provided such a swell of positive emotion and general reassurance, whichever symbolic power source was the focus of active attention in the scenario will now be deified, defended against all costs, treated with a sometimes disproportionate amount of respect. Finally, building on membership, elation and respect, these emotions are bolstered further by feelings

of morality, in which ‘a sense of rightness’ is attributed to the whole routine, thus enshrining its purpose in social life even further.

It is certainly useful to note Collins’s allusions to Goffman and Durkheim throughout *Interaction Ritual Chains*, indeed the model outlined might simply be understood as the functioning of the collective consciousness on an interpersonal level. Yet, more than a merging of the two, this model provides a detailed step by step process of the construction of meaning in the personal realm, a microsociological approach grounded in the minute detail of interaction. Having observed the human experience in such detail it seems that the only question left in appreciating the construction of narratives might be found in the electronic realm, in virtual gatherings and more fluid symbols which provide a different kind of focus in a way which perhaps blurs the line between passivity and activity, becoming instead a uniquely integrated part of the daily routine. As Collins notes of email and the internet, “these lack the flow of interaction in real time; even if electronic communications happen within minutes, this is not the rhythm of immediate vocal participation, which... is honed to tenths of seconds” (2004: 63). Therefore, the place of new media presents a challenge to the ‘Interaction Ritual’ approach which I will aim to develop here. I will aim to consider how we might accurately integrate this newer outlet of interaction into the microsociology of interaction rituals and will assess how exactly the particularly symbolically charged issue of crime passes through these processes and has a particular impact on our construction of self.

To conclude, I have argued here that the ‘Interaction Ritual Chains’ model, as based on Goffman and Durkheim’s view of symbolic power adds microsociological detail to our view of the public construction of knowledge and the communication of ideas. It is particularly useful in a discussion of the political communication of crime in that the model focuses on the development from small scale interaction to broad righteous anger, the form of public interaction that most commonly provokes a contribution to the ‘generalized other’, to the *mélange* of narratives that constitute ‘crime’ in society. In employing this approach we gain a much more nuanced picture of the ‘shrill’ public (Loader 2010: 350) and their particular voice in moments of outcry. I have argued for the development of this model beyond physical co-presence and will discuss this development in light of case study findings in my conclusion.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE MEDIA AS INTERACTION RITUAL CHAINS

#### 1. Introduction

The media – understood as the mouthpiece by which crime narratives travel from political office to the public sphere - have frequently played an integral role in accounts which lament the erosion of evidence-based criminal justice decision-making. Indeed, the role of the media in the political communication of crime can tend to be viewed as wholeheartedly serving the political elite or cynically reshaping the message for commercial gain or some combination thereof. While there is certainly significant rhetorical force behind these critiques and much to be gained in pursuit of an account of today's media landscape from a detailed appreciation of these particular arguments, I will suggest that recent shifts in what could more broadly be termed the 'mediated sphere' should positively alter our understanding of the relationship between politics, the media and the public.

In this chapter, I will introduce and discuss a number of leading sociological and criminological accounts of the relationship between the media, public and politics, drawing attention in each case to their theoretical strengths, as well as anticipating their continued relevance (or otherwise) today. I will then introduce an account of the recent evolution of the media landscape and a shift towards immediacy, choice, symbolic force and interactivity. Finally, this updated vision of the construction of crime narratives will be applied to Collins's *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2005) and an argument for the development of this model beyond the necessity for physical co-presence will be given.

## 2. Enduring Accounts of the Media as a Force in the Construction of Narratives

Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) charts the development of this condition - of media as politically serving and the consumption of knowledge as capital-driven - by observing the "refeudalization of the public sphere" (1962: 292). In what he describes as a structural shift away from public opinion formed by open assembly and rational-critical dialogue, which had initially functioned as a force for opposing state power and influencing state policy and practice towards an essentially docile public, Habermas views the developed media as a site for manipulation by corporate interests, feeding a public who can be viewed as largely uncritical, concerned instead with mass consumption (Habermas 1962). In Habermas's account of this shift, we are presented with a powerful potential explanation of the crime and media predicament so widely lamented in recent years. This would be that a structural reframing of this sphere due to the capital-driven move away from an unfettered free press towards the attraction of audiences in a competitive market (Greer 2009: 11), has neutered the "process of participatory democracy underpinned by the values of universal access, rational debate and disregard of rank" (Habermas 1962: 231). As such the delivery of ideas about crime and punishment can be understood as having been framed by an encompassing capitalism in the media. This dominance is further bolstered by a lack of challenge from a public that has become the lethargic consumer of those narratives in place of an active, democratic voice.

Still, the account portrayed by Habermas is essentially hopeful, arguing for the possibility of a re-energized public:

What is needed is a 'rational reorganization of social and political power' between the private citizens, rival organisations and the state, along with an active citizenship that can not only articulate its political will, but also work to ensure that it is implemented by the government.  
(Habermas 1962: 231)

Most prominently, this reorganization has naturally occurred as a result of the shifting, hyper-technological media sphere. In his 2006 paper 'Political

Communication in Media Society' Habermas considers the possible re-energising features of electronic communication. He suggests that "the Internet has certainly reactivated the grassroots of an egalitarian public of writers and readers" (Habermas 2006: 423), but proposes that this form of public activity can only gain traction in certain specific scenarios; in either undermining censorship by authoritarian regimes, or within liberal regimes, it can engender crystallization around a huge number of fragmented issues. As such, there is something of a shift back towards the 'active citizenship' of Habermas's original idealized free press, but that the specific format within which this public discussion occurs is said to limit the particular outcome. More recently, in a 2010 interview with the *Financial Times*, Habermas expanded his view of the potential impact of electronic communication:

The internet generates a centrifugal force. It releases an anarchic wave of highly fragmented circuits of communication that infrequently overlap... As regards its impact on the public sphere, accelerated communication opens up entirely new possibilities for organising activities and for large-scale political mobilisations of widely dispersed addressees. I still receive at least one e-mail per week from Obama's election team. These communications refer to issues and events within the political system, which they in turn influence. However, they remain contingent on their relation to the real decision-making processes that take place outside the virtual space of electronically networked nomads.  
(Habermas in Jeffries 2010, 'A rare interview with Jürgen Habermas', *The Financial Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> April)

Therefore, while the electronic media sphere cannot in and of itself convincingly constitute a new public sphere, with an awareness of its increasing social role and its contingency to political forces, we can at the very least assume some reversal of the all powerful capitalist driven media forces portrayed in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962).

Herman and Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* (1988) remains, among Chomsky's vast contribution to political science and linguistics, one of his most essential works. In approaching an analysis of the mainstream media from a Marxist perspective, Herman and Chomsky's work here illuminates some of the impact of corporate forces which have propelled the Habermasian demise of the active public sphere. Beginning from the fundamental assertion that "the mass media serve as a

system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace” (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 1), their main argument revolves around what is termed ‘The Propaganda Model’, a framework which delineates the process by which corporate influences driven by power and money seem to determine which messages and symbols are communicated.

Accordingly, ‘The Propaganda Model’ “traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public” (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 2), by setting out five particular ‘filters’ as key components. The first is ‘size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media’, which suggests that news choices are strongly affected by the fact that dominant media firms are “controlled by very wealthy people ... who are subject to sharp constraints by... profit-oriented forces” (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 14). Secondly, ‘the advertising license to do business’ is pinpointed as the source which skews much media content towards particular affluent audiences, thus undermining any democratic tendencies which are often cited as being found through large audiences. This varies depending on the media source, for instance television networks are more concerned with ‘flow’ or sustaining ratings from one programme to the next, but the outcome is the same across the board; “the dissemination of a selling message” (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 18). Thirdly, the approach towards ‘sourcing mass-media news’ enables a dependence on ‘experts’ who are frequently government and corporate bodies, indeed; “the mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest” (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 18). The fourth element refers to ‘flak and the enforcers’, essentially the somewhat powerful negative responses to media which can be mass-mobilized and can form a source of power in their groups. These flak-producers keep media sources from offending traditional government or corporate power, while through this role flak machines attain a “propagandistic role” (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 28). Finally, ‘anticommunism as a control mechanism’ which was more pronounced during McCarthyism, but today might be seen in the US right wing media opposition to health care reforms, in which President Obama’s programme was widely derided as ‘socialist propaganda’ in order to demonize these

reform efforts. This final filter is described as a ‘political-control mechanism’; “this ideology helps mobilize the populace against an enemy, and because the concept is fuzzy it can be used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property interests or support accommodation with Communist states and radicalism” (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 29).

This model is ultimately useful in highlighting some of the capitalist-driven functions of the media in the Habermasian inactive public sphere. Therefore, if we are to understand the possible shift back towards an engaged public, we can begin by assessing how many of these elements of the Propaganda Model still remain in place in today’s media landscape. For instance, following the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal which seemed to briefly disempower the Murdoch Empire, one of Britain’s traditional news conglomerates, along with a notable shift within the now hyper-technological media sphere, is it still true to say that advertising-motivated business models and concentrated ownership are among the most prominent filters of news today?

Also focusing some detailed analysis on capitalist forces at the heart of media production, Manuel Castells’s work on the shift from ‘industrial capitalism’ to ‘informational capitalism’. This is particularly relevant in aiming to understand today’s evolving media sphere, as Castells takes seriously the movement towards what he terms a ‘Network Society’ (Castells 2000). This is linked to the upsurge of ‘informational capitalism’, which is essentially “driven by the rapid expansion of Information and Communication technologies (ICTs) [which have in turn] created new and unprecedented capacities for information processing and the global exchange of symbols” (Greer 2009: 56). *The Network Society* (2000) crucially depicts our mediated sphere as exchanging these symbols through ‘information flows’, a fluid circulation of knowledge spanning a huge spectrum from cultural to technical information. In *An Introduction to the Information Age* (1997) Castells outlines the specific processes involved in this ‘network society’, many of which emphasize the societal shifts which facilitate our embracing of this ICT-based media realm, with one eye firmly on capitalist forces. He considers some of the most prominent features of media today;

Media are extraordinarily diverse, and send targeted messages to specific segments of audiences and to specific moods of the audiences. They are increasingly inclusive... connected throughout the globe, and yet diversified by cultures, constituting a hypertext with extraordinary inclusive capacity. Furthermore, slowly but surely, this new media system is moving towards interactivity... that will eventually link up with the current media system. (Castells 1997: 5)

Indeed, Castells's account above many others, demonstrates a profound understanding of the potential for global significance of evolving technological media. Chomsky, for instance, focuses on the faddish nature of particular forms; "Text messaging, Twitter, that sort of thing ... is extremely rapid, very shallow communication... I think it erodes normal human relations. It makes them more superficial, shallow, evanescent" (Chomsky 2011 in 'The Secret of Noam: A Chomsky Interview', March 9th). Chomsky's view here is not without merit, but focuses on the form rather than the outcome. Indeed, Castells's account sees these shallow communications as part of a shift in social activity, a broader move in the reception and generation of particular narratives.

A particularly deconstructionist analysis of the way that we consume information and a more fluid examination of the relationship between advertising and consumption is found in Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulations* (1981). This account is well-suited to a greater understanding of the impact of evolving media as the focus is on the shift from the modern to the postmodern world in which "the image becomes the reality – a mediated 'hyperreality' – in which simulations, signs and codes come to structure and constitute everyday life" (Greer 2009: 70). Baudrillard's 'simulacra' encapsulates our approach to self-definition and the consumption of knowledge in a hyper-technological media sphere. Through this he creates an account which, although abstract in its terms, insightfully captures aspects of our present day comfort around simulated imagery and the role that the presentation of self can have in today's formation of meaning.

### 3. Capturing the Role of Media in the Construction of Crime

As criminal justice narratives are regularly viewed as having been cultivated within news media, particular approaches to understanding the nature of this relationship have emerged, such as the large body of work conducted by Ericson, Baranek and Chan between 1987 and 1991. *Visualizing Deviance* (1987), *Negotiating Control* (1989) and *Representing Order* (1991) constitute a significant contribution to our understanding of the formation of ideas around deviance and control, while arguing critically for analysis which moves beyond a surface-level consideration of content. Indeed, drawing on Clifford Geertz, Ericson et al. contend that ‘appreciative’ ethnographic research which engages not only with the news but with the broader newsroom, can move discussion beyond the mere selection of particular news items towards a crucial understanding of how journalists and news sources “play a key role in constituting visions of order, stability, and change, and in influencing the control practices that accord with these visions” (Ericson et al. 1987: 3).

Viewing crime news as a significant but contingent element in the broader project of the construction of deviance, Ericson et al. contend that we must move beyond textual crime news analysis towards an understanding of ‘news as knowledge’, in which “knowledge is a key aspect of organizational power and social stratification” (Ericson et al. 1987: 11). They view knowledge as integral to not only the formation of meaning surrounding institutions, but also cultural engagement. As a result it constitutes “the fibre out of which are woven the ‘webs of significance” (Geertz 1973: 5 in Ericson et al. 1987: 11) and demands a level of attention comparable with that which is regularly given to news text. As such, this approach encourages engagement beyond the text and while *Visualizing Deviance* (1987) comprises a vast newsroom study, essentially there is a strong argument here for research which observes the construction of news as knowledge wherever its power is constituted, whatever organizational structures are formed around it.

Beyond the crucial examination of organizational power around the production of knowledge, *Representing Order* (1991) demonstrates that the product of such institutional control is an active public discourse which is “dominated by talk

of crime, law and justice” (Ericson et al.. 1991: 3). Drawing on Wuthnow et al. (1984) and their view of the integral role of symbolic force in human interaction, “to inspire or to give meaning to individual or collective activity, to delegitimize other activity and to bring to bear the force of social control” (Wuthnow et al. 1984: 37 in Ericson et al. 1991: 5), Ericson et al.. reframe the act of receiving and regenerating symbols as ‘representing’. In this context ‘representing’ is the public act of absorbing discourse and symbolic meaning and reconstituting it, much like Goffman’s Symbolic Interactionist approach. Similarly, the goal of ‘representing’ is “an effort to represent a world in which one’s descriptions make sense” (Ericson et al. 1991: 5). Therefore, for Ericson et al., the study of news media requires an appreciation of this public ‘representing’ which is driven by a desire to satiate feelings of disorder.

While Ericson et al.. highlight the significance of organizational construction of news, as well as the public reception and regeneration of meaning, they also suggest that issues of crime are at the heart of this burgeoning and dependent relationship: “A concern with deviance and control in social relations and organizations is *the* defining characteristic of newsworthiness” (Ericson et al. 1987 in 1991: 239). They track the central role of crime news from Milton (1671) (“Evil news rides post, while good news baits” (Ericson et al. 1991: 239)) and find in their own detailed content analysis that “conceptions of deviance and control not only define the central object and character of news stories, but are woven into the methodology of journalists, influencing their choices from assignment, through the selection and uses, to the final composition of the story” (1991: 239) and as a result of this institutional tendency, that news concerning crime, law and justice “constituted just under one-half of all news coverage in newspapers and popular television, and approximately two-thirds of all news coverage on radio” (1991: 341). Ultimately they contend that their five crucial components of representation in news discourse--‘visualizing, symbolizing, authorizing, staging, and convincing’ (1991)—are regularly rallied around the particularly dominant issue of deviance because of the symbolic force which this issue holds in society. They suggest that “law is a kind of conceptual device for order, an imaginative and interpretive tool for constructing social relations” (Ericson et al. 1991: 342) which satisfies our desire to receive symbolic representations of order. Furthermore, they suggest that this provides “a



vocabulary with which we rationalize our actions to others and ourselves” (Macauley 1987: 185 in Ericson et al. 1991: 342).

On this view, the inherent desire to understand ourselves and to feel a sense of security and order, is given to us through a steady flow of deviance-related news and through our own ‘representing’ of this news. This brings us to an obvious paradox around the idea of reading news of a murder and feeling subsequently comforted. Yet Ericson et al. suggest that this triggers in us a ‘morality play’. We digest not only the facts, but more powerfully a sense of “how what happened fits into the order of things” (1991: 343). They suggest that this is facilitated by the particular media approach of emphasizing the proper role of authority and justice, since “ultimately it is the authoritative strength of institutions and ‘the system’ that is on view” (1991: 344).

David L. Altheide’s work draws on Ericson, Baranek and Chan’s body of research, with a particular focus on the seemingly powerful and ubiquitous production of fear in the media and takes an approach to considering this particular problem which values the researcher broadening their theoretical base at the outset. His article on ‘The News Media, The Problem Frame and the Production of Fear’ (1997) highlights C. Wright Mills’s concern in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) that “sociologists were blinded by limited theoretical perspectives that prevented them from seeing major social shifts” (Altheide 1997: 647). Accordingly, Altheide delineates a broad conceptual approach, claiming that this is necessary to study ‘fear’, a research subject which he suggests transcends the issue of crime content in the media, through its pervasive and expansive nature (Altheide and Michalowski 1999: 477). This is a persuasive approach, Altheide prioritizing what he sees as the driving force of fear over any arbitrarily defined topics. However, for the purpose of understanding the construction of crime narratives today, this perspective is perhaps overly preoccupied with an element which we might view as no longer holding such unfettered dominance in the mediated sphere. Nonetheless, this is a valuable approach to understanding the role of crime in the media. The research values espoused here are particularly applicable still, yet whether the focus on fear as

dominant over the issue of crime remains valid is something to be explored empirically.

Altheide embraces several theoretical perspectives, including ‘Symbolic Interactionism’ which “suggests that the impact of any message is its contribution to the actor’s definition of the situation” (Altheide and Michalowski 1999: 477). This process of the interpretation of media such as news reports through any person’s particular lens of analysis is useful, not only in highlighting individualism and context as driving forces that can seem to supersede the initial media output, but also in introducing the idea of ‘meta-power’. Drawing on Hall’s (1997) analysis of meta-power, Altheide and Michalowski suggest that “Meta-power refers to altering the type of game actors play; it refers to changing the distribution of resources of the conditions governing interaction” (1999: 477-8). This is an approach grounded in Symbolic Interactionism which essentially relocates our gaze in the analysis of fear in the media, towards the reception of symbolically charged messages in a context-laden interactive realm.

As such, a conceptual model is proffered which aims to view the production of fear in American society as having been “produced through the interaction of commercial media, entertainment formats and programming, and the rise of the ‘problem frame’” (Altheide 1997: 648). The ‘problem frame’ is suggested as a term which captures a form of generic and often utilised fear production in the media. It is the outcome of increasingly commercial and entertainment-focused media outlets and is essentially an attempt to make everyday issues satisfy these modern news demands by manufacturing news stories into “a secular morality play” (Altheide 1997: 653). In order for the public to most strongly identify with these stories and process them within their particular personal contexts, they are constructed to be “both universal and specific, abstract and real” (Altheide 1997: 654). The ‘problem frame’ describes certain qualities which are infused into news, distorting them until they contain the emotional resonance of a morality play: a familiar and story-like narrative structure, universal moral meanings, a specific time and place, a lack of complexity or ambiguity, cultural resonance and crucially, a focus on disorder (1997: 654).

Drawing from Ericson et al. (1989), Altheide argues that “repeated presentations of similar scenarios ‘teaches’ the audience about the nature and causes of disorder” (1997: 654). Here we see that while Altheide views fear as the ultimate goal and the absolute scourge of modern media, that disorder plays a key role in the process of the production of fear. He suggests:

It is immaterial whether the audience has other experiences with crime or related problems; the resulting messages both reinforce certain experiences and perceptions, and provide a meaning about the pervasiveness of fear. (Altheide 1997: 654).

Indeed, what Altheide’s model emphasizes is the forcefully entwined relationship between media and crime in the pursuit of commercial success, a success that is achieved by stoking societal fear and is defined by entertainment values.

Altheide also addresses the broader socio-political implications of this relationship, suggesting that the problem frame is at the heart of the distortion of social issues which can inevitably lead to “politicians, funding agencies, academic disciplines and even agency personnel who actually deal with the alleged problem to make adjustments that are counterproductive and make matters much worse” (1997: 655). As such, his analysis of the production of fear in the media views this commercial endeavour as the ultimate power, above any political interests. In this account, he views politicians as constrained within rather than as orchestrating the media system. This perhaps is a reflection of his belief in the production of fear as the ultimate thematic and certainly challenges accounts which view the media as merely the mouthpiece for political gain. It seems that accounts can vary on their identification of a particular social ill as having primacy. In truth the reality today is possibly more of a variety of cross-cutting power struggles, rather than either commercialism or cynical politics as the absolute villain of the piece.

#### 4. Policing the Crisis

Hall et al.'s *Policing the Crisis* (1978) is enduringly highly-regarded for its “hard-edge stance on analysis and prescription and its intellectually eclectic explanatory framework” (McLaughlin 2008: 145). This seminal examination of the realm beyond the criminal act assesses ‘Mugging’ via an exploration of race and youth, utilizing a theoretically rich research model which established a blueprint for understanding the role of crime in the media. Their focus on the ‘Handsworth mugging case’ of 1973 was constituted as an ideological rather than a content analysis (Hall et al. 1978), in concurrence with a forceful critique of the popular Marxism of the time, utilizing “a commitment to grounded theorizing, albeit from a Marxist vantage point” (Jefferson 2008: 114). Indeed, in *Policing the Crisis* the theoretical approach is at the fore of the project, very much reflecting the movements of its time by purposely moving away from moral panic theory which had utilised an interactionist paradigm (Jefferson 2008: 114), viewing this approach as insufficiently critical of power, towards a particular version of theoretical Marxism which is multifaceted and employed in objection to “conventional, reductive Marxism” (Jefferson 2008: 114). As Woollacott (1982) notes, the particular use of Gramscian and Althusserian Marxism in *Policing the Crisis* is focused on an understanding of the media which is sufficiently critical of power but which is also committed to grounded theorizing:

The work reflects an analysis of the signifying practices of the mass media from the perspective of Marxist cultural theory inflected through Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and ‘an Althusserian conception of the media as an ideological state apparatus largely concerned with the reproduction of dominant ideologies’, claiming relative autonomy for the mass media. (Woollacott 1982: 110)

This approach has been termed ‘conjunctural analysis’, an analytical method commonly utilised in cultural studies, which Clarke (2008) describes as “trying to identify the multiple forces, tendencies, pressures in play in a historical moment and to identify how the balance of forces is being worked on, shaped, directed in the search for a ‘solution’ and a ‘way forward” (Clarke 2008: 125). Applying this approach to their primary interest of assessing the societal and media reaction to the

moral panic of ‘mugging’, Hall et al. employ a methodology, which much like Ericson et al., aims to understand the media by extending their gaze beyond the text.

They forcefully constitute ‘public opinion’ as “an *ideological* rather than *empirical* domain” (McLaughlin 2008: 148), eschewing interviews with media elites or a newsroom ethnography, instead “reading newspapers in order to identify the ideological frameworks used to structure the news” (McLaughlin 2008: 148). This approach is taken in order to broaden the lens of analysis beyond the crime of mugging, towards the ‘social phenomenon’ and the broader implications of the reaction to the crime:

[It is] not a book about why certain individuals, as individuals, turn to mugging; nor about what practical steps can be taken to control or reduce its incidence; nor about how awful a crime ‘mugging’ is. It is not a case study, a practical manual nor a cry of moral outrage... We are concerned with ‘mugging’ – but as a social phenomenon, rather than as a particular form of street crime. (Hall et al. 1978: vii)

*Policing the Crisis* begins with a detailed excavation of an account of ‘mugging’, looking chronologically at the history as well as the contextual ‘equation of concern’. In ‘the social production of news’ detailed descriptions of the moral panic and the police campaign are wedded to a classic account of the media. The Handsworth mugging case is presented in detail and stands as an example which “crystallises the operation of the media, so that in one moment we can observe the shape of a whole news process” (Hall et al. 1978: 82). This piece of research begins in the form of a case study. We are taken through the details of how this particular mugging unfolded in the press, and presented with a comprehensive content analysis of the news values and debates which crystallised public opinion, the headlines, editorials, the particular case of *The Sun* which abandoned traditional distinction between ‘news fact’, ‘feature exploration’ and ‘editorial opinion’ in favour of the exclusive shaping of the event. Subsequently ‘public opinion’ is explored in an account which incorporates knowledge, rumours and folk-lore to provide a thorough analysis of the interactions which occur beyond the criminal act.

Hall et al. further make their mark in establishing a perspective on media and knowledge production in their methodological distinctions of primary and secondary ‘definers’. They place particular emphasis on primary definers as the most powerful

in the media sphere through their ability to “frame what the problem is” (Hall et al. 1978: 59). These are authority figures who “command the field... and set the terms of reference within which all other coverage or debate takes place” (1978: 58). As a result the mass media are viewed in this perspective as the ‘secondary definers’, playing “a crucial but secondary role in reproducing the definitions of those who have privileged access” (1978: 57). Notably, the critical perspective espoused by Hall et al. means that their view of the media, while infused with explanatory force, is in essence one which views the media as a channel rather than a motor of change. It is an account which sees political authority as the ultimate driving force in the construction of crime narratives.

## 5. The Evolving Media Landscape

In aiming to understand the role played by crime and the everyday allusions to its prevalence in our society, some constructive ‘conjunctural’ analysis might begin by considering the modes of communication through which we receive this kind of information. If we wish to know the impact of policy decisions as they are transmitted throughout society, if we wish to appreciate the impact of law and order rhetoric, if we wish to study the public opinion on any topic which is primarily communicated through a mediated landscape, it follows that we must begin with a certain grasp of this particular field of communication. Indeed, a curiosity around crime in society has on many occasions begun with analysis of the media and rightly so, as a vessel through which our centralized governments have distilled crime promises and policy action, the media is the realm within which society’s understanding of crime is received, reshaped and communicated in various ways.

Much criminological analysis of media has focused on more established elements, such as the widely studied print press or television journalism. For instance, the notion of ‘newsworthiness’ of crime matters has traditionally been constructed with an organized, commercial newsroom in mind (Ericson et al. 1987, 1989, 1991; Jewkes 2004). This has resulted from many years of an established tradition of the prominence of print press and a logical assumption that tradition

suggests longevity, where newer forms of media are often cautiously viewed as ephemeral. Certainly there is much to be gleaned from classic studies of newspapers beyond the specific workings of a newsroom, such as Ericson et al.'s (1978, 1989, 1991) seminal works. More commonly, content analysis has been regularly utilised in order to study “communications in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring certain variables... free of the subjective bias of the reviewer” (Dominick 1978: 106-7). While there are many criticisms of this approach, namely its inability to “justify inferences about the effects of content on the audience” (Reiner 2007: 303), I would argue that in light of alterations to the media landscape and the increase in media sources experienced briefly by most members of society on a daily basis, that this form of neutral and inflexible content analysis is no longer viable. Furthermore, if we limit our understanding of public opinion to those who read actual printed newspapers, if we continue to follow the research model of content analysis, we may only gain an awareness of the knowledge held by an increasingly restricted portion of society.

The broad spectrum of digital media is one which is increasingly pervasive, flexible and widely adopted by large sections of the population. Indeed, in order to understand public opinion today, that is as something naturally occurring in daily life rather than in a constructed research setting, we must first attempt to grasp a clearer picture of our hyper-modern media landscape, one which is uniquely fluid and defined by immediacy, choice, symbolic force and interactivity.

## 5.1 Immediacy

Technological developments of new media sources are the driving force behind the demise of the print press. With the widespread development of online news, both by TV news outlets such as the BBC and print press outlets in almost every instance now providing free access to extremely up to date news information, the timeliness and traditional ubiquity of printed newspapers has significantly diminished. Within the hyper-modern media landscape:

Digital media and contemporary technogenesis constitute a complex adaptive system, with the technologies constantly changing as well as bringing about change in those whose lives are enmeshed with them.  
(Hayles 2012: 18)

Some of the most prominent news outlets that were initially reluctant to provide their services for free online have either adapted their advertisement model or in the case of papers like *The Times* have chosen a subscription model or 'paywall'. Most online newspapers developed quickly and embraced the format by creating original online content including videos, hyperlinks and a new aesthetic which would better suit computer screens as well as tablets and smartphones. As a result, the availability, up to date news information and enhanced 'reader experience' of online news has dramatically shifted consumption online; a 2012 study of news consumption in the US found that since 2008, online or digital news consumption had surpassed radio and print at 39%, 33% and 29% respectively (Pew Research Centre for the People & the Press, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2012). Therefore, today's active consumer of news no longer reads information about a particular news event the next day, but instead is now able to access it as immediately as they connect themselves.

In recent years, developments in social networks and in technological hardware have brought news information even closer and integrated it seamlessly into many more instances in our day in that those who own smartphones or a tablet reader can access information available online while they travel and while they complete their day to day activities. The rapid rise towards the apparent ubiquity of smartphones is noteworthy, so much so that indeed, many news outlets have adapted by creating apps in which they might deliver news, again, as accessed by the user. It is apposite at this point perhaps to note the sheer strides in immediacy which have occurred in the transmission of messages in recent years, where previously a news consumer may have waited until the next day to read information in a printed newspaper, today they may receive a message to a device which they now carry at all times updating them constantly on events. In this way, the flow of information is constant and thoroughly integrated into the normality of a routine day.

Immediacy of news information is heightened even further when we consider how many people are connected not only to their social groups, but also to news sources through social networks such as Facebook and Twitter (1 billion and 500



million users respectively, Lee (2012) 'Facebook surpasses 1 billion users as it tempts new markets', *BBC News*, 5<sup>th</sup> October and Barnett (2012) 'Twitter to hit 500 million registered users', *The Telegraph*, 22<sup>nd</sup> February). The slight difference in news consumption as between these two networks may be due to differing formats, namely that Facebook users may tend to receive opinions or links to news articles from other sources, while Twitter users can actually follow specific journalists who will outline events as they happen:

We used Twitter to do live coverage of stories of our choice. There's an emphasis here on 'choice'. Live-tweeting school board meetings might not quite work. Live-tweeting a high-profile court case, on the other hand, might. It's all about listening to readers and applying news judgment in deciding which stories lend themselves to which medium  
(Lowery 2009)

As a result, events like the London riots of 2011 can unfold in real time to followers and can even be susceptible to some kind of escalation, a hyperactive deviancy amplification (Young 1971) of sorts. Real time news can also unfold visually for the news consumer who watches 24 hour news programming, now widely available on UK TV. As a result, the news cycle now occurs in hyper-speed, with whole storylines and responses unfolding while the print press rush to report the initial incident.

## 5.2 Choice

This vast eruption of news sources and outlets through which we may consume information has facilitated a new level of consumer choice in news. Whereas in previous years our choices were limited to which newspaper or TV news report we chose from amongst a familiar set, informed in many cases by political persuasion, class, family tradition or ease of access, today choice is not only vast, but our preferences now span far beyond political persuasion, far beyond the world of organized press and into a much more diffuse and vibrant community fulfilling this traditional role. Today *we* determine whom we trust to find news issues and repackage them for our consumption, which allows us far greater power in the

construction of our life views and seriously threatens any opportunity for a politically-serving Westminster press to conduct any form of manipulation. Indeed, for a politician to construct and deliver rhetoric, they must aim beyond a single prominent interview, through several channels of communication or indeed must construct a narrative which will travel well, an approach which requires politicians to be much more aware of the power of this new realm. As Tony Blair commented at the Leveson Inquiry; “today this whole issue of managing media is far more difficult and far more important... [because] it occurs in a way and with an intensity that in the old days wouldn't have happened” (Halliday and Baird 2012, ‘Tony Blair at the Leveson Inquiry’, *The Guardian*, 28<sup>th</sup> May). The key is that through the vast expansion of the media, not only have our choices weakened the power of the few, but they have prompted a complete overhaul of strategic communication in politics.

The vast scope of today's media allows various choices to be made and while there is almost no way of categorizing the endless combination which can be utilised by a typical person on a daily basis, there are media choices which suit certain groups, much as there were demographic certainties in traditional print press, each of these groups gravitate towards narratives which then have their own force in today's society. For instance, the UK-based liberal, left-leaning consumer who may have previously read *The Guardian* and regularly viewed the Channel 4 news, might now include in their roster *The Huffington Post*, *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *The New York Times*, VICE, *Jezebel*, *Slate*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic* and NPR. Obviously it would be incorrect to categorize too rigidly, but similarly some right leaning news sources might include the *Daily Mail* website which is now the leading online newspaper in the world (Greenslade 2012, ‘Mail online goes top of the world’ *The Guardian*, 25<sup>th</sup> January), the increasingly popular online content of FOX News, Politico and Drudge Report. While many modern consumers favour particular online news providers, some demographics will favour traditional print editorials or local news programming. The significance of the ability to make such a choice is, as noted, a distinct and powerful capacity to undermine the dominance of traditional print press, as was demonstrated in the downfall of the *News of the World*. When the phone hacking scandal left the public feeling a sense of outrage towards the practices

of the Murdoch-run newspaper, they were easily able to abandon their years of loyalty and find sources of news and entertainment elsewhere.

With the public now able to exercise consumer choice over the kind of news that they consume, a significant effect is that by doing so they tend to reinforce the legitimacy of their existing views through daily reiteration from a like-minded news group, as was demonstrated, for instance, by the Fox News support for the Tea Party movement. A conservative political group prominent in the US during the 2010 mid term elections, Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi said of the Tea Party “We call it Astroturf; it’s not really a grassroots movement” (Pilkington 2010, ‘The Tea Party Has Just Begun’, *The Guardian*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November). Speaker Pelosi’s comment insinuated that what had been portrayed as locally prominent voter-led gatherings were not wholly authentic and were in fact being funded and promoted by big business billionaires lobbying for tax cuts from the Republican establishment. However, despite much discussion in some news outlets of these business links, for members of the tea party the strength of rhetoric surrounding the movement was unflinchingly constructed and reinforced on a daily basis by Fox News talking head contributors, such as Glenn Beck. Beck utilised his platform on Fox to become “for the fractious Tea Party movement... a unifying figure and an intellectual guide” (Wilentz 2010, ‘Confounding Fathers’, *The New Yorker*, 18<sup>th</sup> October), acting as an opinion-giver rather than a neutral news anchor and drowning out any dissenting voices for those politically inclined towards the right. In essence, the vast expansion of choice in news today has promoted increased specialization. This move has replaced neutrality with opinion and the effects can be dramatic in mobilizing particular groups at the extreme ends of the political spectrum.

### 5.3 Symbolic Force

When our symbolic environment is, by and large, structured in this inclusive, flexible, diversified hypertext in which we navigate every day, the virtuality of this text is in fact our reality, the symbols from which we live and communicate  
(Castells 1997: 12).

In our digital society, as we negotiate an everyday barrage of ideas, occurrences and opinions, the symbolic power of certain pieces of rhetoric or policy ideas is central to their ultimate success in gaining our attention. The communication of particular narratives no longer comes from a considered editorial piece read by the majority but rather in fleeting messages, easily encapsulated in a slogan or a picture, distilled to the most basic element and easily re-communicated. The result of the media of today favouring 140 characters or less as well as the particularly visual approach that news show simulations, YouTube, Facebook and online picture blogs such as Tumblr and Pinterest promote, is a sense that the visual image is now as important as print in conveying a message and in forcing that message to the top of the pile. Furthermore, sentiments are reduced and repackaged in a way which now, more than ever, must be eye-catching to the browsing viewer. A typical news website will gain some advertising revenue from the number of times someone chooses to click through to a link on their page and so the headline and picture must entice the ‘unique monthly visitors’ and page views. This, in many ways, can be more important to the publisher than any of the content, than the message, than any organizing views and as a result, can move the emphasis away from content and towards symbolically forceful imagery and catchy headlines.

This shallow approach can have the somewhat positive effect of allowing the particular issue which contains enough potential ire and which is appropriately formatted, to gain enough traction to rise to the top of the public consciousness very quickly and become a brief talking point. As a result, new campaigns can form around an issue, now prompted by individual parties rather than the more frequently tabloid-championed approaches of the past. Now, rather than the forceful imagery of a front page picture, social media campaigns as recently employed for instance by the group ‘Hacked Off’, are used to move an issue through this media landscape and capture the public imagination in this new way. However, while these issues can burn brightly within this context, it is difficult for campaigns to sustain any momentum, as was experienced prominently by ‘Hacked Off’. Initially prompted by the News of the World phone hacking scandal, championing victims rights and lead by Hugh Grant, this combination of celebrity, victims and scandal, supported by Twitter campaigns, online petitions reaching 171,933 people, easily shared YouTube

videos and the slogan ‘We need social media to rival column inches. Share us with your friends because the newspapers won’t!’, seemed to have utilised the new media landscape powerfully. In helping raise awareness of victimization in the phone hacking scandal, Hacked Off were instrumental in campaigning for press regulation as part of the Leveson Inquiry. However, they found that while the issue remained prominent around the time of the closure of the *News of the World* and again at the hearings for the Leveson Inquiry, much was made of the fact that the Hacked Off campaign documentary aired on Channel 4 on the day of Lord Leveson’s announcement, had floundered, receiving disappointingly low ratings of 552,000 viewers, or a 2.3% share of the audience that night. The public interest waned as the issue became less potent and immediate, while the bombardment of imagery and short blasts of information, now totally out of the control of any kind of editorial discretion or long-term view, had turned to whichever issue had risen somehow to the top on that day.

#### 5.4 Interaction

More than ever, the public voice in news issues is heard through an increasingly interactive system which provides several interesting forums for expression. Through Twitter and other active forms of social media which are increasingly utilised by news programming, viewers can comment personally on topics or ask a question. Indeed, TV and radio news programmes can easily gather the public opinion on issues by suggesting the use of a ‘hashtag’ which viewers will quote and thus be collated within a single stream, such as #r4today for listeners of Radio 4’s ‘Today Programme’. This is significant, not necessarily in the actual interactions which are rarely revelatory, but in the spirit of this shift. Where previously newsrooms were regarded as an important part of democratic society in that they employed skill and editorial guidance in order to investigate issues and present them in a controlled manner, often providing a crucial check against corrupt governments, now the untethered public voice is viewed as a key part of the presentation, that it is now required for a certain credibility. In a sense this could be viewed positively, allowing the public to take an active part in the construction of narratives, once again diluting

the power for elite manipulation of the masses and democratizing the news. However, the opportunity for such interaction, particularly around law and order issues, can attract the expression of reactionary views. In talk radio, news podcasts, newspaper comments sections, YouTube videos and comments sections, the anonymity available has tended to promote a certain viewpoint which counteracts any neutrality aimed at by the editorial approach.













## 5.5 New Media Scholarship on Social Media

I have stressed throughout this project that the seismic shifts around media have occurred not exclusively around social media, but rather with a more general broadening of access to news media, through rolling 24 hour televised news, through internet access to online media and through the ubiquity of personal tablets and smartphones. These changes have been instrumental in enhancing the aforementioned qualities of interactivity, immediacy, choice and symbolic force and the power of these elements should not be underestimated, or subsumed by discussions of social media. The introduction of social media certainly has had an impact on this realm, as we will see in the following case studies, it has enhanced our capacity to gather physically and figuratively around an issue and yet it is by no means the whole picture here. To make assertions about a change in society based around social media alone would take for granted longevity, which we have seen is inherently lacking in the ‘social’ element of social media. Formats driven by young demographics are subject to the rise and fall of trends and shift in popularity as generations grow. Millennials may have in recent years been defined by their proclivity towards interaction through social media, but we have seen that enormous brands of the social media world can still be undermined by their own popularity. For instance, as Facebook membership reaches a staggering 1.2 billion monthly active users, it has still reported concerns of a mass exodus of the most profitable young groups to apps such as WhatsApp and Snapchat, reportedly “part of the reason is that gradual encroachment of the grey-haired ones on Facebook” (Olson 10 November 2013 *The Observer*, ‘Teenagers say goodbye to Facebook and hello to messenger apps’). As such, this is a fast-paced, fluctuating realm and we cannot for

instance speak on the potential long term effects of particular formats, rather, the most important point here is to observe the general encroachment of social media into our daily lives in its multiple forms. Some essence of social media is likely to endure; its interactivity, the ability to connect in particular circles, its particular delivery of news. In this section, I will provide an overview of new media scholarship on social media, with the aim of drawing out some of the important and enduring elements of this realm.

In the 2015 Reuters summary of news consumption, one of the key questions around the ‘starting points for news’ highlighted social media as a particularly dominant source, especially in Brazil and Australia where it was the most common over search, email and going direct to a news brand.

**STARTING POINTS FOR NEWS**  
ALL COUNTRIES

	 UK	 US	 FRA	 GER	 IRE	 DEN	 FIN	 ITA	 SPA	 JPN	 BRA	 AUS
Direct to news brand	52%	36%	27%	26%	44%	54%	63%	20%	36%	15%	46%	33%
Search	32%	40%	40%	45%	46%	29%	26%	66%	54%	54%	52%	49%
Social Media	28%	35%	21%	20%	36%	38%	28%	33%	35%	14%	48%	41%
Email	10%	25%	21%	15%	9%	24%	9%	17%	14%	15%	23%	20%
Mobile notifications and alerts	10%	13%	14%	9%	9%	9%	7%	7%	8%	7%	11%	9%
Other aggregator site, newsreader, or app	4%	5%	6%	5%	7%	9%	12%	6%	11%	27%	17%	8%

Q10. Thinking about how you got news online (via computer, mobile or any device) in the last week, which were the ways in which you came across news stories? Please select all that apply. Base: Total sample in each country.

(Reuters 2015: 75)

Keitzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) aimed to categorise the variety of social media outlets according to scope and functionality as follows:

Some sites are for the general masses, like Friendster, Hi5, and of course-Facebook, which opened only 4 years after Sixdegrees closed its doors. Other sites, like LinkedIn, are more focused professional networks... Media sharing sites, such as MySpace, YouTube, and Flickr, concentrate on shared videos and photos... Today the resulting ‘blogosphere’ of more than 100 million blogs and their interconnections has become an important source of public opinion... [On Twitter] more than 145 million users send on average 90 million ‘tweets’ per day.

(Keitzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre 2011: 242)

Even in the few years since Keitzmann et al. published this categorisation, as mentioned the landscape has shifted even further, yet this provides us with a sense of the breadth of the field in which users can share, communicate, receive messages which are given to them by trusted users. Crucially in social media, the user actively controls the stream of messages they receive with far greater autonomy than other forms of media. Mason (2010) aims to hone in on the exact kinds of uses for each source:

Facebook is used to form groups, covert and overt—in order to establish those strong but flexible connections. Twitter is used for real-time *organisation* and news dissemination, bypassing the cumbersome ‘newsgathering’ operations of the mainstream media. YouTube and the Twitter-linked photographic sites—Yfrog, Flickr and Twitpic—are used to provide instant evidence of the claims being made. Link-shorteners like bit.ly are used to disseminate key articles via Twitter. (Mason 2010: 75)

With so many sources of media available, it can be difficult to further assess user motivations or the place of a particular source in society. Madianou and Miller (2012) suggest that most users adopt a form of ‘polymedia’, which they see as an integrated structure driven by each form of media’s functional propensities. They also suggest beyond function, that these varied sources no longer constitute “a horizontal distribution of media whereby each particular medium shifts its meaning and implication relative to the other media” (Madianou and Miller 2012: 183). Rather the internal relationship between forms of media is now multi-faceted and “constitutes a shift in the relationship between communicative media and society... it amounts to a resocialization of communicative media” (Madianou and Miller 2012: 183). The social relationship of media is enhanced by the literacy of media users; as we become more familiar with the varied forms of media on offer, choosing a particular source becomes a socialized act. This is what Couldry (2012) and Hepp (2009) have termed a ‘mutual shaping of social processes and the media’.

While the adoption of social media has been fast-paced and represents a shift in the idea of a media consumer, we have also seen that the open sourced and unfettered elements of these forums have encouraged enormous uptake around political events and have shifted our idea of citizenship. Skirky (2011) argues that “as the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more



participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action” (Shirky 2011: 1). He takes on the two main criticisms leveled at the idea that social media can make a difference in politics: that the tools themselves are ineffective and that they can harm when repressive governments use these tools to suppress dissent. In the first case, he suggests that critiques of ineffectiveness, of ‘slacktivism’, in which Facebook groups for or against issues only extend bumper-sticker politics, fail to appreciate the broad range of possibilities now available to activists through these modes. While modes of communication such as Facebook groups do allow for ‘slacktivism’, the use of social media to coordinate action has been revelatory on the world stage, for instance, recent protest movements against fundamentalist vigilantes in India in 2009 or protests against education laws in Chile in 2006 have taken advantage of the enhanced capacity for coordination (Shirky 2011: 4). Of the second critique, the potential for authoritarian intervention through these modes, Shirky suggests that most examples of this kind so far have demonstrated a vast misunderstanding of the capabilities of social media, of the inability to control entire narratives; “When the government of Bahrain banned Google Earth after an annotated map of the royal family’s annexation of public land began circulating, the effect was to alert far more Bahrainis to the offending map than knew about it originally. So widely did the news spread that the government relented and reopened access after four days” (Shirky 2011: 7). These critiques aside, Shirky suggests that the key challenges for the future of social media and politics will come under international standards of freedom of speech and the issue of most of these large companies; Google, Facebook, Youtube are privately run and under few obligations to prioritise freedom of speech for their users above profit.

Shirky’s point on the enhanced ability to congregate around ideas and around moments of protest through social media is amplified by the great many observers of the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2010 and 2011. Howard et al. (2011) recount the self-immolation of vegetable merchant Mouhammed Bouzazi who set himself on fire in Tunisia on December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 in protest against the government and whose story was “told and retold on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in ways that inspired dissidents to organize protests, criticize their governments, and spread ideas about

democracy” (Howard et al. 2011: 2). The impact of these events was enormous and demonstrated how social media could ‘play a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring... spike online revolutionary conversations [which] often preceded major events on the ground... helped spread democratic ideas across international borders’ (Howard et al. 2011). Essentially, while social media is a realm often criticized for its faddishness and lack of substance, against these odds in the short time it has been an active part of legitimate communicative processes, it has seriously contributed to politics and protest in meaningful and noticeable ways.

## 5.6 Citizen Journalism

As the technology of the media landscape has developed, so too has the public role in capturing newsworthy events. With increased access to the internet and the proliferation of recording devices on phones and tablets, the phenomenon of ‘citizen journalism’ has allowed the public to play “an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information” (Bowman and Willis 2003: 2). Jewkes (2011) argues both that the emergence of the citizen journalist ought to be considered one of the most notable corollaries of the expansion of new media and that this was a significant occurrence worthy of consideration in the context of crime news. She describes the ‘user-generated content’ of citizen journalism as “encompass[ing] images taken on mobile phone cameras, texts and emails sent by audience members to media outlets, and contributions to Internet sites such as Twitter and Youtube (which has its own dedicated channel for citizen journalists; YouTube direct)” (Jewkes 2011: 65). Citizen journalism has tended to indicate an active collection of news imagery beyond that of the public contribution to news previously discussed in this project, one which goes beyond the day to day interaction, now providing newsworthy material and in many cases shifting the focus of news.

In particular, the capturing of video has notably provided evidence to refute official claims, frequently those of the police. Recent prominent examples include the uploading of pictures and video of police brutality in the events surrounding the

killing of an unarmed black teenager by police in Ferguson, Missouri. Of the power of citizen journalism, Gillmor (2014) notes; “Video and pictures are an equalizer: they’re not the only ones, and most of the power remains with the state, but they can be essential tools to help restore some balance in a system that, in recent years, has tilted in favor of those who interpret ‘protect and serve’ as license to act with impunity” (Gillmor 2014: x), reflecting the sense that this form of public action has become a meaningful check against unjust claims of state authority and crucial evidence in cases of police violence. Greer and McLaughlin (2010) note the particular impact of citizen journalism on policing, highlighting the shift in recent years away from media reporting which had tended to support official accounts, towards policing which is “enmeshed in a complex web of internal and external stakeholders and ‘publics’ with different agendas and needs who are willing and able to use the news media and internet to represent their interests” (Greer and McLaughlin 2010: 1044). The outcome of such a shift has, as Greer and McLaughlin suggest, created space for potentially undermining narratives and reinforced critique of the state. Citizen journalism, then, does represent a shift in the media landscape which allows the public voice to emanate in a particularly powerful way.

In his discussion of the rapidly evolving media realm, Yar (2012) incorporates the media analysis concept ‘prosumer’ (Tapscott 2008, Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010 in Yar 2012: 249) to emphasise the modern merging of production and consumption of media, in which this form of ‘user-generated content’ now plays a significant role in the construction of news narratives. Similarly, Greer and McLaughlin emphasise the significance of this shift in their development of Becker’s ‘hierarchy of credibility’ (Becker 1967) within the context of policing. They note in particular that:

The pluralization and professionalization of possible sources of ‘policing news’ has created a multiplicity of alternative ‘knowledge workers’ (Ericson and Haggerty 1997: 19) with access to potentially ‘newsworthy’ information that may or may not correspond with the official police perspective. (Greer and McLaughlin 2010: 26)

Citizen journalism and the many active ‘knowledge workers’ have shifted the established hierarchy of credibility, which, using Yar’s development of ‘prosumer’ is

now more fluid, less of a vertical hierarchy, or indeed much more notably dominated by members of the public, now empowered with the technological capability to capture and deliver news imagery. The increasing regularity and force of citizen journalism in news does seem to indicate a blurring of boundaries, where crucially the non-media elite now frequently play an active and legitimate role in constructing narratives. We have seen that in particular, when these forces are directed towards the issue of crime, that they can provide a meaningful critique against established accounts.

## 5.7 Contemporary News Consumption and Reception

One of the most significant shifts in this realm and one of central importance to this project is the way in which news is now consumed. Recent literature has aimed to illuminate the rapid developments in this area by highlighting research which tells us more about the consumption of news through mobile devices, through multiple platforms, through social media and which aims to understand the resulting impact on civic participation.

The most recent (2015) Reuters Institute Digital News Report provides a detailed international overview of news consumption as it occurs today. They report that ‘television remains the number one source of news in most markets’ (Reuters 2015: 51). However, as the chart below demonstrates, in most cases online media including social media provides a serious challenge to the primacy of television, now dominating consumption in a major markets including the US and Ireland. In all cases, key sources of news tend to be much more heavily weighted towards TV and social media than more traditional formats of radio and printed newspapers.

**SOURCES OF NEWS BY COUNTRY**

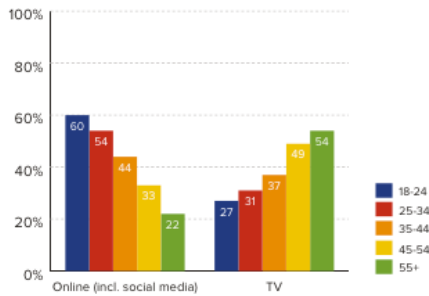
	 UK	 GER	 SPA	 ITA	 FRA	 IRE	 DEN	 FIN	 US	 BRA	 JPN	 AUS
<b>TV</b>	75%	82%	82%	78%	80%	76%	75%	75%	64%	81%	73%	72%
<b>Radio</b>	37%	50%	40%	23%	28%	50%	50%	45%	26%	39%	17%	41%
<b>Printed Newspapers</b>	38%	38%	47%	38%	19%	49%	33%	49%	23%	33%	44%	39%
<b>Online (inc. social media)</b>	73%	60%	86%	81%	71%	83%	85%	90%	74%	91%	70%	85%

Q3. Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news? Please select all that apply. Base: Total sample in each country.

(Reuters 2015: 51)

The consumption of news online tends to be heavily weighted towards younger generations:

**MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY AGE –  
YOUNG PREFER ONLINE**  
ALL COUNTRIES

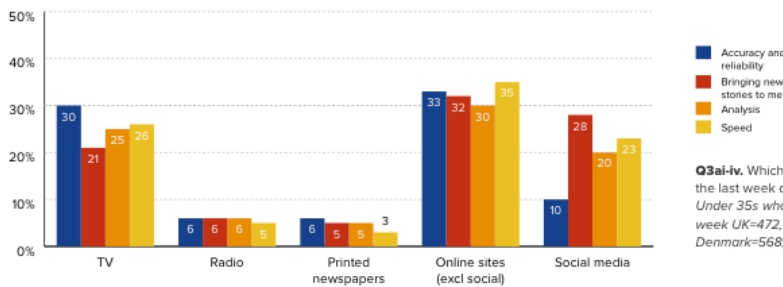


**Q4.** You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news? Base: All who used a news source in the last week All = 23155.

(Reuters 2015: 51)

When the under 35 demographics were questioned on the value of online news (excluding social media), they cited high levels of ‘accuracy and reliability, bringing new stories to me, analysis and speed’ which outweighed their perception of TV news, suggesting that these were the driving forces behind a move towards online news for this age group. As seen below, while social media scored higher than TV on bringing new stories, the accuracy and reliability of sources was rated fairly low, suggesting a key weakness of these platforms.

**THE VALUE OF DIFFERENT PLATFORMS FOR NEWS**  
UNDER 35s



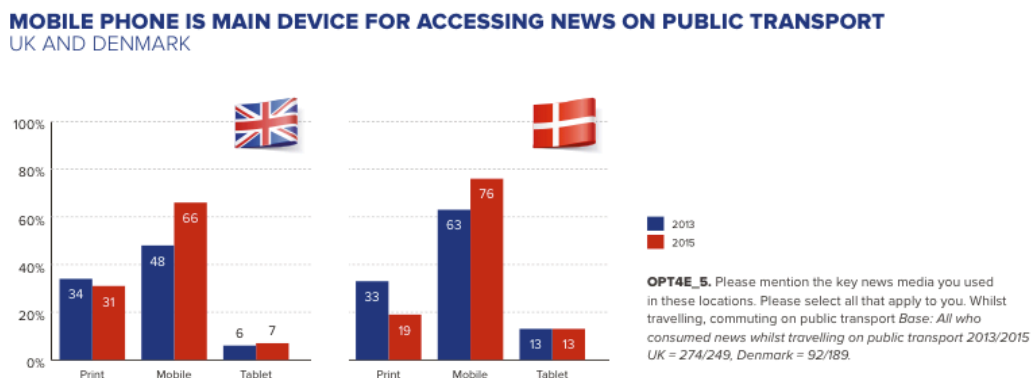
**Q3a1-iv.** Which one of the sources that you've used in the last week do you find best for the following? Base: Under 35s who used a source of news in the last week UK=472, US=492, France=339, Germany=442, Denmark=568, Ireland=485.

(Reuters 2015: 53)

Similarly, Hermida's (2012) key study 'Decoding the social media news consumer' emphasizes that social media is now 'central to the way people experience news', in particular, the sharing function involved in social media plays an integral role in consumption and reception, with the result that "editorially, the traditional gatekeeping function of the media is weakened as a significant proportion of news consumers turn to family, friends and acquaintances to alert them to items of interest" (Hermida 2012: 820). Newman, Dutton and Blank's (2012) specific study of social media consumption in the UK assesses the now fluid relationship between old media and the public through social media outlets:

The press and mass media are using the Internet strategically to maintain and enhance their communicative power, but networked individuals are using the Internet to source their own information, more independent of the press and other estates, and to network with other individuals in ways that enhance their communicative power... [they] are involved in an ecology of media that is also enabling the two estates to be mutually complementary and reinforcing (Newman, Dutton and Blank 2012:18).

In developing their analysis of new media consumption, Reuters compared the UK and Denmark's modes of consuming news, noting overwhelmingly that the increase of mobile devices had made a significant impact on how, for instance, news is consumed on public transport:



(Reuters 2015: 60)

The impact of increased accessibility through mobile news devices, particularly in younger demographics has emerged as a key theme in recent news consumption literature. Chyi and Chadha (2011) studied in detail the use of computers, smartphones, e-readers and tablets and concluded that multiplatform news consumption is now an undeniable, dominant reality in media, with the computer still acting as the main platform, despite the portability of other devices. Chan-Olmsted, Rim and Zerba (2013) suggest that the mobile phones and tablets like the iPad are most popular in young adults, concluding that “it is plausible that usability and/or needs and gratification factors might play a more significant role in this aspect of mobile news behaviour” (Chan-Olmsted, Rim and Zerba 2013: 140).

Mitchelstein and Boczkowski’s (2010) summary of research findings on studies of news consumption suggest that in aiming to appreciate consumer behaviour, most empirical studies have concluded that “despite the proliferation of sites and technologies, most users are still influenced by past consumption habits” (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2010: 1086). Their main argument in assessing the research landscape is to stress that traditional consumption habits still exist across demographics and in this new technological landscape. While this vast expansion is notable, consumption in many demographics is still motivated by traditional models, for instance, a focus on specific interests and content. Readers interested in sport will still be motivated to consume according to this interest. Livingstone’s study (2004) forcefully concluded that “the search for news information in a specific content area drives the consumption of specific news types across different media outlets” (Livingstone 2004: 55).

In considering the impact of political events on news coverage, Reuters concluded that elections and referendums in the UK stimulate interest in politics. Using the Scottish Independence Referendum as a case study, Reuters noted “A quarter (26%) regularly post political comments via social networks. More than a fifth (20%) follow a politician on social media, while the percentage of people contributing money to a political party has tripled in two years” (Reuters 2015: 62). Considering sources of political news, it is noted that “Broadcaster brands like the BBC, ITV and sky and newspaper brands (in print and online) remain the most important sources of news but their overall reach is on a downward curve. By

contrast, those who say they get political news from social networks like Facebook and Twitter has risen from 15% to 25% in four years. More people are also getting information directly from political parties (7% to 14%)” (Reuters 2015: 63).

Halpern’s (2013) study of the impact of participation with social media on civic engagement supports these findings, suggesting that “being exposed to political opinions and beliefs of peers may stimulate interest and knowledge, results showed that the positive effect of news consumption and political discussion on civic engagement was found even in non-active information seekers and those exposed serendipitously to information” (Halpern 2013: 181). These findings stress the force of peer-driven news consumption even on non-active information seekers. Finally, political participation in younger demographics when impacted by online news consumption is assessed by Xiaoming (2014), who makes the argument that we now see a general reversal in youth apathy, when we consider online political engagement. He cautions against extending this link too concretely to offline political engagement but sees strong links otherwise.

## 5.8 New Political Communications Scholarship

We have seen how the reception of news has shifted and how this has forcefully affected consumption, how then have these changes impacted on the way that issues are communicated in the political realm? This area of scholarship has in recent years provided new insight into the relationship between politics, the media and the public, in particular the enhanced manner by which the public may access the political realm, how political communications have been affected by the widespread introduction of new media and how this seems to have redirected activity around elections and scandals.

The relationship between politicians and the public, by way of the media has been recently reexamined by Lee (2014) in the American context, using the President as the focal point for the political realm. His study found that despite the recent recalibration of this now multidimensional relationship, that the news media still plays an integral role in framing issues both for the President and for the public and



that this relationship could not exist similarly between the President and public without the media, noting that “the significant influences of the news media on the president and the public imply that the manner in which the news media make news of issues is critical to understanding changes in public opinion” (Lee 2014: 276). As such, despite these shifts, we see that the role of the media is still integral to political communication.

The impact of evolving media on this relationship is of increasing interest in the realm of political communication, with many actors adopting these new formats to aim to deliver policy or campaign messages. As such, much of the focus of research in this area has been on the potential shift in retention of messages and the possibility of persuasion in today’s media landscape. Hill, Lo, Vavreck and Zaller (2013) aim to understand the limits of persuasion within today’s mediated political context. They examine the apparent problem of ‘rapid decay’ in mass political communication but found that ‘online processing’ actually produced increased durability when compared with ‘memory-based processing’, but that the internalization of communication is quite shallow; “citizens would internalize the implications of communication while forgetting its details” (Hill et al. 2013: 545). Essentially we see a positive impact on the ability to communicate only simple messages to the public. Neiheisel and Niebler (2015) build on this research, aiming to understand how retention of political messages are influenced by ‘voters’ interpersonal discussion networks’ and find that retention is enhanced when individuals are situated in networks which are ‘agreeable’, which correspond with and reinforce their political views; “Individuals situated within more agreeable networks are more likely to strengthen their candidate preferences and, correspondingly, resist shifting their support to a different candidate when exposed to ads that are consonant with their initial vote choice” (Neiheisel and Niebler 2015: 448). We see this kind of network regularly in social media and as such, this has strong implications for political messages now transmitted through these formats. Moving beyond these agreeable groups, Lyons and Sokhey (2014) aim to understand what emotions motivate public engagement with ‘disagreeable discussion’ in politics, what causes a person to engage with other political persuasions and debates of this nature. Both online and in person, they suggest that “disagreeable discussion-

regardless of conceptualization and operationalization- is poorly predicted by emotions associated with information seeking (e.g., fear) while it is better structured by emotions associated with expression and participation (e.g., enthusiasm)” (Lyons and Sokhey 2014: 237). Therefore, to move a person beyond their agreeable networks, to engage with other political groups, they are better motivated by enthusiasm than fear.

The persuasive capacity of politics is extremely active during campaigns, however, research by Hansen and Tue Pedersen (2014) suggests that persuasion during these periods can extend beyond and into the general public consciousness and that this is largely driven by media messages. Focusing specifically on newspaper output, they found that “Broadsheet readers experienced a significant increase in both knowledge and internal efficacy. In contrast, tabloid readers became significantly less externally efficacious, suggesting that the tabloids may be partially to blame for cynicism and mistrust among the electorate” (Hansen and Tue Pedersen 2014: 319). Surprisingly they also found that TV and radio did not have positive effects on knowledge and efficacy. Their study did not include any other new media sources, but provided an interesting perspective on the effects of communication through these traditional modes, seeming to categorize TV and radio as less persuasive than broadsheet news. While research into the differences in newspaper coverage is wide-ranging, recent work by Dunaway and Lawrence (2015) considers newspaper coverage during elections and the particular conditions which can lead to more measured reporting. They find conclusively that as election races become tighter and the winner is less clear, that policy discussions are abandoned in favour of ‘game-frame’ coverage:

Given a close race, newspapers of many types will tend to converge on a game-framed election narrative and, by extension, stories focusing on who’s up/who’s down will crowd out stories about the policy issues they are presumably being elected to address. And, as the days-’til-election variable shows, this pattern will intensify across the course of a close race. Ownership structure, in other words, does not trump journalists’ (and audiences’) attraction to the horse race when a close race is on.

(Dunaway and Lawrence 2015: 59)

As such, persuasiveness and any approach aimed at effective policy-based communication will under these conditions be superseded in favour of close race politics. In moments such as these, Boydston, Hardy and Walgrave (2014) have aimed to assess the impact of media storms, exploring the activity around such moments and the impact this has on public reception of political communications. Their main finding was that public interest and activity tends to spike during these moments; “When media attention to an event/issue explodes, people start searching for more information regarding the item in a similar explosive fashion” (Boydston, Hardy and Walgrave 2014: 529). They suggest that the broader impact of these surges is notable, that these surges should be considered important in understanding how members of the public develop ideas around specific policy issues. They argue for the media storm as a way of “think[ing] about media effects in a non-linear, conditional fashion” (Boydston, Hardy and Walgrave 2014: 529).

## 6. A Blurring of Boundaries

It is clear that many of the most rigorous and appealing conceptual frameworks which aim to understand the role of the media in the construction of crime narratives, view this particular relationship as a top-down linear process feeding from politician to media to public unchallenged. For instance, the *Policing the Crisis* (1978) account sees the creators of knowledge, the ‘primary definers’ as serving information to the willing media, the ‘secondary definers’, the recipients, the commercially interested middle man. The argument proposed by Altheide instead views commercial interests as maintaining absolute dominance over any other powerful societal forces, in his account politicians are portrayed as the victims, stymied in any attempt at social justice by unflinching capitalist forces. Similarly, Herman and Chomsky use their ‘Propaganda Model’ to demonstrate how the everyday functioning structures of the newsroom facilitate such dominance. While these varied Marxist-influenced approaches are fiercely critical of the power wielded on to the media, they overwhelmingly view the media as weak and tend to downplay any motives beyond commercial gain. The Habermasian account sees the effects of this particular

arrangement as having produced a docile public, no longer active participants in the construction of knowledge, but lethargic consumers of cynical politics or commercial interests.

Moving away from Marxist accounts towards a more fluid understanding of today's media sphere, one which takes into account the prevailing forces of immediacy, choice, symbolic force and interactivity, in "trying to identify the multiple forces, tendencies, pressures in play in a historical moment and to identify how the balance of forces is being worked on, shaped, directed in the search for a 'solution' and a 'way forward'" (Clarke 2008: 125), it is clear that we must enhance our understanding of the media as complicit and the public as active.

*Interaction Ritual Chains* provides a model which refocuses us towards these particular elements, by placing emphasis on the reception of symbols and by providing a microsociology of the regeneration of knowledge. Herman and Chomsky suggest that "the mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace" (1988: 1). As a fundamental starting point this aligns well with the symbolically charged media sphere of today and is complemented by the *Interaction Ritual Chains* model which views symbols as integral in the 'mutual focus of attention'.

Collins's depiction of the 'Interaction Ritual Chain' suggests that co-presence, a group-defining barrier, a shared mood and a 'mutual focus of attention' combine to set in motion the natural escalation from small scale interaction to broader righteous anger. They merge to form a shared emotional and cognitive experience which is internally heightened, which feeds into the 'collective consciousness' and micro-situational moments of intersubjectivity to produce a high intensity pleasure. For Collins, this Durkheim and Goffman inspired symbolic interactionist model depicts the individual consumption of symbolically charged knowledge and the regeneration and heightening of meaning which can occur. In this model symbols are the power source which trigger our mutual focus of attention. Symbols are crucial in triggering emotional entrainment because they transcend language and they are fundamentally shared. Collins emphasizes the dependent nature of this relationship by suggesting that "symbols, in turn, differ as to what kind of group solidarity they invoke, and thus what symbolic / emotional memories or

meanings will do in affecting group interactions, and personal identities, in future situations” (2004: 81). The forum within which symbols are received can have a significant effect on the eventual solidarity produced, the key ingredient being activity over passivity. For instance, Collins describes a spectrum of group circumstances which heighten as activity and focus on a specific ‘Durkheimian sacred object’ increase. From an airport departure lounge, to a crowded bar, to an audience gathered at a show, to sports fans, there are increasingly more collective symbols shared as the focus tightens, but the anonymity of the crowd means that long term solidarity is weaker than, for instance, a conversation between a defined group of friends. As such, for the Interaction Ritual to have force, the symbols shared must “circulate and prolong group membership beyond ephemeral situations of emotional intensity” (2004: 87). In such circumstances, symbols play a key role in defining personal identities and developing established narratives; they appear to constitute the power source with which small scale interactions can grow into broader righteous anger.

This account not only emphasizes the powerful role that the media might play in processing and providing these symbols, the fuel of growing narratives, but it views the public and the individual as an integral part of the construction of narratives. It moves our assessment of the production of knowledge away from a top-down linear power source towards an account which elaborates on the ‘news as knowledge’ format, taking seriously the *Policing the Crisis* (1978) notion of rumour and folk-lore as being at the heart of our enquiry. Furthermore, the IRC model adds a detailed elaboration of the notion of pleasure felt in feeding back or in ‘representing’ as Ericson put it. It views the natural progress set in motion by an initial IRC as developing towards a shared emotional or cognitive experience through a collective rhythm, such as the build up of laughter, a conversation, a religious service or a cheering crowd. Even the more private, internal IRC is heightened, leading similarly to a high intensity feeling of pleasure, derived from the Durkheimian sense of solidarity which reinforces the validity of the process of the IRC and also directs legitimacy at sacred symbolic objects, which in Ericson’s account would include authority figures and the ephemeral notion of law and order. This account complements the Altheide depiction of the media as constructing a ‘problem frame’

in order to produce a ‘morality play’. In this scenario, the morality play would form a part of the IRC, adding texture to the drama of the active ‘representing’ process.

As such, these perspectives on the public construction of crime narratives once more emphasise the need to shift our focus from the high level power players, to a fluid and multilayered interpretation of context, to Ericson’s ‘meta-power’. While, the Habermasian view of the consumer-driven media context as having produced a lethargic consumer public doesn’t seem to fit with these modern conditions, his view of the potential for a more active public does seem to hold some relevance in today’s altered media landscape, in which the public can and do contribute to the construction of knowledge through these IRC interactions. Indeed, the IRC model moves away from an understanding of the media that is overly critical of traditional hierarchies of power. Instead, Castells’s ‘Informational Capitalism’ is a better fit in aiming to assess the flow of power and commercial interests in today’s hyper-modern media sphere, in this ‘Network Society’. Essentially, in conjunction with many of the themes explored here in classic studies of the media, the *Interaction Ritual Chains* model enhances these accounts to provide a view of the construction of knowledge today, which provides a more realistic view of the interactive individual, which understands the vast amount of choice available and the use of choice and immediacy in diluting traditional power sources and which appreciates the renewed impact of symbolic force on this terrain. This is a view of the construction of crime narratives which better understands the blurring of boundaries between the reception and generation of information.

## CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

### 1. Overview

This chapter will begin with a reflection on the purpose of the project and the relationship between this purpose and the chosen method. Connections between the theoretical framework employed and the practical methodological approach will be explained, ultimately arguing for case study research as in keeping with the conceptual aims of the thesis. The research process will then be outlined in detail, providing an explanation of the evolving methodological strategy, the decision-making process around the choice of case studies, with reference to a possible fourth case study which was eventually excluded. The particular process of data collection employed will be described, including the ways in which the materials collected were turned into analysable data using the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis approach. The choice and role of discourse analysis in this project will be explained, outlining Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as an applied method, including how it has been operationalized across different communicative genres and empirical examples and a justification as to why this had been employed as an appropriate method for undertaking research which includes a focus on social media. There will be a discussion of the ways in which other scholars have attempted to research the social media environment and analysis of their particular methodological strategies, with an argument for this approach as expanding upon this work. Finally, the process of data analysis will be described and a critical reflection on the methodological approach will be given.

## 2. Choosing to Use Case Study Research

In moving towards a coherent and sufficiently rigorous research approach by which I might examine ‘The Political Communication of Crime’, I began to identify an appropriate method by refocusing on the most crucial issues at the heart of this inquiry. Namely, that this project should aim to better understand the dystopia of criminological literature in which evidence-based criminal justice research is somehow transformed by government to become reactionary and ill-conceived law and order policymaking. Furthermore, that it should aim to propose an alternative and more plausible academic account of the politics of law and order by developing a contemporary picture of the construction of crime narratives which is attuned to political realities and an evolving media landscape; and that it should reframe our view of the ‘Political Communication of Crime’ from being perceived as a top-down manipulation of the masses by a political elite, instead viewing this as the product of the blurring of boundaries between the reception and generation of information. As such, given the expansive nature of this research problem, it was evident that any such attempt at examining these issues would require a broad gaze and one which would be usefully positioned to appreciate not just the highly visible public political communications surrounding crime, but also the more intangible communication structures present in these interactions.

Bearing in mind the practical limits of the research project, it was decided that it would be most appropriate and productive to explore this area through an examination of certain distinct instances or episodes of political communication, which might demonstrate the now fluid and multi-layered construction of crime narratives today. This approach borrows from the conjunctural analysis ethos discussed in Chapter 3, by which we begin with a specific issue, an area of inquiry, and approach the research by “trying to identify the multiple forces, tendencies, pressures in play in a historical moment and to identify how the balance of forces is being worked on, shaped, directed in the search for a ‘solution’ and a ‘way forward’” (Clarke 2008: 125). This approach seems also to fit well with the theoretical



approaches that have been adopted and developed in this thesis, in particular the Interaction Ritual Chains (2004) model provides a view of these communication processes as in constant flux, seeming to be shaped by multiple forces rather than a single all-powerful master. In essence, this is to favour a broadly interactionist view of how the political communication of crime is carried on over many of the less contextually aware critical approaches that have regularly been applied to this research problem. However, this theoretical grounding has also been chosen primarily to serve the analytic task at hand. The interactionist methodological approach is indeed one of microanalysis and the focus on micro-situational moments of intersubjectivity espoused by *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) derives from Collins's belief that detailed micro-analysis "reveals the empirical realities of social structures as patterns of repetitive micro-interaction [and] thus gives us a picture of the complex levels of abstraction involved in causal explanations" (Collins 1981: 985). Although they have diverse theoretical vocabularies, several of the most influential works exploring the role of the media in the construction of crime narratives share a similar methodological commitment. Cohen's *Folk Devils & Moral Panics* (1972) employs case study analysis at a time of extraordinary unrest and media-driven social turmoil to unveil the power of these forces. Similarly, Hall et al.'s *Policing the Crisis* (1979) takes a case study analysis of the Handsworth mugging case in Birmingham in 1973 as fertile material with which the authors can observe the microsociological detail of the case and extrapolate to illuminate our understanding of the role of the media more generally; "The Handsworth case, then, crystallises the operation of the media, so that in one moment we can observe the shape of a whole news process" (Hall et al 1978: 82). In this instance, the case study was focused on an out of the ordinary event, rather than the everyday working newsroom, in order to move beyond definitions of everyday newsworthiness towards an understanding of the ideological extremes of media coverage and as a result, to uncover how the media can position itself and employ its powerful tools in relation to the ideological construction of crime and punishment; "these ideologies are present only when they are realised, objectivated, materialized in concrete instances, actions or forms, through concrete practices" (Hall et al 1978: 83). The *Policing the*

*Crisis* (1978) approach, then, makes the argument for aiming to observe these ideological processes when they are stretched, tested and in the process unveiled.

As such, in aiming to most effectively evaluate the varied elements at play in today's political construction of crime narratives, the use of case studies seemed to offer an approach which could facilitate the assessment of the central research problems by capturing a broad enough field of analysis. Furthermore, as is evident in works such as *Policing the Crisis* (1978) and *Folk Devils & Moral Panics* (1972) the case study approach seemed to allow for analysis based on rich data ranging from 'microsituational moments of intersubjectivity' to the more visible political and media sources at play. Finally, this approach seemed to intrinsically fit with a form of ideological analysis which favours moments of crisis, of panic, of extraordinary activity, for their rich data generation as well as their ability to unveil the outer limits, the extremes of capacity and the underlying potential of media structures in particular.

During my research period, I undertook a case study on the 2010 UK General Election. This provided a fertile research field wherein I might observe the political communication of crime in action and examine in particular the role of the media and the public in this evolving landscape. While relatively unpredictable in terms of the day-to-day stories that would unfold, the date of this event was certain and as such allowed me a useful period of preparation time. I found that this allowed me to prepare to gather data and to organize how I might remain adaptive during these largely unpredictable studies. Furthermore, with the established research aims in mind, I decided to conduct two further case studies, namely on the UK Phone Hacking Scandal of July 2011 and the England riots of August 2011. This research was relatively adaptive to the unfolding of events but did not benefit from a similar preparation period. However, I was able to follow the outline I had already established in gathering data on the election case studies, with the added benefit of an opportunity in which I might capture this particular landscape at unique moments of tension, at times which might further unveil the various structures and power relationships at play. Here the case study approach proved to be a versatile method with which I could capture various forms of data without any limiting time or access restrictions, which allowed me to be truly adaptive and aim to answer the research

problem as effectively as possible with this rich, but unpredictable data source. It allowed me to gather a breadth of data and follow the events as they unravelled and this approach facilitated a gathering of data which might complement my theoretical aims, as influenced by such works as *Policing the Crisis* (1979) and *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972).

In choosing to study data gathered by case study during specific moments of focused attention, of inflated production of crime communication I essentially implied a preference not to study 'The Political Communication of Crime' by focusing on the everyday, the newsroom ethnography, the following of a bill through Parliament, the elite interview which might have gleaned some information on the everyday construction of crime narratives, the political cultures at play. Firstly, I chose this approach because as *Policing the Crisis* (1979) demonstrates clearly, the extraordinary event tells us something particular about the ideological boundaries of this sphere. It illustrates what *can* happen when boundaries are stretched, and, as we will see, it can unveil the less apparent dynamics between power-holders and the most prominent sources of crime knowledge, by indicating the terms in which controversial topics may be debated at the absolute periphery rather than in the unnoticed everyday. A large part of this project focuses on the public consumption and regeneration of knowledge, which again is at its most potent in times of outcry and at the public opportunity to express themselves through democratic elections. Indeed, a Durkheimian reading of these moments would view the symbolic force and activity around such events as carrying a distinct importance:

We have only to notice what happens... when some moral scandal has just occurred. Men stop each other on the street, they visit each other, they seek to come together to talk of the event and to wax indignant in common. From all the similar impressions which are exchanged, and the anger that is expressed, there emerges a unique emotion, more or less determinate according to the circumstances, which emanates from no specific person, but from everyone. This is *the public wrath*.  
(Durkheim 1893: *The Division of Labour*)

Similarly, Fine's view of 'scandal' sees extraordinary moments of public attention to an issue as having an instrumental role in the construction of crime narratives: "The depiction of the scandal comes to symbolize the problem for the public and thus, the

response to the scandal shapes the response to the social problem” (Fine 1997: 297). Indeed, there are vast bodies of research which seek to measure and understand public opinions on criminal justice, but there is something particularly potent about the public reaction to a panic, a scandal, an election, that the vocalization, the moment for outcry can illuminate the structures and the boundaries at play, but can also crystallize into action, can take on a new significance. This approach argues for the public opinion ‘outlier’ to take on a more central role. Therefore, if we want to understand more than the everyday; the mapping of structures, a true understanding of power and its potential here and the virile nature of crime in society, then an appreciation of extremes is essential.

Secondly, this project is focused on gaining an understanding of today’s hyper-modern communication structures and their potential; this is an account which could not view, for example, a newsroom ethnography as telling us all that we might need to know about *where* the power to construct narratives lies. It was certainly the case that in Ericson et al.’s (1987, 1989, 1991) work the newsroom ethnography greatly extended academic study of the media by moving our analysis away from the page and into the broader news creation environment. Today’s media and crime research must move beyond the newsroom again and into the more intangible world of present day media, which is why a case study approach is useful in its breadth and its flexibility, bringing us closer to an accurate encapsulation of the many forms of media we utilize today. Similarly, it would not have been desirable to have focused on the accounts of elites, given that the aim of this research was to understand how the construction of crime narratives no longer rests entirely within the grasp of certain traditionally powerful groups.

Yin’s (1994) work on the case study as a compelling social science resource suggests that case studies should be considered as the preferred strategy “when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin 1994: 1). While the case study seemed to appeal naturally within the constraints of my particular research circumstances, these criteria also provide a compelling argument for this approach in that the intangible and contemporary nature of new media and omnipresent communication structures mean that there is no unfamiliar or

intriguing group or site to access and illuminate in this case, and that the analysis must instead focus on an issue which is widely encountered every day. Furthermore, with the sprawling and expansive nature of the events studied, unravelling in real time and in unpredictable directions, again, the case study approach seemed to have the capacity to contain these events and provide a flexible framework for gathering data and for analysis. The case study is particularly suited to the study of media events because of their episodic and time-bound nature. They provide us with a way of tracking something that has a specific trajectory and life-cycle. In this sense the case-study is a particularly naturalistic method.

Platt's (1992) work on the case study aims to reframe traditional hierarchies of research strategy, moving away from a view that case studies could only be considered appropriate as an exploratory tool, suggesting that we can use the case study for exploratory, descriptive or explanatory purposes. However, Yin (1994) suggests that while it is useful to redefine the case study in this way, that we ought not to limit the potential of case study research by delineating approaches so strictly, and that instead we ought to view each approach as potentially distinct but not mutually exclusive. Yin (1994) also provides a detailed counterargument to traditional prejudices against the case study as a research strategy. He touches on the concerns commonly held that the case study can seem to lack rigour and is not well known for providing unambiguous evidence and notes that his work has endeavoured to delineate a thorough and constructive methodological process, with the aim of enhancing the legitimacy of case study findings. He suggests that this might reframe the case study as prone to a similar level of bias or uncertainty as is commonly found in other qualitative methods, rather than seeming to be somehow especially unreliable and unwieldy. These involve a thorough research design process, which can involve the integration of theoretical models as well as a period of preparation for data collection. Of common concerns frequently levelled at case study research, Yin (1994: 10) also suggests that scientific generalization from a single specific case can be treated with some scepticism. The case study approach does seem to operate without various standard research practices such as "multiple sets of experiments, which have replicated the same phenomenon under different conditions" (Yin 1994: 10). Yin's answer is that the case study is not a tool to be used in pursuit of

‘particularizing’; “the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a ‘sample’, and the investigator’s goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)” (Yin 1994: 10). Stake (1994) argues that case studies ought to be valued not only because they are intrinsically appealing in their “down-to-earth and attention-holding” (1978: 1) nature, but because analytically they provide a unique form of ‘naturalistic generalization’ which is scientifically valid in that it is “arrived at by recognizing the similarities of objects and issues in and out of context and by sensing the natural covariations of happenings. To generalize this way is to be both intuitive and empirical, and not idiotic” (Stake 1994: 4). As such, these perspectives on the analytical force of case study research help to demonstrate the value of the general approach here, while validating the project as one which is methodologically robust and which can also provide conclusions with the requisite level of weight. Finally, Yin addresses the complaint that case studies can take too long and can “result in massive, unreadable documents” (Yin 1994: 10) by suggesting that the researcher ought to explore alternative and creative ways of reporting the case study, bearing in mind the unparalleled ability to orient the case study report to an audience’s needs through structures which he defines as ‘linear-analytic, comparative, chronological, theory-building and unsequenced’ (Yin 1994: 138). Furthermore, Yin’s view of the case study is that it need not extend unnecessarily in that case-studies do not depend on data from participant-observation ethnographies which require undefined time in the ‘field. In this case, the data are more controllable. It should be acknowledged that at times, the case study can become unwieldy if it is focused on a sprawling event, and this poses challenges when this method is applied to an event of a long duration or which involves diverse participants, such as the Phone Hacking Scandal, which through the Leveson Inquiry has repercussion which still unfold daily. However, in essence Yin’s approach is correct in that the researcher has the power to rein in the study rather than being dictated by the participants or ‘the field’ and as such, the case study approach can be usefully contained within specific time constraints. Yin defines the main approaches to data collection in case study research as ‘question-asking, listening, adaptiveness and flexibility, a grasp of the issues being

studied and a lack of bias' (1994: 58). When discussing adaptiveness and flexibility, Yin argues that the investigator "must remember the original purpose of the investigation but then must be willing to change procedures or plans if unanticipated events occur" (Yin 1994: 57). This ethos became central to my research when the unexpected but significant events of the Phone Hacking Scandal and the Riots occurred in July and August 2011. Their obvious relevance to my study, their generation of various kinds of useful data during a moment of extremes and their at least superficial similarities to the scandals and panics documented in works such as *Policing the Crisis* (1979) and *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972) presented an excellent and timely opportunity to research the nexus of politics, crime and the media in new and additional directions, For this reason I proceeded to undertake these further two rather less foreseeable case studies, with two already having been completed. As such, having previously collected data and conducted a full case study for the UK General Election in 2010 I was able to reflect on which sources had produced the most useful information and equally, which data would be disproportionately time consuming in relation to their potential utility. This saved a great deal of time and allowed for me to collect data efficiently and immediately. In essence, this approach followed Yin's 'assets of a case study researcher', through listening and striving to have a grasp of the issues, which would allow the study to unfold most productively. In this research approach, the lack of bias must be self-imposed as it is not structurally mandated by the rigour of a step by step procedure as is common in many established forms of research, and yet this is a great benefit of the case study in that it allows for original data to be captured, such is the immediate nature of that which cannot be predicted.

Planning my research approach began with a consideration of the many influential works which had conducted similar explorations into the broader construction of crime, particularly those which focused on moving beyond textual content analysis. I have discussed in Chapter 3 the most prominent works such as Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), Hall et al.'s *Policing the Crisis* (1978), as well as Ericson, Baranek and Chan's *Visualizing Deviance* (1987), *Negotiating Control* (1989) and *Representing Order* (1991), which have prominently contributed to our knowledge on this area. As such, it seemed natural to move forward with research based on

some of the approaches as espoused within these works. For instance, the Handsworth mugging case study of *Policing the Crisis* (1979) looked at how the law and order ideology of the time, a prominent moment of Conservative backlash against ‘soft’ law and order, was constructed. The authors focused on the social forces at play in that particular moment in order to observe the shape of the whole process. Similarly, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972) considered the ‘creation of the Mods and Rockers’ through a research approach which specifically rejected the task of asking *why* certain groups had become involved in these subcultures (and why some hadn’t), but instead “paid attention less attention to the actors than to the audience” (Cohen 1972: 27). These works saw something crucial in the *reaction* to the particular crime events in question, something which tapped into broad questions of the role of the media and of politics and public reaction in having an instrumental effect on criminal activity as well as our understanding of crime. Crucially, both works also saw the case study as the method which could provide the fullest possible picture of the reaction. Essentially, a reaction will always be sprawling and will manifest itself both internally, through intangible *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) and publicly, through symbolically charged gestures and performances. The possibility of capturing some of these forms of *reaction*, was therefore at the heart of my inquiry.

In following Yin’s more rigorous case study research design template, five components are required, including “a study’s questions, its propositions, its units of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings” (1994: 20). The study questions have been narrowly defined already as an examination of the evolution of the construction of crime in today’s hyper-technological media sphere, with the aim of reframing accounts within a context of the blurring of reception and generation of information. Put in the form of methodological convention the central research question with which I am concerned is: “How does the political communication of crime take place within today’s evolving media sphere and what implications does this have for our understanding of crime in society?”

The propositions or hypotheses at this stage are that the conditions within which political communication occurs have evolved dramatically and in a manner which



gives cause to reassess the supposed inevitable dystopias outlined in various recent, notable criminological works (Garland 2001, Simon 2006). Furthermore, the proposition is that the impact of political narratives on criminal justice outcomes is nonetheless so powerful that the political realm requires considerable further and detailed attention, and that one way to examine the significance of energetic events that preoccupy media and public alike from time to time is by employing an interactionist and neo-Durkheimian model such as has been developed by Collins in *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004). The main subject of these propositions is the media-influenced realm of political communication, in which crime narratives are developed and delivered. As such, the units of analysis, here the 2010 UK General Election, the Phone Hacking Scandal and the English Riots of 2011, were chosen as appropriate and timely topics through which to examine the propositions. In researching such a contested realm, I felt from the outset that any approach to analysis of data here ought to be chosen with an awareness of context in mind. As such, I have opted to utilise discourse analysis as the central methodological approach and will consider its application further here.

### 3. The Research Process

As I have discussed, one of the key aims of this research was to capture the construction of crime in an evolving media landscape. As such, the research strategy was specifically designed to enable the observation of a relatively novel and expansive field of data. I have discussed the benefits of the case study method in allowing the researcher to accommodate fluidity in the piece and in enhancing control over the boundaries within which data may be collected, an element which was crucial in aiming to capture the particular data required to reflect on the present day media construction of crime. In this section I will outline exactly how I gathered analysable data, how I worked to infuse rigour into a relatively vast, dynamic field, and how this reflexive and evolving process was managed and finely tuned as the research progressed. I will begin by describing the planning processes for the three case studies in turn, focusing on lessons learned from each moving into the next.

## 3.1 Case Study 1: Planning

### 3.1.1 The start of the research process

The 2010 UK General Election campaign period began officially on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010 when Parliament was dissolved. This moment signified a natural starting point for my research and previous media speculation surrounding this event had provided some sense that the campaign would begin around this date, which allowed time to first decide to carry out research in this way and then to conduct initial project planning. Due to the particular focus on political communication in this project, I had resolved from the outset to capture this kind of crime-related speech and as such a general election had always seemed to provide a timely, rich opportunity to gather data. Therefore, both the focus and the specified time period for this initial case study were relatively well-defined, allowing a good amount of time to put in place a conceptual framework, to familiarize myself with the method and to clearly specify data collection approaches.

### 3.1.2 Data-gathering preparations

I began by aiming to appreciate the case study as an applied method and sought guidance from established sources on preparing to conduct this form of research. Punch (1998) emphasizes that in preparation for this process, the researcher should firstly bear in mind that “the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible” (1998: 150). This approach necessitates a broad gaze, beyond the scope of other forms of qualitative research. Indeed, it is stressed that the researcher must aim “to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and its context” (Punch 1998: 150), thus, adopting a ‘holistic’ approach, in which the researcher aims to view the elements of the case in confluence with the case as a whole. Similarly, Goode and Hatt (1952) underlined the importance of the case study as a strategy designed to appreciate a breadth of

material, noting that “the case study then is not a specific technique; it is a way of organizing social data so as to preserve the unitary character of the social object being studied” (Goode and Hatt 1952: 331). Preparation, then, must essentially begin by putting in place a framework by which we capture a broad, detailed picture of the case at hand.

The first case study undertaken here was of the 2010 UK General Election campaign as a whole, with specific priorities to capture any notable crime-related events and failing this, to map the ways in which today’s media landscape may process or reframe these moments. Previous UK General Elections had involved certain political discussion of ‘law and order’, policing and criminal justice, and the ‘crime problem’, but it was interesting to explore whether the actors involved in constructing the campaigns continued to share criminologists’ fascination with such topics or whether these had now been displaced by other concerns such as ‘immigration’ and management of the economy. These elements provided a focus within the broad case study landscape which would facilitate concentrated data collection and would complement the already established conceptual aims of the project, thus embracing Stake’s (1988) classic definition of the case study as “a study of a bounded system, emphasizing the unity and wholeness of that system, but confining the attention to those aspects that are relevant to the research problem at the time” (Stake 1988: 258). The unpredictability of future events in a chaotic, politicized moment meant that I could not guarantee large-scale discussion surrounding crime and indeed this was largely the outcome of this election. As a result and in concurrence with a desire to conduct a case study which would embrace the holistic aims of the method, I resolved initially to adopt a data collection approach that could capture the media in its functioning form at this time of intense coverage and so put in place a plan to cover a broad range of popular news sources. In Yin’s (1994) classic manual on case study research, he directs that in preparation for a case study, a key instruction to embrace is that “once in the field, each case study fieldworker is an independent investigator and cannot rely on a rigid formula to guide his or her behavior” (1994: 59). Certainly this ethos allowed me to adopt an initially quite broad approach, embracing the holistic intent of the method and the frequently cited directive to modify while in the field. This would form the basis of

my initial case study approach, along with an appreciation of established case study design and field procedures.

Research design in case studies forms the basis of “an action plan for getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and there is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions” (Yin 1994: 19). Thus, with established aims deriving from my conceptual work, the research design consisted of a ‘blueprint’, as typically employed in case study research (Yin 1994: 20). Crucially, while the research eventually evolved to include multiple cases, planning at this stage began with a blueprint formed under ‘single-case design’ (1994: 38), for the simple reason that I had not yet anticipated that further case studies would be a certainty in this research. Still, ‘single-case design’ approaches were absolutely viable in that these distinct case studies constituted three separate instances of the ‘revelatory case’, rather than ‘multiple-case’ research, i.e., that each of the cases constituted “a situation previously inaccessible to scientific observation... therefore worth conducting because the descriptive information alone will be revelatory” (1994: 41), as opposed to multiple cases planned and replicated by the researcher, analogous to replication employed in multiple experiments. This kind of case study work is regularly employed in clinical psychology, where the case demonstrates a rare or unique occurrence (Yin 1970, 1978).

As such, my single-case research design evolved on the basis of these works. As a leading researcher in the area of case studies, Yin’s (2011) more recent work has aimed to clarify the distinct difference between case study research design and other empirical research. He argues that research design for the case study has long been mis-categorized as a ‘subset’ of experimental research design, that which can follow a general, predetermined outline and which can draw from similar works (2011: 25). Most crucially, single-case research design allows that the blueprint for data collection be focused on capturing this revelatory material, that is, data which is unpredictable but valuable.

### 3.1.3 Forming a malleable research plan; what to prioritise in data collection?

One of the most crucial elements of planning this case study, in creating my specific ‘blueprint’, was to choose particular media sources to follow and to put a systematic structure in place by which I might navigate this hyperactive media landscape. Using the case study approach, and deploying discourse analysis as an analytical framework, allowed me to move beyond text-based media sources and to prioritise a range of news media, thus reflecting the diversity of the current field. Marshall and Rossman (1989) define the potential sources of evidence in case study research as vast and varied; documentation, observations, archival records, films, photographs, videotapes, psychological testing, proxemics, kinesics, ‘street’ ethnography, life histories, interviews to name a few. Yin stresses that in the case study approach, “most of the better case studies rely on a wide variety of sources” (1994: 91). This helps to infuse ‘triangulation’ into the project and “allows the investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal and behavioral issues” (1994: 90). Perhaps most compelling is the potential for multiple sources to triangulate and highlight the “development of *converging lines of inquiry*... following a corroboratory mode” (1994: 90).

As such, I put together a list of media sources on multiple platforms to consider, with the intention that these could be referred to in cases of intense interest, rather than collected fastidiously and with exact similarity every day. This was a key decision of the research process and one which complemented the case study data collection directives; that is, as opposed to the content analysis approach often utilised in the study of newspaper output, this project would consider the media beyond the traditional print press and as such required a more flexible approach to data collection. This study would therefore actively move away from the method employed in content analysis, of collecting every piece of data every day over a limited time period and a limited number of sources. Instead, the particular aims of this project would require that as a researcher I was able to capture crime moments, their inception, their unfolding and the particular media sources which would play a role in shaping them and delivering them to the public. Furthermore, it was crucial

that in accordance with previous discussion, that I should be able to follow the movement of public debate beyond traditional, established media outlets, so that I might observe how crime ideas are further processed and reframed in the public realm today. Therefore, I aimed for as much potential triangulation as possible and collected data on a deliberately broad range of key media outlets which operated during election times and created a framework of potential sources, organizing them as follows:

#### Print Press

- The Guardian
- The Observer
- The Times
- The Telegraph
- The Financial Times
- The Independent
- The Sun
- The Daily Mail
- The Daily Mirror
- The Metro
- News of the World

#### Television News and News Programming

- BBC News bulletins
- ITV News
- Channel 4 News
- Channel 5 News
- BBC News 24
- Sky News
- Newsnight

- Newsnight Scotland
- Question Time
- This Week
- The Daily Politics

#### Radio

- The Today Programme
- Jeremy Vine

#### New Media Outlets and Social Media

- BBC News online
- The Guardian website
- YouTube
- The Huffington Post
- Facebook
- Twitter

#### Other Election Materials

- Party Political Broadcasts
- Manifestoes
- TV channels broadcasting the Leaders' Debates
- Flyers
- Posters

With this large number of extremely active, often overlapping sources, representing the now expansive media landscape currently in play during elections, I was required to prioritise how exactly I collected data in order to capture a systematic picture of activity and to make the project practically workable. I began by implementing a

temporal framework into my data collection ‘blueprint’ by which I may follow the unfolding of events. This helped provide a number of ‘check-in points’ that would keep me in touch with active news moments.

For instance, on a typical day without a particularly notable event (as defined by my conceptual discussion) I would check the following sources at these times:

#### MORNING

6.00 – 9.00am and iPlayer: The Today Programme

Online news: BBC, The Guardian, Twitter

Rolling 24 hour news: BBC, Sky TV

#### AFTERNOON

12.00 Jeremy Vine Radio 2

1.00 BBC News, ITV News Lunchtime Bulletins

Online news

#### EVENING

6.00 BBC News Bulletin

7.00 Channel 4 News

Online news

This provided a good range of easily available news coverage and acted as a basic framework around which I might direct my data collection. This approach was self-designed, but was based on valid case study research practices; of creating an approach which would allow for broad capture, but which could be usefully employed in pursuit of detail.



### 3.1.4 How the data was collected

In conducting a case study, the approach to gathering materials involves creating a comprehensive database with the key aim of maintaining a chain of evidence (Yin 1994: 94 – 99). The database will ordinarily be organized around detailed case study notes, which are traditionally hand-written. Both Yin and Patton (1980: 303) note that case study notes need not be comprehensive, due to the nature of collecting data in this manner;

they may be assembled in the form of a diary, on index cards, or in some less organized fashion... any classificatory system will do... the identification of the notes as part of the case study database does not mean, however, that the investigator needs to spend excessive amounts of time in... making extensive editorial changes to make the notes presentable... any such editing effort should be directed at the case study report itself, not at the notes (Yin 1994: 96)

Indeed, the breadth of data involved in a case study may reasonably result in a large number of case study notes. Comparable with an ethnographer's notes in a field notebook or the coding of interview transcripts, the key purpose of these notes is for the researcher to note and begin to make sense of the data, as well as to actively maintain a chain of evidence while in the field. Indeed, practical techniques of coping with large volumes of data are paramount in effectively conducting a sound case study with multiple streams of researchable information.

Therefore, while collecting data, I would organize potential chains of evidence by taking notes on the progress of the campaign, any particular crime coverage and any noteworthy moments which seemed to reveal the power structures at play in the media. On some days nothing of note happened, but unlike a content analysis where the data from these days would be documented and analysed, the case study approach allowed me to use these days as signifiers for bigger events, in that I could follow building stories and prepare to gather detailed data. For instance, I used this approach to actively prepare to document in detail high profile events such as the three planned Leaders' Debates and in these instances, was able to collect much more detailed data that I would later apply to Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, due to

the richly textual and subtextual elements available here. Using this approach I was able to follow these events in detail:

[List taken from field notes]

6<sup>th</sup> April: dissolution of Parliament and campaign begins

8<sup>th</sup> April: Ashes to Ashes poster

9<sup>th</sup> April: MP Twitter scandal

12<sup>th</sup> April: Labour Party manifesto

13<sup>th</sup> April: Conservative and Lib Dem manifesto

15<sup>th</sup> April: First Leader's debate

16<sup>th</sup> April: Cleggmania

20<sup>th</sup> April: Daily Politics: Crime Debate

21<sup>st</sup> April: Nick Clegg's Fault hashtag

22<sup>nd</sup> April: 2<sup>nd</sup> debate

28<sup>th</sup> April: Gillian Duffy incident

29<sup>th</sup> April: Third leader's debate

30<sup>th</sup> April: Tony Blair joins campaign trail

1<sup>st</sup> May: The Guardian supports Lib Dems

2<sup>nd</sup> May: Sunday Telegraph supports Conservatives

5<sup>th</sup> May: 24 hour campaigning schedule

6<sup>th</sup> May: Election

7<sup>th</sup> May: Hung Parliament

8<sup>th</sup> May: Sack Kay Burley hashtag

12<sup>th</sup> May: coalition agreement, David Cameron and Nick Clegg speech

On these high profile days, in which moments of intense action were evident, I would enhance my schedule as follows:

#### MORNING

Purchase of a range of print press newspapers

Today Programme

Online news

24 hour news

The Daily Politics

#### AFTERNOON

The Jeremy Vine Programme Radio 2 12.00

Lunchtime Bulletins

Online news

#### EVENING

6 o'clock and 7 o'clock news

Newsnight

Question Time (Thursdays only)

I kept annotated diaries of activity and having achieved a firm grasp of the rhythm of these news cycles, I was able to easily mobilize around emerging data. I gathered other materials according to Yin's categories of case study evidence; notes, documents, such as print news, flyers and manifestos and tabular materials such as surveys and quantitative data released during the election. I also collected pictures of posters and even took photos of polling booths on election day, which ultimately revealed very little, but were conducted with the aim of reaching as broadly as possible to capture through as many data sources as possible, the breadth of activity in this election. See below, for instance, a range of print newspapers from Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May, ranging across broadsheet, tabloid and Scotland-specific press outlets.



### 3.1.5 Data Collection for Discourse Analysis

Within the case study research, I resolved to focus on high profile moments of political speech and consider them through the lens of discourse analysis, in order to draw out some detailed analysis of ‘political communication’. I have discussed the nature of discourse analysis, the particular mode adopted and its benefits below, but generally, when conducting this initial case study, it became clear that certain moments of intense public spectacle would provide ample opportunity to consider the detail and effects of moments of political communication of crime. In this case study I took detailed notes and made transcripts of the Leaders’ Debates and a Daily Politics ‘crime debate’. Notes were made in a notepad, transcription was done on Microsoft Word. These both provided heated, high profile moments of communication of crime issues in the public gaze and produced a rich body of data for analysis. I was able to prepare to collect this data because of the highly publicized

scheduling of these events and was able to make transcripts through repeated viewings of recordings available via the iPlayer and itvplayer, which gave me a limited period of 1 month to do so.

Data collection for discourse analysis first requires a sense of the purpose of this approach, that is, a “view of language [that] looks above its words, sentences and linguistic features and focuses attention on the way language is used, what it is used for, and the social context in which it is used” (Punch 1998: 226). Therefore, in transcribing data for discourse analysis, the researcher must make notes on the words used and the contexts of their use in as much detail as possible, in order to facilitate the most illuminating and informative analysis feasible. Gee et al. (1992) note that it is impossible to conduct pure discourse analysis without adopting a particular approach;

Discourse analysis is not a unified body of theory, method and practice. Rather, it is conducted within various disciplines, with different research traditions, and with no overarching unifying theory common to all types, being heterogeneous. (Gee et al. 1992, in Punch 1998: 226)

One key approach to discourse analysis, as developed by Foucault and adopted here, identifies three features;

First, discourse is social, which indicates that words and their meanings depend on where they are used, by whom and to whom. Consequently their meaning can vary according to social and institutional settings and there is, therefore, no such thing as a universal discourse.

Second, there can be different discourses which may be in conflict with one another. Third, as well as being in conflict, discourses may be viewed as being arranged in hierarchy.

(Jupp 1996: 305)

I will discuss the adoption of Foucauldian discourse analysis in some detail below, however, for the purposes of data collection, it should be noted that such an approach

determines that the researcher must take into consideration the ‘social and institutional setting’, the power dynamics at play, conflicts, hierarchies. In many ways, this analytical framework provided a rich lens through which to observe this political landscape, one which was rich in complex, subtextual power dynamics. Therefore, the data collection process aimed to capture these element. Transcripts were made with detailed notations on who the participants were, their particular political status, their relationship with one another and their particular political history. Transcripts of debates also included audience responses, visible emotions, interjections by the moderator and as far as possible, subtextual elements such as body language, stuttering, pausing.

### **3.1.6 Case Study 1: reflecting on the research process**

Following data collection on the 2010 election, I organized my findings for analysis and reflected on the process, particularly as I began to consider conducting a further case study on a related subject. I certainly emerged with a broad range of data providing a layered picture of the election campaign, through a variety of sources. My malleable case study ‘blueprint’ had created a routine by which I might be able to stay abreast of potentially crucial events in a manageable way. This allowed me to gather more detailed data on high profile issues and identify moments to hone in on political communication such as the Leaders’ debates and crime debates. I was able, through this process, to create a body of data which could provide case study findings as well as more detailed discourse analysis, which ultimately fulfilled my conceptual aims, to better appreciate the evolving political landscape within which crime communication takes place.

Moving into another case study, I resolved to retain this approach with some modifications. From carrying out this first case study, I had identified news sources which were the most useful in highlighting emerging news moments and was able to elevate those in my next ‘blueprint’ and move away from such a rigidly complete picture, particularly in the act of following the emergence of news stories. An appreciation of methodological texts in the area was certainly enhanced by my experience with this first case study, ultimately reinforcing the idea that this

approach to research must not be viewed in the same way as content analysis, indeed it is stymied when an overly rigorous approach is taken. The key points of focus in a case study should be facilitating a coverage of important events, allowing them to naturally rise to prominence in the news cycle and observing this at a fast-pace. I appreciated in the aftermath of the election that an important part of case study research is the assessment and where necessary the rejection of data. As such, moving into the next case study I aimed to streamline this approach, with greater efficiency in mind.

## **3.2 Case Study 2: Planning**

### **3.2.1 The start of the research process**

On the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011, the Guardian newspaper published details of the hacking of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler's phone (O'Carroll, 24 June 2014 'Phone-hacking scandal: timeline', The Guardian), an event which prompted enormous public outrage and widespread media coverage. In the week that followed, a number of high profile events, including the closing of News of the World and the announcement of a public inquiry by the Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee seemed to suggest that this period would signify an important moment in the evolution of the modern media landscape. Almost as soon as these events erupted, it seemed clear that the joint investigation by the Guardian and the New York Times and the public excavation of fact to follow, would unearth unprecedented data on the relationship between Britain's high ranking politicians, the police and powerful members of the UK media. From the outset, these events seemed to present an opportunity to gather a wide variety of data, as in my previous case study, and to tell us something unique about the way that crime narratives are regularly constructed. The time difference between the end of the election and the beginning of these events, May 2010 to July 2011, was over a year and as such, I had enough time to organize my findings, conduct rigorous data analysis and to reflect on the opportunities afforded by this approach. One of the significant benefits of having conducted a case study already

was that I was well prepared to begin gathering data in the phone hacking scandal as soon as I identified its potential.

### 3.2.2 Data-gathering preparations

In beginning to gather data on these quickly unfolding events, I put in place a data collection blueprint very similar to that which had been employed in the 2010 election, this time honing the structure so as to prioritise an ability to quickly follow unfolding stories. I took notes on unfolding events as before and followed a now-streamlined daily news blueprint:

#### MORNING

6.00 – 9.00am and iPlayer: The Today Programme

Online news: BBC, The Guardian, Twitter

#### AFTERNOON

1.00 BBC News, ITV News Lunchtime Bulletins

Online news

#### EVENING

6.00 BBC News Bulletin

7.00 Channel 4 News

Online news

Case Study-appropriate data was widely released from a number of sources throughout these events, including the New York Times and Guardian special investigation into phone hacking, a coordinated release of documents on access of the press to politicians from the government in a bid to regain a sense of trust and transparency and finally, the public hearings conducted a part of the Culture, Media & Sport Committee, which were televised live, were covered widely in the press and were released as transcripts through the government website.



### 3.2.3 Data Collection for Discourse Analysis

The main focus for discourse analysis in this case study was the transcripts on the Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee hearings which took place in central London, with Rupert and James Murdoch, as well as the separate hearing hosted later that day with Rebekah Brooks. Having honed my approach from conducting discourse analysis on the 2010 Leaders' Debates, I followed these events using as efficient an approach as possible. I watched each of the hearings live, taking notes on first viewing of instances of interest, points which fed directly into my conceptual discussion on the construction of crime and anything which more generally referenced the inner workings of the media world. While watching the events unfold live on BBC News 24, I followed the discussion of social media, staying aware of prominent commentators and hashtags. In the following days, after organizing my notes, I was able to go back through the data, by way of YouTube videos which had captured the entirety of the events for posterity, along with a transcript of each committee as provided by the government website. The notes I had taken on first instance allowed me to feel confident about the veracity of this second-hand transcription. As such, this provided a useful tool, by which I was able to go through the words spoken, the body language demonstrated, the nonverbal power relations on display and adequately apply this data to discourse analysis.

### 3.2.4 Case Study 2: reflecting on the research process

Conducting this case study and gathering further data for discourse analysis was certainly made much easier by being able to adopt an already-tested framework and having reflected on good practice. I was able to streamline my process for gathering data, was able to quickly mobilise around unfolding events. Possibly the biggest difference in this case study was that, having conducted data analysis of the 2010 election, I felt confident in gathering fewer tangible materials and instead prioritizing as clear a picture as possible of the news process. Indeed, all of the data in this particular case study emerged from news presented online or through television, while reflecting on the demise of the print press, the print press outlets themselves

presented quite biased offerings from newspapers owned by NewsCorp in particular. I found that while the 2010 process of gathering physical election materials and print editions of newspapers was certainly in the spirit of the case study approach, to cast a broad net, that ultimately, data which had provided more material on the news process was more beneficial in analysis. As such, when I gathered data under a time pressure in this case study, I largely utilised the wealth of materials available to me online. Without election materials, this limited the kind of physical data I could collect. Still, having conducted analysis already, I felt confident that the range of materials I sought to gather during the phone hacking scandal had provided me with a similar level of rigour and a broad picture of the events captured within the case study period.

### **3.3 Case Study 3: Planning**

#### **3.3.1 The start of the research process**

Only a month after the phone hacking scandal, on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2011, the shooting of Mark Duggan by a police officer sparked a week of civil unrest. I have covered the chronology of these events in a great deal of detail in the chapter to follow, however, at this stage, it should be noted that this was the point at which I began gathering data. The beginning of widespread rioting across London and certain cities in England provoked an immediate sense that something noteworthy in the construction of crime was occurring and that this was an event which could easily form a third case study. Indeed, the subsequent media coverage seemed to frame these events as a classic-type moral panic and was accompanied with several high profile political statements on crime, which I recognized, following my previous case studies, as moments which could form an important, complementary part of my data. This was certainly a series of events which began and escalated quickly, but having previously conducted two case studies, having recently honed the case study blueprint I had created to capture the evolution of news events, I felt capable of quickly mobilizing around data collection again. In many ways this was a notable strength of the case study approach. This is a method which does not require lengthy, formal planning

processes and the priority of the researcher is to follow unfolding news stories, to put together an accurate, nuanced, detailed account of events from within the case study period. This meant that in the case of the phone hacking scandal and the riots, I was fortunate to be able to research revelatory, unique events which could not have been otherwise captured.

### 3.3.2 Data-gathering preparations

This data collection period followed the same framework as the phone hacking scandal, now mobilized in pursuit of covering unfolding crime events and political reaction, rather than media-driven news revelations occurring on a more controlled news cycle to an extent. This meant that the unfolding of events was slightly more unpredictable, but with a firm, effective blueprint in place, I was able to capture the detail required. I continued to make case study notes, following the events through the news media framework I had honed in the previous case study:

#### MORNING

6.00 – 9.00am and iPlayer: The Today Programme

Online news: BBC, The Guardian, Twitter

#### AFTERNOON

1.00 BBC News, ITV News Lunchtime Bulletins

Online news

#### EVENING

6.00 BBC News Bulletin

7.00 Channel 4 News

Discussions of the riots were particularly notable on late night platforms such as Newsnight, with historian David Starkey's comments on the edition of Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2011 providing a particular focal point for discussion, his notorious assertion that 'the whites have become black' seemed to capture headlines and drive the

debate towards generational and race issues. Another notable news source in these events was the Guardian newspaper, in which Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke utilised the ‘Comment is Free’ section to make bold statements about ‘feral rioters’ (Clarke 5<sup>th</sup> Sept 2011 ‘Punish the feral rioters, but address our social deficit too’ *The Guardian*).

As such, the framework I had established allowed me to home in on crucial news sources which could not have been anticipated in a more formal print only content analysis. I was able to utilise the flexibility of the method to pick up the case study immediately, to note down moments of importance regarding the construction of crime and the shifting media landscape. Finally, as in the previous examples, I was able to direct focus towards the outlets which were part of the unravelling of the crime narratives.

### 3.3.3 Note: Social Media

Given the focus on an evolving media landscape in this research, forms of social media were indeed included in the collection of data where possible. These were limited to information relayed on Facebook, Twitter and comments sections of online news outlets and did not extend to lesser used forums such as Instagram or Tumblr. This distinction was made in the same manner which had dictated the inclusion of particular print news outlets; if the social media outlet played a material role in the evolution of the crime issue then it was included as a part of the research. It would have been counter-intuitive to define at the outset that I would focus on certain social media outlets above others and stick overly rigidly to these depending on usage or a quantifiable measure of reach. As I had noted throughout my previous case studies, the employment of certain forms of social media had varied and had become an essential part of the crime narrative according to the kind of messaging that would take place in each; with Twitter’s format encouraging the instant relaying of information as it happened and connecting with large audiences and Facebook allowing longer form discussions to closed peer-to-peer groups. Beyond these formats, where other crucial forms of social media played an active part in the construction of crime, such as BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) messages, these were

included where possible. The use of BBM was integral to the study of the riots and if it had been excluded at the outset this would have provided a significant limitation to the study. As we will see in the Riots chapter, the BBM function of sending mass messages to large, but defined groups had facilitated fast-moving gatherings around parts of London. Its focussed use in certain demographics enabled these messages to spread widely among young men in the area and became an integral part of the ‘communication of crime’ in this study.

Regarding collection of data, in the period in which this research took place, up to August 2011, very few resources for the widespread gathering or collating of social media messages were available or had even been conceived of. Indeed, as I have noted in the chapter on the Riots, these events actually prompted moves towards aiming to develop an applicable method which could take on such a project. With the scope of this project already broad by necessity, it was impossible for me to also develop a new method in this time, by which I might single-handedly and rigorously capture a totality of public expression around given crime moments. Indeed, as the large team involved in ‘Reading the Riots’ found, this required a significant amount of innovation by a large team of quantitative researchers. I proceeded, then, by capturing social media data as I had done with all of the data in my case study research, by noting which elements were crucial in the development of crime narratives, by following a framework of key contributors, including:

@number10gov  
@stephencanning  
@tom\_watson  
@guidofawkes  
@JonathanHaynes  
@sunny\_hundal  
@johnrentoul  
@markpack  
@cambellclaret  
@mayoroflondon  
@psbook  
@drevanharris  
@Frasernels  
@patrickwintour  
@BBCNewsnight

Largely, however, social media output was thoroughly integrated into news coverage of items, which allowed me to gain a broad sense of the field beyond these popular political Twitter accounts. This demonstrated what an integral part of the coverage of the riots social media had played. While I did not take on the quite different project of capturing social media output in its entirety, I did, by necessity and following the tenets of successful case study research, integrate social media output into my data collection in the same way as I had done with newspaper output.

On reflection, I believe that this approach not only complemented the established method I had embarked upon in this project, but that a case study analysis of social media can provide a perspective which is inherently useful. As we have seen since the riots, there have been several attempts to harness messages on social media forums such as Twitter, in order to quantify a picture of public expression. Certainly, this complex process may well provide a picture of the entirety of public output around an issue, but in many ways fails to capture the distinctive role of social media in public and political discourse. Taking Twitter as an example, to quantify the number of occasions in which a hashtag is employed or in which a single person comments on an issue tells us very little about impact, because frequency of commenting is less important on Twitter than *who* sees these comments, how far they are followed, viewed, retweeted and quoted in established news outlets. Similarly, in reporting the number of instances of mentions on Facebook, ignores the impact that comes with being delivered a message from a trusted, closed social group.

### 3.3.4 Data Collection for Discourse Analysis

Parker (1999) suggests that Foucauldian Discourse Analysis can be carried out “wherever there is meaning” (1999: 1), while Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) argue more specifically that the key factors determining choice of material in data collection for this kind of discourse analysis are:

The research question, the researcher's knowledge as to the relevant material within the social domain or institution of interest, and whether, and how, one can gain access to it (2002: 78)

Parker's intent was to communicate that this form does not necessarily require that we analyse words, that we should consider "all tissues of meaning as texts" (Parker 1992: 7). Willig's key text on Foucauldian Discourse Analysis states simply that "the selection of suitable texts for analysis is informed by the research question" (Willig 2008: 114) Still, for the purposes of data collection, the guiding factor should be to home in on something which is both infused with some textual or subtextual discourse and which is tangibly analysable.

The following is a list of data that was collected and analysed in the case of the riots:

- Theresa May speech 'London Rioters will be brought to justice', 8<sup>th</sup> August 2011
- David Cameron speech, 'Criminality Pure and Simple', 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011
- Boris Johnson speech, Clapham Junction, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011
- Ed Miliband statement, House of Commons, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2011 and statement 12<sup>th</sup> August 2011
- David Cameron statement, House of Commons, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2011
- Ken Clarke, 'Punish the feral rioters', The Guardian, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2011).

In this case study and in all previous case studies, these materials were turned into analysable data in that I acquired a full transcript of each specific speech or debate and ensured that I had witnessed the event myself as they unfolded or in full online or through a TV source. As mentioned earlier, with a rigorous and fast-moving media source framework in place, I was often able to witness crucial events in real time and take notes on the moments as they unfolded. As such for each part of discourse analysis I had both a full transcript and personal notes. To turn these into analysable data required both a full account of the words spoken and the notes I had

taken. I will provide an example of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis in action in section 5. However, it should be noted that the preparation process included capturing the event in full using a transcript and notes, which made the data analysable. Discourse Analysis requires both an account of the words spoken and the subtext, which can, as I will detail, be considered somewhat subjective. However, for the purposes of analysis, the transcript and notes prepared me to conduct this process.

### **3.4 The Evolution of a Methodological Strategy**

As I have described, the methodological strategy employed here was one which was grounded in quite standard approaches to case study research and discourse analysis and which naturally evolved over the course of the research. As mentioned, the case study on the 2010 UK General Election served as the starting point, allowing me to plan a methodological approach, to familiarise myself with data collection for case study research and discourse analysis. The strategy at the outset had been to embrace the breadth and flexibility of the case study method and as we will see, this produced data which gave not only a sense of the events, but allowed me to hone in on crucial moments of crime communication. The key developments in the methodological strategy centred around honing the approach to allow for greater depth of analysis in crucial moments. My previous discussions of the case study method have highlighted the importance that established works in this area place on the researcher as malleable and as constantly reviewing the frameworks in place to enable greater efficiency. As such, I have detailed the ways in which I began to focus on particular media outlets as the research progressed. I also embraced the upsurge in social media as a source and aimed to include key examples wherever possible, again taking advantage of the case study method to focus on important emerging data rather than previously rigidly defined sources. As I have described, there was at all times a methodological strategy in place which did adhere to an established framework, one which encouraged flexibility and a reflexive approach.



### 3.5 The Choice of Case Studies

The 2010 election case study was a vital first step in this project. From a practical perspective, it was the only case study that I could plan in advance and so it acted as a pilot, allowing me to set out a framework for capturing crime events in a rapidly evolving, vast media landscape. It allowed me to hone in on the key aims to actively pursue in conducting this research; of focusing on crime and its communication, as well as aiming to observe the media landscape at its extremes. These were dual, contingent aims which would allow me to draw broader conclusions about the potential future of the construction of crime narratives and to reflect on the structures within which this activity regularly occurs. It also gave me the chance to run the research, reflect on data collection approaches, to consider the parameters of the case study method and to ensure that I gathered analysable data for discourse analysis within the unfolding events. This case study provided focus, confirmed my aims and prepared me practically to be able to capture further data should the occasion occur within a researchable time frame.

Conceptually, the 2010 election fit with my established challenges to the penal populism and Neoliberal politics discussions in criminological literature. Having challenged tendencies in this work towards dystopianism, I was given the opportunity here to actively consider whether the certainty of the ‘law and order merry go round’ was assured or whether, as I had suggested, the evolving media landscape might allow a more democratic voice to challenge this inevitability. The focus therefore was ‘crime’, or law and order politics, as covered in the election, but also the conditions of crime construction. As such electoral politics provided a natural moment of interest, a rich field within which I might map this realm and capture functioning media structures beyond explicit references to crime. Indeed, as the election campaign evolved and it became clear that crime would not feature as a prominent theme, the consideration of broader forces became even more crucial. This solidified for me the sense that in researching further events I should not limit my gaze to ‘crime’ only, but should wholeheartedly map the environment within

which crime construction occurs, with the hope that this might explain omissions or provide detail behind the shift away from the inevitability of established populist trends.

Following from this case study, I felt certain moving forward that to map the media landscape in detail would constitute an important part of my research and would benefit my conceptual discussion more than a stubbornly narrow focus on ‘crimes’, the commission of criminal acts only. This approach reflected my initial desire to move beyond immovable, predetermined research, believing that honing in on events occurring within a narrow definition of ‘crime’ would provide the wrong focus; on events rather than processes. As such, when the phone hacking scandal occurred, I quickly realised that this period seemed to provide an unparalleled unveiling of the power structures and inner workings at the heart of UK media. It seemed clear to me that this public inquiry along with the committees and news coverage surrounding these events would provide data which would gradually reveal unique information about the realm within which crime is constructed. I began to see data emerge around the links between powerful media elites and high ranking criminal justice policy decision-makers. This case study presented parallels with the 2010 UK General Election in that not only did it cover rich ‘crime’ issues in the political realm, touching on classic criminological themes like Christie’s ‘Ideal Victim’ (1986), but that it seemed also to reveal something unique about the realm within which crime is constructed. The phone hacking scandal was certainly a scandal about a crime, but essentially the richest data was derived from the information concerning the media. This case study provided unique, vivid, detailed new data on the particular power structures at play in the upper echelons of media power in the UK. My desire to capture this data was legitimized by a rich body of evidence and original findings on the particular power of elements of the UK press, their unfettered access to Justice Ministers and 10 Downing Street, their perceived desire to wield this power in the construction of a victim-oriented, populist crime narrative and their ability to directly influence criminal justice policy. This case study was essential in mapping influence in crucial criminal justice policy

movements and complemented my conceptual aim of providing additional detail to the 'second-order consensus' on crime in politics.

The three case studies in this research project evolved naturally, but in many ways they span a fortunate breadth of fieldwork. In focusing on an election, a scandal and as I will discuss, a moral panic, I have aimed to capture events which demonstrate not only the construction of crime in action, but indeed the very element of action. In keeping with the methodological approach of *Policing the Crisis* (1979) I have aimed to observe society's structures at its extremes, an approach which facilitates the ability to see potential, to observe a web of influence flexing its muscles and working at maximum capacity. This allows us to infer a great deal, to map out the whole realm and to visualize future potential.

The rich data provided by the phone hacking scandal and the election had suggested that this approach was one which was viable and fruitful and having conducted two full case studies, with detailed discourse analysis on key political speeches within, I felt capable and eager to begin collecting data on the Riots of August 2011 almost as soon as they began. This sprawling series of events took place in quick succession, consisting of bursts of rioting, panicked media coverage and iconic political speeches. The practice of conducting data collection in this way had been firmly established so I was able to move as quickly as the events unfolded and to prioritize coverage effectively. When the riots began I had a sense from my data analysis of previous case studies that again, my key conceptual aims would be served here; to observe the construction of 'crime' and to map the landscape within which this occurs. The riots indeed provided essential data demonstrating a form of moral panic in full force in the now updated, hyperactive media landscape.

The three case studies complemented each other in a number of ways. We saw crime constructed in the fertile political realm of an election, constructed with purpose, we saw crime as a vehicle for scandal, as a revelatory tool and we saw a classic crime outburst, misunderstood, translated, reclaimed, reconstructed, we saw it travel through every corner of the now sprawling media landscape. Furthermore, with these

three case studies we saw that landscape functioning in its fullest forms, in the now hyperactive 24 hour political news cycle, erupting from the inside from a scandal that exposed its guts and grappling with crime in a familiar but intensely modernized process. Through these three case studies we saw crime as it exists today, both as a criminal act and as an entirely separate construct. Crucially, in moving forward with analysis, a focus not just on crime but on media structures meant that we saw *how* this construction happened. I carefully chose to observe here an election, a scandal and a moral panic and found them essential and complementary.

### 3.6 A Fourth Case Study

A fourth case study was undertaken as part of this research, covering the period of the Scottish Parliamentary election campaign of April and May 2011. Given the relative advantage of both elections occurring during the research period, I had initially felt that to capture each using case study research would provide an opportunity to provide depth and to compare these periods. Also, having no prior indication that the research period would include such unique and momentous incidents like the Phone Hacking Scandal and the Riots, I felt that the best possible approach that I could plan would be to conduct detailed case study analysis of both of these elections. As such, I gathered data in a very similar manner to the UK General Election, focusing on a similar pattern of media sources and using the same approach of notation, following media and crime events. As I began to gather data on the Scottish Parliamentary election, I became aware that the Scottish media landscape at that time was far less developed and instantaneous than that of the London-based media driving the UK General Election coverage.

In April/ May 2011 there was a much smaller base of media outlets who were specifically interested in this election; the 24 hour news channels did not cover the election in constant detail as they had done in the UK election, the social media landscape was not so prominently known for political commentary, or indeed wasn't active in the Scottish context. While I did investigate the social media presence at that time, in 2011 largely this was being utilised for official statements by parties or

by interest groups and failed to really encourage a dialogue with the public in the way that, for instance, we have seen in the Independence Referendum of 2014. The Scottish newspapers, including; The Herald, The Scotsman, The Daily Record, The Evening Times, The Edinburgh Evening News, The Press & Journal, The Scottish Sun, The Scottish Daily Mail, provided some commentary on the election, yet in truth, the failure of Iain Gray's Labour party to gather around a captivating electoral campaign meant little press coverage. Crucially there was very little discussion of law and order issues in this campaign, most of the focus around Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill had centred on his decision to release Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, known as 'the Lockerbie bomber' and so there was little challenge on issues such as the reduction of prison sentences in favour of the 'community payback' policy. In the last week of the campaign, the Labour party circulated a petition against knife violence, which seemed to represent a last minute effort to employ populist justice issues as a vote winner, however, with the relative lack of fanfare and time to build this narrative, this went largely unnoticed. The SNP landslide victory of the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary election seemed to represent a failure on the part of opposition parties to really engage in a captivating electoral campaign and this was reflected in the research. Indeed, early analysis of this data suggested that with an underdeveloped media landscape and a largely uneventful campaign there wasn't essentially enough to observe so that I may reasonably draw comparisons. When compared with the rich data gathered on the three other occasions, I felt that this case study was insufficient. Essentially the research here, when comparing the UK and Scotland, would have to reflect on differences in jurisdictions, yet there was not enough data to allow me to fully undertake this analysis. This research would certainly be more fruitfully conducted in the post-referendum period.

#### **4. Discourse Analysis and Documentary Evidence**

Discourse analysis, at its most distilled, is "an approach to the analysis of language that looks at patterns of language across texts as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the texts occur" (Paltridge 2006: 1). In its essence and origin a

practice of sociolinguistics, discourse analysis espouses a textually-oriented approach which concentrates on minute linguistic formation. However, this ethos of facilitating a consideration of language beyond the text has led to the development of “more socially-oriented views of discourse analysis which consider what the text is doing in the social and cultural setting in which it occurs” (Paltridge 2006: 1). This approach has been wholeheartedly adopted within social psychology, where it has been practiced and nurtured and enjoys widespread applicability. It is also now commonly used across the social sciences, in order to study language use in detail and draw attention to meaning, power, and the constitution of categories, terminology and power relationships.

The development of discourse analysis as a linguistic approach was prompted by Zellig Harris’s assertion that “connected discourse occurs within a particular situation” (Harris 1952: 3). Harris emphasized the importance of examining language beyond the sentence, as well as the interaction between linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. He argued that there are typical uses of language in situations, which not only share meaning, but have “characteristic linguistic features associated with them” (Paltridge 2006: 2). As a result, the central concern of discourse analysis as a textually-oriented approach is what exactly these meanings are and how they are realized in language (Paltridge 2006: 3).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) describe the key approaches to unearthing such meaning and the major components of discourse analysis as ‘Function, Construction and Variation’ (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 198). Employing a focus on ‘function’ is said to involve the analyst actively reading the context rather than conducting a simple categorization of speech. Drew (1986) suggests that understanding ‘function’ in this way is crucial, particularly in the case of requests, where people tend to anticipate undesirable acts like rejection before they happen. For example, as Brown and Levinson (1978) note, when someone makes a request they are often rather indirect, couching the request as an abstract question. Intuitively, we know from experience and consideration of the context that the true function of this sentence is to request something, but it is to the speaker’s advantage to choose this indirect approach, as this will lessen the impact of the rejection. ‘Functions’ in discourse analysis are, according to Potter and Wetherell (1987: 199), rarely limited to *doing*

things such as ordering, requesting, persuading and accusing, but can also be more 'global', in that they may be used to present the speaker in a favourable light and as we might expect, "global self-presentations can be achieved with particular kinds of formulations which emphasize either good or bad features" (Potter and Wetherell 1987:199). Somewhat similarly, 'variation' in discourse analysis refers to a case by case varying of the person's function, depending on the feelings of the speaker to the recipient. An awareness of at least the potential for this kind of variation adds an interesting point of analysis when considering language and indeed, when studying the broader meaning of political speeches; that we must acknowledge the audience and be aware of the potential malleability of the words spoken or written in alternative contexts, particularly when the person is giving opinion or a fact which may be flexibly presented.

Observing 'construction' in language is an important tenet of discourse analysis, and perhaps the element which lends itself best to the broad socially-minded approach which is favoured by social psychology and which fits with the research approach I intended to utilise in my case studies. The focus on 'construction' reminds the discourse analyst that 'functions' are built from pre-existing resources, that active selection takes place and that accounts are potent and consequential (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 199). Indeed, the inclusion of 'construction' in the building-blocks of discourse analysis most significantly moves the practice away from minute linguistic detail towards a broader consideration of society and add an element of practical utility for a case study approach which requires analysis of the construction of words. The practicalities of observing 'construction' are far less easily describable or instructive than in the case of 'function' and 'variation', however, Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest:

It may be that the person providing the account is not consciously constructing, but a construction emerges as they merely try to make sense of a phenomenon or engage in unselfconscious social activities like blaming or justifying... the person may be just 'doing what comes naturally' rather than intentionally deciding this rather than that form of language will be appropriate... [However] all language, even language which passes as simple description, is constructive and consequential for the discourse analyst (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 200).

The element of ‘construction’ seems more of a suggested lens of analysis, rather than a technique for interpretation, which feels relatively intangible in the sociolinguistic context, but is actually the crucial element which differentiates discourse analysis from content or conversation analysis and which also renders this approach extremely useful within my research.

Due to its broad scope, discourse analysis can be applied to “all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds” (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 201). As such, it provides a broader applicability than content analysis and conversation analysis, in that they only apply to the written and spoken word respectively, with neither reaching beyond these boundaries. Indeed, the fact that discourse analysis emphasizes the structure, variability and function of the language used, allows the focus to remain with meaning, rather than format. In assessing social psychology’s tendency to utilise discourse analysis over conversation analysis, Wooffitt (2005) cites the unique approach of analyzing the interpersonal and social functions of ‘linguistic repertoires’ and the ability to use a broader range of data such as interviews and media, emphasizing again the scope available. Once again, this appears to merge with my research aims, of analyzing a range of data in order to understand the broader political narrative landscape.

Discourse analysis-informed research began prominently in 1984 with Gilbert and Mulkey’s case study of two rival groups of biochemists, entitled ‘Opening Pandora’s Box’. Gilbert and Mulkey were particularly interested in the construction of scientific knowledge in controversial situations and so collected accounts of the biochemists’ practices by reviewing both technical reports and interview statements. Along with this discourse analysis-based approach, Gilbert and Mulkey introduced the method of identifying ‘interpretive repertoires’ in which the researchers would search for and highlight “different ways attitudes were constructed and the functions served” (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 201). For example, Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) noticed not only an empiricist repertoire, which consisted of an impersonal, data-driven account but also a contingent repertoire, which made reference to dramatic revelations, personal motives, and was used in informal settings. Crucially, the empiricist repertoire was used by both groups of biochemists in emphasizing truth, whereas the contingent repertoire was consistently employed in accounting for error.



This development beyond the ‘function, construction and variation’ signifiers in discourse analysis, constructed an approach by which assumptions and conclusions could more readily be drawn, hence, opening a ‘Pandora’s Box’ of discourse-focused research. Building on this prominent development, two major versions of discourse analysis as a practice have emerged within social psychology which identify specifically with different intellectual traditions (Willig 2001: 95). I will discuss these briefly here and consider how I will opt to utilise discourse analysis in this project.

‘Discursive psychology’ is inspired by ethnomethodology and specifically “studies what people do with language and emphasizes the performative qualities of discourse” (Willig 2001: 95). Discursive psychology as a body of research is primarily concerned with the study of memory and identity, with a focus on understanding these through “naturally occurring talk and text, and the functions and consequences of such references” (Willig 2001: 96). This approach aims to develop discourse analysis beyond a methodology, into a substantial body of work which advances the study of memory and identity by taking seriously the “conceptualization of language as constructive and functional” (Willig 2001: 98). However, its strength as a working methodology should not be overlooked, I would suggest that the development here of the initial sociolinguistic principles of discourse analysis into this established school of thought has also provided us with a more advanced and easily reproducible blueprint for social scientific research within this intellectual tradition.

While sociolinguistic discourse analysis understands construction of sentences from a particular perspective, the translation of these principles into ‘discursive psychology’ provides us with a much more robust methodological approach. For example, Willig’s ‘Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology’ (2001) outlines practical and instructive ‘Procedural guidelines for the analysis of discourse’ (Willig 2001: 99). We are informed that before analysis we must read the text once as a neutral reader in order to “experience as a reader some of the discursive effects of the text” (Willig 2001: 99). Coding instructions are given, that “it is important to make sure that all material that is potentially relevant is included. This means that even

instances that are indirectly or only vaguely related to the research question should be identified” (Willig 2001: 100). In Discursive Psychology, analysis draws heavily on Gilbert and Mulkay’s (1984) ‘interpretive repertoires’, suggesting that the researcher should pay close attention to how versions of events are constructed in alternative, often contradictory ways. Practical research advice is given, that the researcher must observe the interviewer and the interviewee’s contributions (if the research is conducted by interview) and ensure that “analytic focus is upon variability across contexts and the action orientation of talk” (Willig 2001: 101). Discursive psychology is, in essence, discourse analysis as influenced by ethnomethodology, in action.

If discursive psychology could be viewed as discourse analysis in action, its alternative incarnation develops the more critical and structural elements at play to enhance our theoretical understanding of power in discourse. ‘Foucauldian discourse analysis’ draws on the work of Michel Foucault and subsequent post-structuralism , to explore how “discourses facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when” (Parker 1992: 112). Willig (2001) defines the difference between the two approaches as:

while discursive psychology is primarily concerned with *how* people *use* discursive resources in order to achieve interpersonal objectives in social interaction, Foucauldian discourse analysis focuses on *what kind* of objects and subjects are constructed through discourses (Willig 2001: 96).

Indeed, the focus of this Foucauldian approach is the role of discourse in social life and accordingly, a crucial tenet of such research is that “discourses offer subject positions, which, when taken up, have implications for subjectivity and experience” (Willig 2001: 113). In terms of personal discourses, this approach attempts to understand how these ‘subject positions’ influence our views of society and psychology, while more broadly, the Foucauldian version of discourse analysis “is also concerned with the role of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power... [and] pays attention to the relationship between discourses and institutions” (Willig 2001: 113).

Notably, Parker (1992: 1) states that Foucauldian discourse analysis can be carried out “wherever there is meaning”, thus broadening the field of analysis

beyond words, to any symbolic systems, and suggesting that we “consider all tissues of meaning as texts” (Parker 1992: 7). This research will utilise this Foucauldian ethos, of focusing analysis beyond words. While the discursive psychology approach is instructive in its advice to the researcher, ultimately discourse analysis has been employed here with the explicit aim of viewing the case study data from a supralinguistic perspective, beyond language and in appreciation of power structures. This will include consideration of the setting, of body language, of the power context. It is argued that an awareness of these schools of research in discourse analysis is useful in appreciating the aim of my analytical approach, by which I mean that the focus here is the intangible structures of crime communication and this Foucauldian perspective helps us to take seriously their impact in the data. Hopefully this will enhance my ability to derive cogent, meaningful findings from what will be sprawling data collection opportunities.

## 5. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

In understanding the practical application of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, we must first appreciate what makes this Foucault-influenced version separate from, for instance, Fairclough’s more commonly employed critical approach. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) provide a sense of the subtle differences in the field, illustrating them as firstly relating to their conception of the meaning of discourse:

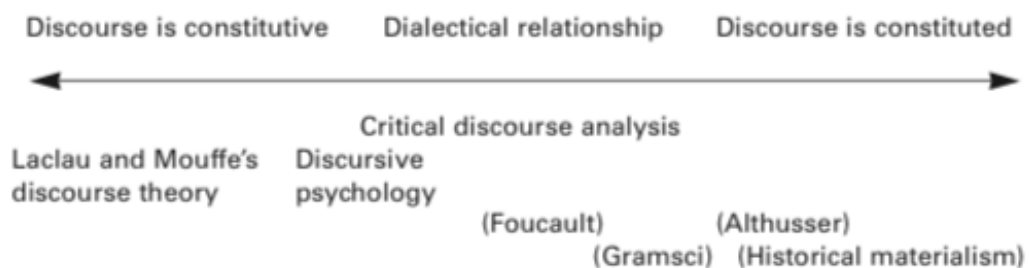


Figure 1.1 The role of discourse in the constitution of the world

(Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 20)

In this spectrum, the Foucauldian perspective of discourse is neither purely constituted by society, nor does it constitute society, but exists as a dialectical resolution between both. Foucault was concerned with the idea of discourse, widely popularising discourse analysis with his view that “discourses comprise bodies of knowledge which systematically create and reproduce particular social institutions” (Holloway 1997: 48). As Seale (1998: 246) notes, Foucault was concerned with the way that this subtle form of social control can, when delivered through discourse, integrate subtly into our lives. As Parker (1994) notes, discourses are defined under this approach as “sets of statements that construct objects and an array of subject positions” (Parker 1994: 245). Willig (2008) explains that ultimately, the Foucauldian approach sees “discourses [as] bound up with institutional practices – that is, with ways of organizing, regulating and administering social life. Thus, while discourses legitimate and reinforce existing social and institutional structures, these structures in turn also support and validate the discourses” (Willig 2008: 113). Similarly, Jorgensen and Phillips suggest that rather than being grounded in the also frequently employed purely critical accounts, power is the central focus of the Foucauldian approach, a particular conception of power that “does not belong to particular agents such as individuals or the state or groups with particular interests; rather, power is spread across different social practices” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 13).

Practically, we can view this approach as essentially similar to ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, the key difference being that, as mentioned above, with Foucault’s conception of meaning we can broaden analysis beyond texts and aim more squarely towards intangible, shifting power relations. “Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis reserves the concept of discourse for text, talk and other semiological systems (e.g. gestures and fashion) and keeps it distinct from other dimensions of social practice” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 18), whereas the Foucauldian method sees power as the active and driving force in discourse:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things,

it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault 1980: 119)

As we see in the second spectrum (below), Foucault's approach to analysis tends more towards the abstract, between discursive psychology's more 'everyday' discourse:



Figure 1.2 Analytical Focus

These are subtle differences between the various key approaches in the field, but do give a sense of where the Foucauldian approach sits in relation to the rest.

Foucauldian discourse analysis as an applied method builds on the basic tenets of the popular critical approach, which Willig (1999) explains as having been adopted from textual analysis. This approach involved eight key stages:

1. Read texts and identify any recurring or linked ideas that emerge
2. Isolate all references to the specific aspect of the texts which is of interest.  
These will be the ones necessary to answer the research questions
3. Search for similarities and contrasts in the sections of text and group together appropriately so analysis can be done one discourse at a time
4. Write down a section of text
5. Note the explicit meaning of that piece of text
6. Consider and note implicit or extended meanings of a section of text in square brackets [ ]

7. Relate the implicit and explicit meanings to ideologies
8. Use theoretical framework to explore ideology

The particular differences in the Foucauldian approach are set out by Willig (2001: 119)

#### STAGE 1: DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

(how is the discursive object constructed via shared meanings and lexical references)

#### STAGE 2: DISCOURSES

(places the object within wider discourses)

#### STAGE 3: ACTION ORIENTATION

(closer scrutiny of discursive contexts)

#### STAGE 4: POSITIONINGS

(identifying the subject positions)

#### STAGE 5: PRACTICE

(examining the relationship between discourse and practice)

#### STAGE 6: SUBJECTIVITY

(drawing links between discursive constructions and personal experiences)

For instance, what follows is an example of discourse analysis from the chapter on the Phone Hacking Scandal, as stated in its final form, with the evidence followed by the conclusions drawn from discourse analysis:

A particularly strained exchange between Rupert Murdoch and MP Jim Sheridan regarding Murdoch's access to the Prime Minister revealed how au fait he had become with an unrivalled level of political access:

Jim Sheridan: Mr Murdoch senior...Why did you enter the back door at No. 10 when you visited the Prime Minister following the last general election?

Rupert Murdoch: Because I was asked to.

Jim Sheridan: You were asked to go in the back door of No. 10?

Rupert Murdoch: Yes.

Jim Sheridan: Why would that be?

Rupert Murdoch: To avoid photographers at the front, I imagine. I don't know. I was asked; I just did what I was told.

Jim Sheridan: It is strange, given that Heads of State manage to go in the front door.

Rupert Murdoch: Yes.

Jim Sheridan: Yet you have to go in the back door.

Rupert Murdoch: That is the choice of the Prime Minister, or his staff or whoever does these things...Which visit to Downing Street are you talking about?

Jim Sheridan: It was just following the last general election.

Rupert Murdoch: I was invited within days to have a cup of tea and to be thanked by Mr Cameron for the support. No other conversation took place. It lasted minutes.

Jim Sheridan: That is the one when you went in through the back door?

Rupert Murdoch: Yes. I had been asked also by Mr Brown many times.

Jim Sheridan: Through the back door?

Rupert Murdoch: Yes. And my family went there many times.”

(Uncorrected Transcript of Oral Evidence of Tuesday 19 July 2011 at Q. 211 – 220)

The tone of the exchange is rather tense and infused with accusatory subtext. The implications being made by Jim Sheridan are that Rupert Murdoch enjoyed an astonishing level of access to the Prime Minister, one which exceeded that of various heads of state. The detail of Rupert Murdoch entering through the back door of number 10 immediately after the election was heavily focussed on in the subsequent media coverage and this seemed to highlight the sense that there was some sinister element to this relationship, and that both Rupert Murdoch and David Cameron did not want to reveal publicly exactly how influential this relationship was. In the subsequent verbal exchange, we find that Jim Sheridan repeats the detail several times, namely that Murdoch had specifically entered through the back door, which has the effect of emphasising his surprise that this would occur. He repeats the words ‘back door’ several times with the apparent aim of trying to have Rupert Murdoch address this detail, of trying to elicit some response on the unusual nature of this arrangement and its implications regarding his unfettered access. However, Murdoch’s response, in line with much of the rest of his

testimony, aims to project innocence by addressing only the direct questions posed rather than speaking to any of Sheridan's accusatory subtext. For instance, when Sheridan asks initially 'Why did you enter the back door at No. 10 when you visited the Prime Minister following the last general election?' he responds 'Because I was asked to'. This exchange provides a fascinating example of the power dynamics at play here, wherein Sheridan really wants Murdoch to answer why he had entered through the back door rather than the front door, he really wants some elaboration on why this unusual arrangement took place and essentially what he wants to know is what the nature of this relationship is, what it means to be entering through the back door at number 10. The answer given is wholly unsatisfying because of the vast implications intertwined with this question and while Murdoch appears to answer honestly, his answer betrays a general unwillingness to engage, almost a belligerence. The root of Sheridan's accusatory tone is that in essence by asking this question and by repeating it several times he is suggesting that Murdoch's access and power is in some way underhand or undemocratic. As a result, when Murdoch refuses to engage with the true spirit of the question his response is jarring rather than honest and belies a discomfort with the inferences being made. As we see from the exchange, this dynamic continues, with Sheridan mentioning the back door again and again and yet never explicitly verbalising the implied accusations. Murdoch is able to deflect by mentioning innocuous details and yet the outcome is still a sense that there is something underhand at play here. Despite the fact that Murdoch suggests that his meeting with Cameron lasted only minutes, this fails to address the implication that he enjoyed an incomparable influence, one which is concerning enough to need to be hidden from the public.

## STAGE 1: DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

(how is the discursive object constructed via shared meanings and lexical references)

'Discursive constructions' allows us to probe the language used for implied meaning, which is particularly useful in this case, in which so much is inferred by the line of questioning, the back and forth on paper appears innocuous and yet, considered as a whole we see testing and reluctance. For instance 'in the back door', taken as a stand alone statement does not infer further meaning, yet in this context our appreciation of the shared meaning and lexical references allows us to highlight the unusual nature of entering 'in the back door' at 10 Downing Street. This implies something more, something notably underhand. Willig suggests that at this stage the reader focus on the relationship, the 'identifiable social arrangement' (Willig 2001: 119). Here, the social arrangement between Murdoch and Sheridan tells us a great deal about the suspicion inferred in the questioning about the back door.

## STAGE 2: DISCOURSES

(places the object within wider discourses)

What kind of social relationship is this, for instance is this an interview and a such how do we contextualize the words accordingly? Here, situating this discourse



among an understanding that this is a Committee Hearing taking place at a time of enormous moral outrage, tells us about the anger underpinning the formalities of the setting.

### STAGE 3: ACTION ORIENTATION

(closer scrutiny of discursive contexts)

How do the speakers interact with one another and how does this affect the building of the dialogue, how does this affect the meaning inherent? This allows us to hone in on the exchange and see it as of equal importance to the standalone statements. Here we see the active reorientation present in the discourse analysis approach, where we move beyond words towards the primacy of the interaction.

### STAGE 4: POSITIONINGS

(identifying the subject positions)

What are the subject positions of those involved in this social interaction? Crucially this allows us to reflect on the weight of Rupert Murdoch and his place in society when we view these words. Understanding his notoriety versus the relative underdog position, or the less charged nature of Jim Sheridan in this exchange, helps us to really appreciate the weight of his careful statements. We can see Murdoch's answers as enormously weighted by the awareness of his notoriety in society.

Jim Sheridan: Through the back door?

Rupert Murdoch: Yes. And my family went there many times.

Murdoch invokes his family and makes careful statements as a way to technically answer the questions and yet his words are infused with further meaning. On paper we might see these answers as innocuous. However, this can be viewed as obfuscation when we understand how much more important it is to us that Murdoch himself enters through the back door, with his family or not. Perhaps obfuscation is even too strong, he is employing his right to answer questions very technically and

truthfully, yet the weight of his power in society dwarfs them and focuses us on the subtext.

#### STAGE 5: PRACTICE

(examining the relationship between discourse and practice)

Willig describes this stage as viewing how the participants act according to how we might expect in a given situation. She gives the example of a relationship break up, in which we might expect common social conventions to dictate practice and yet varying from this practice tells us a great deal about the discourse. Here, the rhythm of committee style questioning is strictly in place and Murdoch uses this to his advantage to remain as measured as possible and give away very little. This is a similar rhythm to a court room cross examination for instance.

#### STAGE 6: SUBJECTIVITY

(drawing links between discursive constructions and personal experiences)

“This stage in the analysis is, of necessity, the most speculative” (Willig 2001: 122). Willig suggests that this stage can be viewed as a limitation of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and yet it is unique in allowing for the lived experience of the analyst to carefully assess the discourse according to subjective experience. This is crucial at many stages of FDA and allows us to understand the discourse not as being words uttered as neutral evidence, but words uttered by one of the most powerful media magnates in the world. Subjectivity, personal experience or indeed knowledge of the actors is a useful tool in analysis here.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis has been employed in a number of settings, Parker (1999) and the Bolton Discourse Network are known for their development of work in this field, favouring this approach due to its ability to capture a wide range of materials. Similarly Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2008) use this approach widely, developing it in more recent years to include advanced approaches to issues of

Foucauldian concerns of genealogy, governmentality and subjectivity.

Environmental research is a particular realm which has widely adopted FDA in recent years (Sharp and Richardson 2001, Hajer and Versteeg 2005), with many researchers citing a desire to better understand the way that environmental discourse is constructed, with the hope that an understanding of discourse can enable policy change around such a loaded, political subject. We might draw some similar comparisons to the crime debate and as such, I would suggest that the focus on the subtleties of discourse provided by this approach fits well with this project.

Finally, no discourse analysis was conducted on social media in this project. I have stated in this section and we will see in the case studies, that discourse analysis was reserved for certain speeches and debates in which the full picture of the conversation was capturable. Still, this would certainly be a logical future direction for research.

### **Note: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and Interaction Ritual Chains**

The choice to employ Foucauldian Discourse as an analytical framework I felt fit well with the wider theoretical framing of this thesis. I have suggested that discourse analysis is an approach which helps us better understand the potency and meaning in acts and inferences beyond spoken or written language and would argue that Collins's *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) engages with a similar project. Indeed, the focus of the ritual ingredients of a 'mutual focus of attention' and a 'shared mood' and what Collins calls "transient emotional stimulus" (Collins 2004: 48) point us towards the importance of mood and emotional experience in the connections between members of society. Each of these approaches emphasises the unspoken and points us towards the weight of intangible, unmeasurable energy in leading to the ritual outcomes of "righteous anger for violations" (Collins 2004: 48). Case studies and discourse analysis are approaches which allow for increased appreciation of energy and action and the unwieldy, which is as we have seen, the essence of *Interaction Ritual Chains* which can ultimately tell us more about the experience of

engaging with crime issues, both verbally and through “entrainment in bodily micro-rhythms and emotions” (Collins 2004: 48).

## 6. Assessing the Methodological Approach

### 6.1 Case Study Research

I have discussed at length the particular utility of the case study approach here and the various intrinsic elements which drew me to adopt this method; the ability to capture a broadly defined event or moment, a relative lack of rigidity in defining what can constitute data, the capacity to begin researching quickly in unpredicted moments. Furthermore, the process by which this method is undertaken provides the researcher the opportunity to hone a framework of observation as they familiarise themselves with the field. I found this to be a particular advantage in mapping out and developing a sense of the evolving media landscape around political events; by the time I undertook my fourth case study on the Riots, I was able to mobilise quickly around a solid and honed research framework.

In case study literature the most common criticism levelled at the method is that of imprecision or a lack of objective rigour. I have noted that Yin’s key text (1994) on the method aims to infuse a relative level of precision into the process by creating rules which the researcher can follow, by encouraging a thorough research design, but that Yin is careful to suggest that to overstate this is to move away from the key benefits of this method; its relative malleability. Woodside (2010) develops Yin’s assertion by suggesting that we should not view case study research as lacking when compared to other approaches, that if we follow good practice principles as espoused by Yin and others that we can appreciate “the usefulness for theory creation, doing valid research and implementing successful practice” (Woodside 2010: 398). Beyond Yin’s good practice approaches of thorough research design, that is subject to regular reassessment as the researcher becomes familiar with the

field, Woodside (2010) argues that practise and repetition are the key tools in stabilising case study research.

In reflecting on the case studies undertaken in this project, I would concede that any of the standard criticisms of the method could be levelled at these examples. If we look for irrefutable objectivity in case study research it can easily be found lacking in the best cases. Yet, without the case study approach, observation of these events in this way would not be possible. The observation of crime events as they unfold, of scandals and moral panics in particular, are extremely useful in adding to a body of work which is primarily concerned with such a subject matter. As the relevant case study texts suggest, to best capture these moments and to employ the approach properly, the researcher must both prioritise planning and active reflexivity throughout. I hope that I have demonstrated the employment of both in this project. Similarly, I would argue that the decision to undertake multiple case studies, rather than one larger study of the riots only, for example, would detract from the ability to make broader conclusions as well as the opportunity to improve the research model. Certainly it is inevitable that in the process of this research, the identification of potential further treatment of this data using other methods does arise, but these are questions for another project. The case study approach has ultimately provided a thorough and useful picture of the moments under analysis and has allowed me to hone in on data that I could not have otherwise captured.

## 6.2 Discourse Analysis

In keeping with the interactionist conceptual aim of moving analysis of crime communication moments away from macrosociological discussions towards the microsociological, discourse analysis provided an appropriate analytical framework by which I might assess this data. Willig (1999) suggests that when compared with content analysis, discourse analysis allows us to delve deeper, beyond observing the regularity in choice of words to unearth power and ideology, as Van Dijk (1996) suggests, to critically analyse those in positions of power, to connect the author of words with the 'institutional framework' (Wodak and Meyer 2001). This ethos fit

well with the aims of this project and the Foucauldian approach essentially grounded this research in the assertion that “power does not belong to particular agents such as individuals or the state or groups with particular interests; rather, power is spread across different social practices” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). This project was focussed centrally on unearthing the driving forces behind the construction of crime narratives and in many cases we saw shifts in power from traditional institutions to emerging groups. This approach to discourse analysis was therefore the most appropriate for my research. Having considered the evolution of discourse analysis and the various bodies of work undertaken under this approach, it seems clear that each has its own distinct lineage, with Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis one of the most prominent in the field and social psychology’s discursive practice as the driving force behind development in the area. It seemed important that adopting a certain perspective on analysis should derive directly from the conceptual aims of the project and it seemed natural to me that the Foucauldian approach was the best fit. Certainly, I had not overwhelmingly adopted many of Foucault’s works in the theoretical discussion of this project, nonetheless, considering its place among the spectrum of established discourse analysis approaches, it fit well with the aims of the project.

This approach also meant that in keeping with the case study method, I was able to undertake discourse analysis on speeches and debates as they occurred, rather than taking the more rigidly defined approach espoused by content analysis. I was unable to employ formal sampling approaches here for instance, instead endeavouring to apply discourse analysis approaches where significant moments of political communication emerged. This was again, a distinct advantage of the approach and was directly linked to the aims of the project already established.

### 6.3 Researching the Media

The central struggles experienced with media research here, were in aiming to infuse objectivity into a forcefully subjective and chaotic realm, while also trying to capture moments in detail as they occurred and were passed by quickly. Certainly, we can see that at times objectivity is impossible, but I have endeavoured to embrace the strength of the subjectivity involved in case study and discourse analysis research in order to capture something quite crucial, the action at its high points rather than the whole field at its every possible moment. The fast-paced nature meant adapting a framework for data collection which I have detailed here and it also meant relying on many internet sources, which does come with a certain risk of fallibility. I have aimed at every possible juncture to only conduct discourse analysis on transcripts which I myself witnessed and have a body of research notes to refer to.

I hope that I have demonstrated throughout this project that ‘the media’ today now constitutes a vast landscape far beyond that which we know from even very recent media research. Having conducted this project, I would argue that this realm must be treated and observed as best as possible as it naturally occurs, rather than captured in a manner which does not fit. A simple content analysis of written news would entirely miss the energy of the field. Case study analysis allowed me to capture this and discourse analysis took seriously the weight of the players involved, helped me to look beyond the text towards the energy of this rapid realm. As I have detailed in the media chapter, while social media was a part of this story, it by no means played the main and only role and as such, developing a new method by which I might capture the entire realm of social media was well beyond my capabilities in the time available. Certainly, this is a project for future research, but not one which was necessarily at the heart of my research. I would stress again, that interactivity was enabled not just by social media such as Facebook and Twitter, but by a whole network of ‘new media’, including 24 hour news, online news and comments sections. My focus here was on capturing the whole picture and so could not also take on the task of quantifying social media output, which would have constituted an entirely different project.

The key challenges faced in this project were clearly in aiming to capture this large amount of data and moving forward, further research might limit the scope further. Having conducted the research, I can certainly see the practical value in an approach which makes decisions around which selecting which media outlets to focus on specifically at the outset and sticks rigidly to this list. I made a decision not to limit my scope in this way based on the assertion that the narrative should drive the data collection. I feel this did allow me to bring in new media sources which I might not have anticipated and so did provide a fuller picture, but this certainly did add to the workload involved in the data collection. Selection of media texts then could be less fluid for easier data collection.

It must be noted that there are also undeniably challenges in inferring meaning from media texts. I have mentioned the accommodation of subjectivity in the discourse analysis process. Still, it should be noted that many media sources here are included as part of the chronology or in evidence of the development of narratives and it should be acknowledged that these do not constitute uncontested data. Indeed, media texts are in many cases highly politicised, can be driven by ownership and do not necessarily abide by neutral news values. I hope that my discussion of media in chapter 3 will provide a full picture of the complexities involved in the media landscape, however, in this methodological context, it should be noted that there is an undeniable difficulty in utilising media texts in research, in that objectivity and neutrality can never be achieved.



## CHAPTER 5

### THE UK GENERAL ELECTION 2010

#### Introduction

The case study method provides an approach for researching the ‘Political Communication of Crime’ which not only facilitates the theoretical aims of this project, but also best captures the data available. It allows for an exploration of the interactionist aims of constituting meaning as a work in progress, of the mapping of a realm in constant flux, while accommodating the particular kinds of event-based, broad-ranging data which was available during my research period.

The UK General Election of May 2010 provided a sprawling and uniquely fertile environment within which I might observe political communication in action, with the particular activities of electoral politics prompting the consideration of new law and order strategies, the crystallization of party policy on these issues and a subsequent concerted effort to communicate these new values. While the case study approach seemed to fit with the aims of my project and the 2010 election provided data which would certainly illuminate some of the issues I had hoped to discuss, was a case study of the 2010 election the best possible approach to researching this event?

Huckfeldt and Sprague’s discussion of the utility of electoral politics in observing *Citizens, Politics and Social Communication* (1995), suggest that research which aims to understand political communication must prioritize such a broad gaze:

the socially contingent nature of political choice leads to a conception of political behaviour that is characterized by multiple levels: Individuals are to be understood within the larger social aggregates of which they are part, and aggregate behavior is to be understood as more than the simple accumulation of individually determined preferences.

(Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995: 8)

It follows that the case study fits particularly well with research on electoral politics through its capacity to observe the multi-dimensional elements at play in these complicated communicative interactions. Furthermore, in aiming to assess the Political Communication of Crime, a case study of a general election not only facilitates this particular broad gaze but also takes advantage of the opportunity to illuminate the landscape at its most extreme. As previously discussed, this allows an ideological analysis, as the rich data generation and extremes of capacity at the outer limits tends to unveil not only the everyday functioning power structures, but also the underlying potential. Using this approach, we can see what may ordinarily occur as well as what could happen in the general instance and in the extremes, we essentially gain a comprehensive view of the field. The 2010 General Election therefore presented an ideal opportunity to observe these kinds of communications and seemed to be best served by the case study approach, allowing access to the negotiation of criminal justice ideas beyond political actors, into the evolving and intangible media and public spheres.

Crucially, electoral politics have tended to feature heavily in prominent criminological discussions of the NeoLiberal law and order trajectory and as such, seemed to demand further analysis in assessing the communication of crime. As has been discussed in Chapter 1, Garland's *Culture of Control* (2001), for instance, portrays electoral politics as integral to a destructive politicization of law and order, suggesting that "political reaction has become more pronounced as the conditions of political speech have changed over time" (2001: 131). This has seemingly had the instrumental effect of redefining crime as politically dangerous during electoral periods and as such frames crime as a priority issue in wooing the public vote.

I have discussed how Downes and Morgan's (2007) definitive account of elections and 'law and order' outlined the development of this trajectory. To recap briefly, this began with a 1960s rise in crime rates which was employed by the 1970s Conservative Party who ended the post-war consensus by laying blame for the first time with the opposing party, to Thatcher's 1979 campaign which criticized Labour's undermining of the 'rule of law' and "dispelled the last vestiges of the bipartisan consensus on law and order" (Downes and Morgan 2007: 204). Following this, we saw that a perception of the Labour Party approach of viewing social development as

a legitimate method of dealing with crime became a weakness, which led to the situation that “no party could any longer afford to cede law and order ground to the opposition” (Downes and Morgan 2007: 205). The Labour Party ‘tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’ slogan which followed, served to reinforce this ‘second-order consensus’ by proving that this was also a powerful vote-winning strategy. Building on these events, a body of literature focusing on ‘Late Modernity’ views the accompanying public ‘ontological insecurity’ (Giddens 1991) and sense of continuous anxiety (Young 2007) as central to an account of today’s society and views the prevalence of a cynical and populist approach to crime in today’s electoral politics as integral to this demise.

In particular, ‘Penal Populism’ as introduced in Bottoms’ ‘Philosophy and Politics of Sentencing’ (2005) and developed more prominently by Pratt in *Penal Populism* (2007) focused on the notion that as a result of these particular political developments, electoral politics had become dominated by “the pursuit of a set of penal policies to win votes rather than to reduce crime or promote justice” (Pratt 2007: 3). The regular political employment of this cynical practice was explained by Tyler and Boeckmann’s (1997) work which proposed that “penal populism emerges out of concerns to restore a disintegrating moral and social cohesion... rather than a specific response to crime problems” (Pratt 2007: 37). Therefore not only did this work re-emphasize the significance of electoral politics in the construction of crime, but it suggested that this practice had been intrinsically linked to the perception of a need to heal our damaged social fabric. This work proposed that ever-escalating law and order grandstanding at elections had not only fed into a general rise in punitiveness sentiments, but that this practice was linked with electoral success through a perception that a strong stance on law and order would heal our ontological insecurity, would restore our society to a perceived golden age of moral and social cohesion, an essentially false but powerfully conjured image of better times. The penal populism argument, therefore, was that the forceful and emotional nature of this relationship would ensure that law and order issues would continue to remain at the forefront of electoral politics, feeding into an ever-escalating populist punitiveness which would be extremely difficult to derail, so strong was its intrinsic link to ontological insecurity.

As a result, it seemed that a case study focusing on a major UK election might provide an opportunity to unpack this dystopia and better understand which elements truly feed into this panicked construction of crime narratives during these heightened moments of debate and communication. The 2010 UK General Election provided such an opportunity to observe communication processes at work, to understand the role of law and order in electoral politics and as such, to try to identify which forces seemed to drive this unstoppable derailing of evidence-based criminal justice policy in favour of ‘populist punitiveness’.

In attempting to gain a more detailed picture of these political communication processes, a key aim of this project had always been to better understand the blurring of boundaries between the reception and generation of information, to move accounts beyond the traditional notions of the media as the willing mouthpiece of manipulative politics on to a docile public. As such, with prominent shifts in the media sphere occurring before the 2010 General Election, it seemed that this moment of increased activity would also provide information on these evolving roles. Most prominently, a rise in the use of social media and online news had reshaped the media landscape, which seemed to suggest that electoral politics and the subsequent construction of crime narratives might also be significantly redefined. Furthermore, following the perceived success of the utilization of social and visual media in Barack Obama’s 2008 Presidential campaign, steps were taken before the election to establish new Presidential-style TV debates between the leaders of the three main parties, followed by US-style spin rooms and instant polling. These developments suggested that key elements of the communication structures in place in electoral politics were undergoing a rapid evolution and as such, further implied that a case study of this shifting realm would illuminate the construction of crime narratives as it occurs today.

Finally, in keeping with the theoretical work already developed, the election seemed to provide a natural moment in which the *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) approach might be tested. It seemed that during an election, we might observe the natural escalation towards broader righteous anger as a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood could find empowerment from a constant flow of meaning-enriched symbols. Indeed, the flow of new criminal justice information created by electoral

politics would again provide a fertile environment of high levels of emotional entrainment in which to better understand this process and the power of the public role in the construction of crime narratives.

### The Case Study Data

As Yin (1994) notes, many case studies utilise data gathered from a single type of source such as archival records, while others use multiple sources in order to achieve an adequate level of triangulation. This ability to derive evidence from a broad range of sources is a significant strength of the case study method in that it allows the researcher to be as adaptive as possible and is the approach that I opted to employ when studying the 2010 election.

Traditionally, case study data is taken from a variety of sources which have largely focused on documentary evidence. The appendix of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972) lists press cuttings, tape recordings, parish newsletters, council minutes and annual reports while the *Policing the Crisis* (1978) account of the 'Handsworth mugging' focuses heavily on newspaper headlines, editorials and features. In both cases, the focus on particular sources of data is driven by the content and so the data I chose to examine in this case study took a similar approach of aiming to gather thorough documentary evidence, while framing this around the elements which were forefront in the research; acts of political communication, the evolving media sphere and instances of public interaction.

In Political Science, campaigning tends to be captured at a much more specific level in order to answer a number of pressing but particular questions, for instance 'do campaigns stimulate voter interest and ultimately voter turnout?' or 'do campaigns persuade voters, and, if so, which voters?' (Brady, Johnston and Sides 2006: 13). The specificity of these questions often require more quantitative approaches which provide a defined answer. In this case, however, as the enquiry relates more to intangible, conceptual issues such as 'ontological insecurity', NeoLiberalism, populist punitiveness and is based in interactionist theoretical considerations, it seemed more appropriate that the case study data serve these questions more generally, rather than targeting survey data at a particular question.

As such, the data I gathered covered quite a broad range of documentary evidence and was by nature of the project adaptive to the new forms of evidence which emerged. I focused on high profile instances of political communication, in particular the three televised Leaders' Debates which were accompanied by US-style 'spin rooms' and a wealth of public interactions via social media. In search of crime-specific content, I took evidence from a law and order debate with each of the main party candidates for Home Secretary on the news programme, 'The Daily Politics'. I aimed to cover a wide variety of television news, both in politics discussion programmes like 'Newsnight', 'This Week', 'The Daily Politics' and 'Question Time' as well as in news bulletins on the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 and rolling 24 hour news channels, in particular BBC News 24 and Sky News. By this point, the amount of evidence available was already overwhelming and as such, I did make a concerted effort to adopt a strategy of viewing each of these outlets as potential sources and rather than observing and logging each systematically, to take the approach of following the biggest events, the dominant themes and the crime-related events in most detail.

I made an effort to gather data from traditional campaign materials, such as flyers, manifestoes, Party Political Broadcasts and posters. Beyond television media, I also viewed a range of print media sources, albeit in their online versions, including broadsheets such as; The Guardian, The Observer, The Times, The Telegraph, Financial Times, The Independent and tabloids including; The Sun, The Daily Mail, The Daily Mirror, Metro and News of the World (then still in operation, May 2010). With much of the focus of this work on the role of the media, I made a point of immersing myself in new media, which included a broad spectrum from social media websites such as Twitter which proved extremely powerful during the Leaders' Debates, as well as Facebook which highlighted some interesting new modes of interaction ritual chains. Other significant sources of new media included YouTube videos which became significant in the wake of various news stories due to their sharing capabilities, as well as exclusively online news sources such as The Huffington Post. At any given moment there was some new or repackaged information to be consumed, which meant that higher profile news stories ought to dominate the focus, however, I did make an effort to specifically observe how crime

narratives travelled through these various modes of communication and how they were reshaped at various points along the way. Indeed, the availability of such vast amounts of information for the first time at this level in UK electoral politics highlighted how media consumption today is now guided more than ever by autonomy and choice.

Before I conducted this case study I was aware that the analysis of documentary evidence would require some consideration of a particular approach to this work. As such, in Chapter 4 I have considered the use of discourse analysis rather than content analysis, in keeping with the ethos as espoused by Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1989), of moving beyond the text, of viewing the media landscape as having meaning beyond the newsroom or the single political speech.

## Chronology

The Parliamentary Session that preceded the 2010 election was a time of declining credibility for the Labour Party and the perception of politics more generally. The expenses scandal which unfolded weekly in 'The Telegraph' served to engender public distaste towards politicians, while catastrophic economic conditions severely dented the Prime Minister (and former Chancellor's) approval ratings. These conditions seemed to suggest that the 2010 election would suffer from extremely low turnout, which would particularly hurt Labour's chances at success. Labour were severely in need of a boost, while all of the main parties desired an outlet which would allow them to project a sense of increased transparency, in light of the feelings of public suspicion prompted by the expenses scandal. As a result, for the first time in British history the Prime Minister agreed to take part in a televised Presidential-style debate. Much positive feeling towards these American-style debates had been derived from the success of those in the Obama Presidential campaign which had seemed to provide an opportunity for Obama to impress the electorate by demonstrating his charisma and superior grasp of policy issues against his opponent Senator McCain. It was decided that Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg, the leaders of the three main parties, Labour, the Conservatives and the

Liberal Democrats respectively, would take part in three televised debates on the 15<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2010.

The media interest surrounding these unprecedented events was considerable. Speculation before and analysis afterwards was rife in the traditional press outlets, while new media approaches proved potent and rapidly evolved into fundamental elements of the campaign. For instance, on the night of the debates US-inspired instant polling rooms were introduced to survey opinion on the three candidates as the debate occurred. Borrowing again from this American model, television stations holding the debates set up 'Spin Rooms' in which politicians from the various parties gathered to give their particular opinion immediately after the debates had concluded. This had the effect of creating huge public anticipation around the debates and resulted in massive ratings of 9.4 million viewers on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April (Deans 2010, 'Leaders' Debate TV ratings: 9.4m viewers make clash day's biggest show', *The Guardian*, 16<sup>th</sup> April), 4.1 million on the 22<sup>nd</sup> (Deans 2010, 'Election debate TV ratings: 4.1m watch Leaders' tussle', *The Guardian*, 23<sup>rd</sup> April) and finally 8.4 million on the 29<sup>th</sup> (Deans 2010, 'Leaders' debate draws 8.4 million viewers', *The Guardian*, 30<sup>th</sup> April). Much was made of the increased public voice through social networking websites like Facebook, and in particular the immediacy of Twitter allowed a #leadersdebate hashtag to provide a forum for constant public commentary throughout the debates. The Guardian reported that:

The [@Tweetminster](#) account – which describes itself as "a media utility that connects you to the politicians, commentators and news that shape UK politics" – says that in the third debate there were 154,342 tweets relating to various terms around the leaders' debate, coming at 26.77 tweets a second, spread among 33,095 people (Arthur 2010, '2010: The first social media election', *The Guardian*, 3<sup>rd</sup> May).

This does not account for those who were following the tweets, while not actually tweeting themselves. In essence, the Leaders' Debates served as a political event which uniquely engaged the public in a recently unforeseen surge of interest and anticipation. In addition to the appropriation of new media outlets, this added to the mélange of commentary and served to strengthen an unfiltered public voice in the general debate. Indeed, the increased vigour of the public voice was often



demonstrated through a vocal frustration towards traditional media tactics, such as the overly critical coverage of Nick Clegg following his surge in popularity after the first debate, which was widely satirized on twitter through the #nickcleggsfault hashtag:

By midday it was the second most-tweeted hashtag on Twitter, second only to Earth day; in the UK it was the top hashtag, indicating that thousands of tweets incorporated it every hour.... The rapid responses on Twitter indicate just how much shorter the feedback loop now is for the mainstream media and electors – and how dangerous it can be to attack politicians who are riding a wave of popularity (Arthur 2010, ‘Twitter says it’s all Nick Clegg’s fault in ironic swipe at newspapers’, *The Guardian*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April).

Crucially, this more powerful public-oriented media and increased focus on the Leaders’ Debates meant that the particular style of electoral communication had been altered enormously, which would prove extremely significant in the delivery of crime narratives and conventional attempts to engage in ‘the law and order merry-go-round’.

The early stages of the 2010 general election demonstrated something of an adjustment period for politics and new media. Initially, this more transparent medium opened up the parties to an increased vulnerability, with the Labour Party’s Stuart MacLennan being sacked from his candidacy in Moray due to a string of ill-advised twitter comments and the Conservative candidate for Ayrshire North and Arran, Philip Lardner, suspended for inappropriate comments made on his website. These teething problems served to highlight the potency of social media in election campaigns and re-framed our traditional news outlets within a powerfully technological and fiercely instantaneous mediated landscape. High profile events seemed to be processed through an interconnected mesh of traditional print press outlets, 24 hour news television and radio, event-style televised debates, an increasingly broad and legitimatised range of internet sources and new social media which was in a state of constant adaptive flux and which also unified to provide the most unforgiving 24 hour news cycle our politicians have ever been forced to negotiate. The naivety and lack of awareness towards the power of this new landscape was constantly demonstrated by politicians who made gaffes by misunderstanding the now heightened level of scrutiny which they would inevitably

endure; a chaotic misdirection of party funds to old-fashioned campaigning tools like posters which eventually found more fame as internet spoofs.

Indeed, at the beginning of the campaign most politicians and their party coordinators seemed to have underestimated the danger of this expansive mediated sphere, a danger which Gordon Brown was most humiliatingly the victim of after mistakenly calling pensioner Gillian Duffy “a bigot” (Wardrop and Edwards 2010, ‘General Election 2010: Gordon Brown versus Gillian Duffy: transcript in full’, *The Telegraph*, 28<sup>th</sup> April). As a result of Brown’s failure to remove his microphone following a TV interview which seemed to exemplify his lack of media-savvy, viewed by many as his great weakness, his private expression of irritation was recorded and almost immediately broadcast on all of the 24 hour news channels, followed by the online print media, commented on by bloggers, trending on twitter, within minutes this was an international news story which was beyond the control of campaign managers. Brown then continued to his scheduled interview on the Jeremy Vine programme on Radio 2, in which he was forced to listen to the recording and respond, as well as take questions from callers on the matter. Following this extremely public humiliation and in response to growing media-hype, by the end of the day Brown had returned to Gillian Duffy’s home to apologise personally and make a statement to cameras in time for the 6 o’clock news programmes. This was an incident which many sympathetically commented was probably caused by the intensity of the long day visiting various media outlets, and it was certainly propelled at break-neck speed by the same ferocious 24 hour networks, now buoyed by the ubiquity of online media. A day later every newspaper featured a now relatively dated version of the debacle on their front pages.

These fast-moving events seemed to play out in their entirety in the instant-news sources, causing the print press to seem sluggish and irrelevant in comparison. While newspapers have long battled with their increasing status as after-the-fact commentators, now languishing behind the instant news-providers, this election served to truly highlight the demise of the traditional power-houses in election media. Much commotion was caused by the Sun’s decision in September 2009 to state that Labour had lost their support and they would now be compelling their readers to vote for the Conservatives. But the altered media structures of this election

heralded the end of power for Rupert Murdoch's vote; as the campaign progressed, it became clear that the TV debates, along with the requisite internet chatter, had catered for a large segment of society who did not identify in any tribal way with a party and who did not strongly subscribe to the views of a particular paper. As well as destabilising the power of the newspaper vote, an interesting phenomenon of the TV debates was that the initial spike in popularity that they had provoked for Nick Clegg seemed to fade away over time, with most polls suggesting that the Liberal Democrats had fallen back into third place by election day, having initially overtaken Labour in second place. What the polls surrounding the TV events actually show, therefore, is that the greatest effect was felt by the Conservatives (Telegraph Poll Tracker), who suffered a drop in their popularity and were unable to effectively target seats with Lord Ashcroft's much-publicised marginal seat cash injections. This seemed to signify a loss of control in the parties, as traditional electoral campaigning techniques were weakened.

As these conventional sources of power were gradually undermined, the strength of the online voice also seemed to accumulate, which in many cases had the effect of further challenging the resonance of established media conglomerates. As previously noted, the #nickcleggsfault hashtag on twitter for the first time provided strength to a more liberal voice which counteracted classically underhand and cynical tabloid tactics. These new voices not only provoked a degree of subversion of the traditional media, but they significantly allowed new public opinions to arise and flourish, which were in many cases the opposing views of much of 'Fleet Street'. A more vocal criticism of media tactics was also largely present in this election, thanks to video sharing through YouTube and social networking sites. For instance, the Rupert Murdoch owned Sky News channel reacted strongly against the rise of the popularity of the Liberal Democrats, as was evidenced by visible outrage at times from their presenters Kay Burley and Adam Boulton. These clips were widely viewed online, and culminated in outrage throughout the blogosphere and social networking, leading to prominent expressions of distaste towards the channel which had seemed to become extremely partisan as the campaign had unfolded. While the #sackKayBurley hashtags and coverage of Adam Boulton's argument with Alistair Campbell may have hardly dented the confidence of Sky News, it is notable

that an arena for protest of the media had clearly emerged and was functioning forcefully in providing a representation of these views which before would not have featured in the mainstream press.

Shifting media structures continued to take control away from the parties as the TV debates and the increasing prominence of American-style polling indicated that the Liberal Democrats presented a significant threat to Conservative success. Awareness of these polling figures forced the candidates to dedicate many campaigning hours to discussing the potential pitfalls of a coalition. This had the effect of removing the power to control the debate and force preferred policy issues to the fore. Indeed, by the end of the campaign, the three leaders seemed so keen to finally regain control of this expansive news cycle that they took part in almost continuous, non-stop campaigning, with Cameron and Brown actually spending 24 hours on the campaign trail on the last day.

The political events of the 2010 election were truly remarkable, in that the results provided the first hung parliament in the UK since 1974. Quinn (2010) argues that “although the Conservatives required the second-largest post-war swing to win a majority, given the circumstances they might have expected to do so” (Quinn 2010: 408). A tired Labour government, a discredited Prime Minister, the deepest recession since the 1930s, record levels of government debt and clamorous Conservative support in the traditional press could have combined to secure a win (2010: 408). Yet, the Liberal Democrats were required to take five seats in the coalition cabinet in order to form a government. This had not been guaranteed by ‘Cleggmania’, with the initial media interest eventually only manifesting a 1% increase. Rather, the results demonstrated an increased plurality, with many more votes going to minor parties:

Together, they won a record 11.9 per cent (up 1.5 per cent), with the anti-European UKIP winning nearly a million votes (but no seats) and the Greens winning their first ever seat in parliament. The BNP also saw a rise in its vote share. (Quinn 2010: 409)

## Academic Literature

In the period since the election, a significant majority of academic literature has ruminated on 2010 as the ‘social media election’, while others considered how the hung parliament and the coalition came to be, despite being a rare feature of a first past the post system.

Gibson’s study of ‘UK Party Organizations and the Use of New Media in the 2010 General Election’ (2010) takes us beyond a surface-level news-based analysis of the parties’ utilization of new media, by discussing the incorporation of these approaches into electoral politics and developing the term ‘citizen campaigning’. She suggests that the potential for political campaigns in light of the success of the Obama campaign is vast, placing “more direct autonomy and power in the hands of ordinary supporters... supported by a wider party-controlled virtual and physical infrastructure” (2010: 16). In aiming to observe the Obama model in the UK jurisdictions she finds that the UK approach certainly aimed to embrace these new media outlets and yet fell short for a number of reasons. She found that the UK sense of established hierarchy and formal membership entrenched a certain reluctance towards the informal ‘supporter’ model espoused by Obama. Furthermore, “activities such as donating to parties let alone fund-raising on their behalf that lie at the core of the new type of activism are not standard practices for UK citizens as they are for U.S. voters” (Gibson 2010: 16). Lilleker and Jackson (2010) contrast this point, suggesting that the influence of Web 2.0 in the UK general election did encourage ‘a more participatory style of election campaigning’. They suggest that the 2010 election represents a turning point away from “election campaigning [which] tends to be synonymous with top-down, persuasive and propaganda-style communication which aims to win the support of voters crucial for the victory of a candidate or party” (2010: 1). They suggest that we ought to take seriously the reshaping of communicational hierarchies through this participatory culture. Indeed, while the new media platforms were tested, Wring and Ward (2010) observe that the speculation around Facebook and Twitter, as well as the integration of the American approach was, in the end, dwarfed by television media. They note that prior to the 2010 general election that a significant excitement around online media as a tool in

electoral politics had been boosted by the “explosion of social media tools...Just prior to the election it was estimated that there were around 25 million Facebook accounts in the UK. The growth of public interest in social networking was also mirrored by UK politicians, by summer 2009 around one-third of MPs had a Facebook site and over 10% had a Twitter account” (Wring and Ward 2010: 811). Despite some skepticism around the eventual use of social media, Wring and Ward do provide some data which suggests that online voter engagement was noteworthy, in particular, that “post-election survey data suggests that the numbers of voters looking for information online more than doubled to around a third of the population” (2010: 815). Somewhat expectedly, they demonstrate that online electoral campaigning was prominent in the 18 – 24 demographic: “Across the board, the younger age cohorts, most notably the 18 – 24 years old group, were significantly more likely to have engaged with online information. Over two-thirds of 18 – 24 year olds claimed to have accessed MSM sites and 43% visited official party sites” (Wring and Ward 2010: 815). Wring and Ward are right to conclude that the main event of the 2010 election was indeed the televised Leaders’ Debates. However, what their data ultimately reveals is that, in accordance with Lilleker and Jackson (2010), there had been a significant reshaping of the communicative structures in place. They concede that “the leadership debates, whilst not necessarily influencing the outcome of the election, certainly helped shape the narrative of the campaign by elevating the status of the Liberal Democrat leader” (2010: 815). Indeed, in this research, when we are concerned not with the overall characterization of the election, or the outcome, but rather with the underlying communication structures, it is clear that a notable shift has occurred.

## Crime in the 2010 General Election: The Leaders' Debates

While the media landscape was being utilised in dramatically new ways and the parties jostled to form a coalition the 2010 UK General Election provided an unforeseen light-touch approach to crime which seemed to entirely contradict previous expectations. Where were the front page stories cataloguing the political tough sentences arms race and where indeed, was the public outcry demanding such strong crime rhetoric? The story of this election was instead one of policy issues; which party could stave off a double-dip recession and provide a convincing approach to dealing with immigration, of procedural issues; which party could form a stable government and which would reform politics, and of the subversion of the traditional media outlets; which party could negotiate the new media landscape, emerging triumphant from Leaders' Debates and twitter scandals, while producing a poster which was fully vandal-proof.

Despite the relative obscurity of discussions of law and order, I have focused on those which did surface, in an attempt to assess the content of crime narratives in this election. As discussed, the Leaders' Debates represented the most prominent moments of the campaign. The content of the debates was highly choreographed, after a detailed format had been agreed on by all three parties. It was decided that the three debates would be separated by topic into Domestic, International and Economic Affairs, although it was notable that a question on immigration featured in each of these debates. 'Law and Order' was therefore featured in the first debate only and the following was the only crime-related question to be asked throughout these intensely high-profile events:

Good evening. I was born and still work in Burnley, Lancashire. The town has the highest burglary rate per head of population in the entire country. What confidence can you give me that towns such as this all over the UK can be made safer places to live and work?

This question is extremely important in attempting to understand the nature of the crime narrative here, as it undoubtedly represents the most high profile discussion of the 'law and order' issue that occurred throughout this election. Furthermore, with .4 million viewers and the surrounding media coverage, it is likely to have made an incalculable impact on the public perception of crime. What is perhaps most interesting about this question, is the very tame approach taken by this question. Perhaps because crime figures had consistently fallen under Labour, with a 7% drop in England and Wales from 2008 to 2009 (Home Office 2009, 'Crime in England and Wales 2008/2009'), the conventional approach of attacking the current government's record is not adopted here. Furthermore, the question does not reach for an overtly emotive crime-related subject, nor does it even suggest that crime is high. Instead, the questioner has opted to discuss the highest burglary rate, which does not even presuppose that burglary itself is unusually high in this town; simply that it statistically has the highest occurrence. Of course, it is likely that the question was designed to allow the three leaders to discuss whichever broadly crime-related areas that they wished to tackle, which is how the debate progressed.

David Cameron began by summarising a broad-level analysis of the faults of the criminal justice system:

We're not seeing enough police on the streets, we're not catching enough burglars, we're not convicting enough. Then we do, when we do convict them, they're not getting long enough sentences.

This sets a precedent for the level of depth in discussion as the pressure to articulate a clear message in such a short time generally forces the three leaders to engage by utilising these condensed soundbites. Cameron then goes on to relate a personal anecdote, which will feature as a recurring theme throughout his various responses and seems to be utilised most frequently in the questions where he particularly aims to seem relatable:



I went to Crosby the other day and I was talking to a woman there who had been burgled by someone who had just left prison. He stole everything in her house. As he left, he set fire to the sofa and her son died from the fumes. That burglar, that murderer, could be out of prison in just four-and-a-half years. The system doesn't work, but that sort of sentence is, I think, just completely unacceptable in terms of what the public expect for proper punishment.

Cameron's response has altered the tone here from the neutral and measured question to an emotive atmosphere of alarm. Despite the fact that the point he makes here is about his view of sentencing, he has chosen to conjure up a picture of a wicked burglary which ended in the murder of a child; this is an example of the cynical crime narrative we have come to expect. Through the utilisation of fearful imagery it attempts to deliberately provoke our punitive urges.

The Liberal Democrat response in this scenario is a particularly interesting one. Much of the analysis of this first debate focussed on the increased publicity given to this smaller third party, which had in recent decades struggled to gain momentum due to the structurally reinforced power of the Westminster 'two-party system'. As mentioned previously, this media event served to "break the duopoly in British politics" (Grice, Morris and Mendelsohn 2010, 'Clegg smashes through two-party system', *The Independent*, 16<sup>th</sup> April) and gave the Liberal Democrat leader a surge in popularity. For our purposes, this sudden publicity put Nick Clegg in a position to comment on 'law and order' in a potentially significant way:

Jacqueline, you asked, what can we do to stop burglary happening over and over and over and over again. Two things: firstly, quite simply, more police on our streets. This government wants to waste billions of your money on an ID card system so you have to pay for the privilege of having lots of your own details on a piece of plastic card that you carry around. For pretty well exactly the amount of money, your money, that the government is pouring into that, we could put 3,000 more police officers on the streets. That is the absolute priority for me. The second

thing is this: there are too many young offenders who start first getting into trouble with low-level nuisance anti-social behaviour who become the hardened criminals of tomorrow. What we've got to do is stop the young offenders of today becoming the hardened criminals tomorrow. In my city of Sheffield, where I'm an MP, we've done some great things to do exactly that. That's the way to get burglary and crime down.

Notably, we see the Liberal Democrat aspiration for the protection of civil liberties highlighted here with a reference to the curtailing of plans to introduce ID cards suggesting that their approach to 'law and order' would be constructed in conjunction with this priority, and in line with necessary cost-cutting. While Clegg does opt for the popular 'more police on the streets' theme, there is also particular emphasis on tackling crime early by targeting young offenders. In comparison with the Conservative response, the narrative here is, at first glance, one of longer-term structural change and a civil libertarian approach to 'law and order'. While Clegg does reach for some populism by promising more police on the streets, his choice of approach is far less forceful and does not seem to make claims to strengthen punishment. It is perhaps worthy of note that at a moment of such political significance for the Liberal Democrats, Clegg apparently does not feel it is worthwhile engaging in the kind of forceful 'tough on crime' punitiveness which has proven a vote-winner in previous years. This, in itself, must raise questions about the necessity of 'law and order' as integral to election campaigns.

In contrast, Gordon Brown's characterisation of the Labour Party approach to 'law and order' is more typical of those which had been expected, in that it refers to successes, yet deliberately diminishes them in favour of a fear-based narrative:

Jacqueline, as long as anybody feels unsafe, and as long as anybody feels insecure, even although crime is falling - official crime figures show it's falling, and violent crime is falling - I feel that we have got to do far more.

In recent decades, there has rarely been such an opportune moment for the Labour Party to reassure the public by stressing that crime is falling and that some of their policies have proven successful, but they seem to prefer that reassurance is provided through a promise 'to do far more'. Brown also opts for a similar fear-based narrative as Cameron's, but rather than painting a picture of the crimes which might befall us, he simply tells us that we feel unsafe and insecure. The Labour Party are now a victim of the 'second-order consensus' on crime, in that they are forced to continue with a narrative of fear and promises to increase punitiveness, despite their own successes and a fall in crime. This adheres to the rule that to cede ground on 'law and order' is to risk defeat. He continues:

And that's why there's three things I want to suggest this evening that will make people safer. One is we've got to have effective policing on the streets. Police have got to spend 80% of their time now on the streets. We've got record police numbers in this country, and we want to maintain that level of police force over the next few years. The second thing is, parents have got to accept responsibility for their children. If an order is passed against a teenager, then the parent has also got to accept responsibility, and we're bringing that in now. The third thing I would say is this: if you are dissatisfied with the way the police are treating or the police are dealing with your case, and you are persistently denied the rights you have, then we'll give you the right to take an injunction against the police so you can be sure that your rights against anti-social behaviour and crime are upheld.

We see Brown again contribute in the race to put more police on the street, this time superficially beating the others by promising 80% of police hours on the streets. We are then promised that parents will accept responsibility and that we may seek injunctions against the police, neither of which hint at long term plans towards dealing with crime, but both of which feed the sense of personal injustice and 'ontological insecurity' of previous elections.

The allotted time spent debating 'law and order' issues continues in a manner which is quite consistent with the positions set out. David Cameron laments the state of the criminal justice system through emotive anecdotes:

I even went to a drug rehab recently in my own constituency, and met a young man who told me that he committed a certain amount of crimes so he could get in front of a judge who could then get him a place in a residential rehab centre. We must be mad as a country not to get people into that residential rehab to get them to clean up their lives, so we cut the crime on our own streets...

I went to a Hull police station the other day. They had five different police cars, and they were just about to buy a £73,000 Lexus. There's money that could be saved to get the police on the frontline. The Metropolitan Police have 400 uniformed officers in their human resources department. Our police officers should be crime fighters, not form-fillers, and that's what needs to change...

My mother was a magistrate in Newbury for 30 years. She sat on the bench, and she did use those short prison sentences that you're talking about. I've got to tell you, when someone smashes up the bus stop, when someone repeatedly breaks the law, when someone's found fighting on a Friday or Saturday night, as a magistrate, you've got to have that power for a short prison sentence when you've tried the other remedies.

What is notable as Cameron progresses is that actually he does use his time to constructively challenge the proposed policies of the Lib Dems and Labour, while he also seems to voice some sympathy for a long-term approach to dealing with the social issues which cause crime. However, his line of questioning is framed by these emotive anecdotes, which illustrate his particular points but do not address the situation as a whole. As Gordon Brown progresses he also takes the chance to provide one example of Labour's 'tough on the causes of crime' approach, citing a

young offenders' institution in Reading which had reduced reoffending. However, this approach is once again couched in a punitive voice:

Will you match our funding on the police? The answer is no from your manifesto. This is not Question Time. It's answer time, David...

That's why there are 20,000 more people in prison as a result of the tougher sentences we've been passing. But you've got to answer this question: we will continue to match the funding of the police as of now. You are saying you're going to cut it. Now, be honest with the public, because you can't airbrush your policies, even though you can airbrush your posters.

An interesting and somewhat novel element of the Labour narrative here is the introduction of the theme of old-fashioned family values. This approach employs penal populist rhetoric which evokes symbolically-charged 'better times' to provide some form of society-wide comfort. This is employed frequently when Brown presents a strong symbolic juxtaposition between old fashioned family values and the present day requirement for strength in 'law and order':

When I was young, my father ran a youth club with my brother for young people, and the more people who do voluntary service and give their time in the community to getting young people off the streets doing purposeful activity, the better, whether it's sports, dancing or music or other activities that get people off the streets. But the one thing I'm absolutely sure of - we've got to maintain the numbers of police we have in this country.

Labour demonstrate their weddedness to populist punitiveness here, as they reach for nostalgia for the past, fear for the present and unparalleled commitment to policing and imprisonment for the future.

Finally, observing Nick Clegg's responses throughout the rest of the crime portion of the debate gives us an even clearer idea of how he may use his status as a

novelty to change the shape of the crime narrative. Building on his previous approach, he is careful not to seem inconsiderate to those concerned about crime, but in some way he attempts to use the current conventions of the crime debate to his advantage. Indeed, he does indulge in a fearful narrative, taking the opportunity to follow Cameron's lead with a personal anecdote:

I met a young man in London the other day. His flat had been burgled five times, and one of them, would you believe it, Jacqueline, was when he was away at his father's funeral. He said to me "Why can't this stop?"

In a political debate in which the main aim is to make the fewest memorable mistakes, it is likely that all of the candidates learned the lesson of US Presidential Candidate Michael Dukakis (see Simon 2007), that to seem in any way unsympathetic to victims is extremely politically dangerous. This is a potent reminder that even as law and order recedes from the core of electoral politics, that the narrative of the 'victim' is one which still commands a certain immovable level of force from our leaders. However, Clegg manages to parlay this necessity for punitiveness into a criticism of the other leaders, which allows him to successfully construct the seemingly powerful notion of Liberal Democrats as the only different party:

I think what makes me so angry is that again, it's like the immigration debate: so much tough talk from different governments of different parties for so long has turned our prisons into overcrowded colleges of crime. Do you know that young men going into prison now on short-term prison sentences now come out, and nine out of ten of them reoffend, so we are reproducing more crime than actually cutting it. What I've seen in my city of Sheffield is that you get these youngsters not when they've done serious crimes, but when they're first starting to get into trouble, to face their victims, explain why they've done what they've done to their victims, apologise for what they've done, make up for what they've done in the community, cleaning up parks and streets. It has a dramatic effect

on their behaviour. I want to change people's behaviour before they become the criminals of tomorrow.

For the first time, we see a very visible criticism of the established approach and in contrast to Gordon Brown's assertion that 20,000 more are in prison as a result of Labour's tougher sentences, the leaders are now forced to confront the issue of whether short sentences work, and ultimately whether the traditional punitiveness is the only effective approach.

Thus, while this leaders' debate did not seem to signal a shift in the 'second-order consensus' of a fear-based narrative coupled with a punitive penal machismo for Labour or the Conservatives, the increased visibility of Nick Clegg in the debate has perhaps signalled a distinct interference with the pessimistic trajectory of today's crime narratives. Indeed, the strongest discussion-point provoked by the first debate was:

...the insertion of Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats into the nation's consciousness but [that] nothing the other leaders said had fundamentally altered the general election debate. The abiding memory of the contest could be "the other leaders saying 'I agree with Nick.'"

(Robinson 2010, 'Election 2010: Three way clashes in historic TV debate', *BBC News*, 15<sup>th</sup> April)

Therefore, while it was without doubt the most high profile discussion of crime in the election and does tell us a great deal about the party approaches to constructing their crime narratives, it remains a small part of the broader story.

### **Example: Primary Empirical Material and Discourse Analysis**

What follows is an extract from field notes, honing in explicitly on crime issues in the Leaders' Debate as well as a more detailed example of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis conducted.

## FIELD NOTES

15<sup>th</sup> April 2010

- First election debate in advance of 6<sup>th</sup> May election
- First televised debate ever
- Uncertainty over rules so long preamble about the rules.
- This debate will focus on domestic affairs, as all the issues have been split between channels to fit with broadcasting fairness rules
- Audience told to participate via [itv.com/electiondebate](http://itv.com/electiondebate)
- Brief opening statement from each of the leaders, starting with Nick Clegg, focus on persuading that there is an alternative to usual two parties
- Then Gordon Brown, global financial crisis is focus, strong economy
- Then David Cameron, hopes that the debates will restore faith in politicians following MPs expenses scandal
- First question about immigration, Gerard Oliver, retired toxicologist from Cheshire
- Studio is very silent, audience seem to have been instructed not to clap or make any noise
- Proceedings tightly controlled by the presenter, seems largely quite staged, leaders seem very prepared, very little off the cuff interaction or challenge in this first debate

Presenter:

Our next question is on Law and Order and I need to point out that it is an area where powers are devolved to Scotland and the Assembly in Northern Ireland.

- Presenter provides a lot of context and reminds everyone firmly of the rules. This is much more in the American Presidential style and feels very foreign to the usual British political setting. This looks like an episode of Question Time, but it's much more quiet and regimented

This question comes from Optician and mother of two Jacqueline.  
Jacqueline, your question...

Good evening. I was born and still work in Burnley, Lancashire. The town has the highest burglary rate per head of population in the entire country. What confidence can you give me that towns such as this all over the UK can be made safer places to live and work?

- Very general question, while she mentions burglary, this is clearly just a staged, broad question. Undermines the format a little that this whole approach is so staged and regimented. Not necessarily



allowing much free flowing debate, rather prepared questions and prepared answers. Still, this is what we can infer.

[Silence, cuts to David Cameron]

Well Jacqueline, the system isn't working properly now, there's no doubt about it, we're not seeing enough police on the streets, we're not catching enough burglars, we're not convicting enough. Then we do, when we do convict them, they're not getting long enough sentences.

[cut to questioner, she nods]

I went to Crosby the other day and I was talking to a woman there who had been burgled by someone who had just left prison. He stole everything in her house and as he left, he set fire to the sofa and her son died from the fumes... and that burglar, that murderer, could be out of prison in just four-and-a-half years. Now, the system doesn't work, but that sort of sentence is, I think, just completely unacceptable in terms of what the public expect for proper punishment.

What have we got to do? Well we've got to get rid of the paperwork and the bureaucracy and get the police out on the streets...

[DC begins to pound fist]

- This is clearly a very thoroughly prepared answer, Cameron gets to say basically whatever he has prepared on law and order because the question was so general

We need very clear signals from our criminal justice system that if you cross someone's threshold, rob their home, you go to prison and you go to prison for a long time....

Interrupted by presenter....

... Nick Clegg

Notes for discourse analysis...

#### 1: DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

- Identifiable social relationship here is the formalized debate
- Lexical references indicate very little discussion that hasn't been pre-planned

## 2: DISCOURSES

- At this stage the discourses are following the patterns established by this format in a very regimented way.
- Possibly a sense that since this is the first debate, they might not want to shout over each other in case they put off audiences or prove that this was a failed experiment in the UK

## 3: ACTION ORIENTATION

- Here, DC speaks to Jacqueline, but in a formal, trained manner. She poses the question in a formal manner by necessity but his response is more like forced friendliness. It feels with this question and with the rest that they have all been told to say 'yes Jacqueline', repeat the person's name
- He pounds his fist or points his hand as he raises alarm about the burglaries, attempts to infuse emotion into his voice and communicate empathy and concern about the subject

## 4: POSITIONINGS

- Leader of the Conservative Party, presenter, member of the public, audience
- 'I went to Crosby the other day' though, tries to lower DC's positioning to man of the people

## 5: PRACTICE

- Each person acts exactly as we might expect in this situation, it seems to enforce formality
- There is an attempt to relate and use specific stories in order to step out of powerful position

## 6: SUBJECTIVITY

- The 'went to Crosby' theme is expected and commonly used
- This is a method employed, as well as the repeating of the questioner's name, to try to help DC seem more relatable and likeable and down to

earth, but any attempts in this direction are stifled by the formality of the setting

### **Crime in the 2010 General Election: The Party Positions**

The extremely high visibility and perceived popularity of the debate format which had been piloted in the first Leaders' Debate spawned several department-specific replicas as part of the daytime political commentary programme 'The Daily Politics'. These featured representatives on each subject, again from the three largest parties and aired during the day on BBC 2. As a result, it should be noted that these were by no means high profile and received virtually no coverage in other press outlets. However, I include them here as they provided a unique opportunity for the potential Home Secretaries or Justice Ministers to outline their party narratives on specific elements of 'law and order', far beyond the sparse detail revealed by the 10 minute slot in the Leaders' Debate. Therefore, while the content included can tell us very little about what the general public were able to receive and internalise on crime, it does provide us with more detail on what the parties were explicitly aiming to communicate.

The 'Crime Debate' took place on April 20<sup>th</sup>, soon after the first Leaders' Debate and featured then Home Secretary Alan Johnson for Labour, Chris Grayling from the Conservative Party who eventually ceded the role of Home Secretary to Ken Clarke and Chris Huhne from the Liberal Democrats, who would go on to become Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change in the ensuing coalition government. A similar format to the Leaders' Debates was adopted and thus each participant was allowed a short summarising opening statement. These were virtually identical in content and tone to the messages espoused by the leaders: Alan Johnson mentioned progress made while stressing the needs of victims and increased policing, while Chris Grayling reached for emotive catchphrases including "on your side rather than the side of the criminal" (all quotes taken from transcribed notes 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010). Finally, Chris Huhne continued to construct the argument first posited by Nick Clegg that their "policies are based on the evidence of what works... the debate is too much about what sounds good in the papers". Here we start to see a concerted effort

on the part of the Liberal Democrats to really progress with the notion that they could provide a useful perspective by altering the debate, a theme which had proven integral to the surge in Liberal Democrat popularity.

The questions posed here provoked an interesting debate, forcing each candidate to move beyond a general position and engage with the detail of issues like knife crime, the validity of certain crime statistics, antisocial behaviour, funding for policing and the DNA database. Furthermore, the nature of the crime narratives constructed by New Labour were called into question when BBC Home Affairs editor Mark Easton asked Alan Johnson; “Isn’t the real failure of your government actually that people are more frightened of crime now than they were when you came into office?” However, while the Liberal Democrats were keen to blame the other parties for participating in thoughtless punitiveness, they again seemed unwilling to go further and deconstruct the fear-based narrative that all parties have so willingly involved themselves in. The responses here demonstrate an unwillingness on the part of the three candidates to acknowledge that these increased levels of fear could be viewed as problematic; Johnson refutes the statement preferring to stress that confidence in the police has increased; Huhne diverts attention to escalating levels of knife crime and states that the public are right to be afraid, while Grayling ignores the point altogether:

We need solutions. Recently a teenager was shot... there was a murder in a railway... a shopkeeper was beaten to death... we can talk all day about statistics but we need to nip this in the bud.

The real shift away from the traditional populism in ‘law and order’ politics is most visible during the discussion of prisons, which has been prompted by the Liberal Democrat proposal that there “should be a presumption against short sentences” (Chris Huhne). Chris Grayling suggests: “We have to create a zero tolerance approach to carrying a knife, the Lib Dems want to release 50,000 prisoners a year” , while Chris Huhne attempts to discuss progressive penal policy:

We have the highest prison population in Europe per head and if prison was so effective it would be having a much bigger impact on crime. If you look across international criminological evidence, what really matters is what's happening in prisons... If you look at short term sentences, for a young man the re-offending rate is 92%. These are colleges of crime, they are learning tricks... We must make sure there is a presumption against short sentences. Community Sentences can have a better effect.

This trend, as set out by Nick Clegg and advanced by Chris Huhne would seem to mark a change in the position that to cede the ground on forceful crime policy, is to severely inhibit your electoral appeal. Furthermore, this debate did seem to prove that the leaders and potential justice ministers held rigidly to the same accounts and that therefore, the parties had seemingly articulated a strictly constructed narrative on crime. This is important because it shows a unity of message which would suggest a certain awareness of intent in adhering to the fear-based narratives which demonstrate an emotional connection to victims, while Labour and the Conservatives also continued with their preferred messages of more prison places, more police, more punishment. For the Liberal Democrats to specifically avoid this approach at a time of such political significance for them has to suggest a fading of the electoral power of established populism. Finally, while it is true that this short term boost in popularity for the Liberal Democrats did not translate into significantly more votes, Cutts, Fieldhouse and Russell suggest in their piece 'The Campaign That Changed Everything and Still Did Not Matter' (2010), that despite great campaign gains and perceived policy successes, that various parts of particular electoral politics combined to deprive them of much success. They suggest that as the prospect of a coalition emerged, the Liberal Democrats expressed a preference to align with whichever party was the largest. In doing so, they ruled out a centre-left alliance which had the effect of "put[ting] off soft-Labour or 'floating' voters from the centre left, who have traditionally formed an important part of the Liberal Democrat vote base" (Cutts, Fieldhouse and Russell 2010: 704). Furthermore, it is suggested that the popularity in polls failed to translate into votes because the polls

reflected a purer expression of what voters might do if their vote was “unfettered by the complexities of local competition and history” (Cutts, Fieldhouse and Russell 2010: 705). As such, many voters who were constrained by the First Past the Post system opted to make best possible use of their vote by deciding between Labour or the Conservatives in their particular constituency battle.

As a result, we can conclude that the Liberal Democrats and their popularity which had been stoked by social media, had a significant impact in changing the law and order narrative and that this attempt at ceding the ground on populist punitiveness did not instrumentally damage their campaign.

### **Crime in the 2010 General Election: The Traditional Media Outlets**

Within an election which saw a marked increase in the expression of views on the internet and through social networking media, we would perhaps expect the impact of traditional paper manifestos to be minimal. However, the Guardian (Flood 2010, ‘Bookshop boom for political manifestos’, *The Guardian*, 28<sup>th</sup> April) reported a 160% rise in total sales compared to the 2005 election, with the Lib Dem manifesto up by 250%, the Conservative manifesto up by 193% and Labour up 97%. What these figures most likely represent is an increased interest in the campaign following the high level of publicity generated by the Leaders’ Debates and in response to the feeling that a change in government was imminent. Indeed, we saw this augmentation translate into a somewhat improved voter turnout of 65.1%, up from 61.4% in 2005 (UK Political Info: Voter Turnout). However, the unusually high jump in manifesto sales seemed to signify an engagement with party policies which had been distinctly lacking in the previous election, which had been viewed as unwinnable by any party other than Labour. As a result, the content of the manifestos is perhaps worthy of note, in attempting to gain an understanding of what the public actively perceived of the parties’ crime stances. Furthermore, as previously noted, this election saw a marked increase in the consumption of party policies online and as such, the party approach to law and order has had a significant reach.

The three main party manifestos each proposed a theme which broadly indicated the kind of country they would like Britain to become. When they were

written it was widely believed that the Conservatives would gain a majority of seats and would comfortably be able to form the next government. As a result, the Conservative manifesto is titled ‘Invitation to Join the Government of Britain’ and details their idea of the ‘Big Society’, in which they essentially propose changes which move away from government intervention and instead highlight greater personal responsibility. The Labour Party manifesto is entitled ‘A Future Fair for All’ and features an art deco picture of a family in the countryside which was taken directly from their 1923 campaign poster (2010, ‘Labour launches election manifesto’, *Channel 4 News*, 12<sup>th</sup> April). This evoked Labour’s preferred theme of old-fashioned family-values and aimed to move the focus away from the unpopular policies of recent years. As I noted previously, Labour’s attempt to focus continuously on ‘family’ created a narrative similar to that of punishment; emotive and seemingly unchallengeable. Finally, the Liberal Democrat manifesto was entitled ‘Change that works for you: Building a Fairer Britain’ and emphasised their characteristic preference for tackling social inequality while maintaining forceful protection of civil liberties, as well as the argument that they represented a change from the old parties.

The role of ‘law and order’ within these broad themes was varied, with each party dedicating a chapter to the subject but not necessarily placing it at the forefront of their list of priorities. Indeed, in examining the priorities specifically detailed by the parties, it becomes apparent that various other political challenges have dwarfed any mention of crime and punishment:

We will rebuild the economy to secure the recovery and invest in future growth and jobs. We will renew our society to further strengthen the communities that bind our country together. And we will restore trust in politics with greater transparency and accountability in a system battered by the expenses scandal. Over the next ten years we will confront major challenges - intensive global competition, climate change, an ageing society, and bringing stability to Afghanistan. (Labour)

Today the challenges facing Britain are immense. Our economy is overwhelmed by debt, our social fabric is frayed and our political system has betrayed the people. Only together can we get rid of this government and, eventually, its debt. Only together can we get the economy moving. Only together can we protect the NHS. Improve our schools. Mend our broken society. Together we can even make politics and politicians work better. (Conservatives)

Only Liberal Democrats will shake up the tax system to put £700 back in the pockets of tens of millions of low and middle-income families, paid for by ensuring the wealthy pay their fair-share. Only Liberal Democrats will break up the banks and start Britain building things again, creating a sustainable economy that no longer threatens our planet's future. Only Liberal Democrats will invest in our schools to give every child, no matter their background, a fair start in life. And only Liberal Democrats will sort out our rotten political system once and for all. (Liberal Democrats)

While law and order is certainly referred to under the guise of the Conservatives 'broken society' and Labour's 'strengthening communities', it is clear that issues like the economy and restoring trust in politics are now the issues which the parties feel they must address as priorities in order to win votes. This is clearly no longer a situation in which 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' would be enough to inspire loyalty in voters.

An examination of the law and order policies detailed reveals that they consist of much of the same content as that expressed during the debates. Labour's crime segment is combined with immigration and promises more frontline policing and faster action on antisocial behaviour in order to confront 'fear of crime'. The other significant elements carry an expected tone of competitive toughness: police spending 80% of time on the streets, no-nonsense action to tackle dysfunctional families, a right to legal injunctions for repeat victims and expanding tough 'Community Payback' for offenders who don't go to prison. Again, while law and



order is not a priority, Labour emphasise the fear they have constructed and promise to tackle it with more punitive measures.

The Conservative chapter 'Fight Back Against Crime' presents a narrative that Britain is subject to a crime epidemic of which we are losing control and that more punitive approaches are the answer. The policies proposed to deal with this are as we might expect; tough measures against knife crime, a crack-down on binge drinking, more police on the streets and democratic control over policing, honesty in sentencing and private schemes to reduce re-offending. They suggest that the incumbent government have allowed the country's crime situation to run out of control, the Conservatives even refute the statistics provided by the British Crime Survey which state that crime has fallen significantly since 1997. Furthermore, in this time of panic, the only option is supposedly an assuredly punitive response. Interestingly, the Conservatives seem to champion the idea that they have found the answer to 'the crime problem' in 'New York style policing'. The cover of their crime chapter features a picture of a New York cop and states that:

New York shows that it is possible to get a grip and cut crime. Over the past twenty years, serious crime in New York has fallen by 80 per cent, thanks to proactive community-based policing and the intelligent use of new technologies and crime data. (Conservative Manifesto 2010: 54)

This highly visible, reference to New York is symptomatic of both the 'we can fix it' attitude of opposition parties and a tendency to look to America, which foreshadows the rest of the campaign.

The Liberal Democrat manifesto on crime sits far to the left of Labour on the political spectrum and of all the parties suggests the most alternative approaches which often follow their attitude to prisons. For instance, while they do join in by promising more police on the streets, they also adopt the quite controversial stance that they will "ensure that financial resources and police and court time, are not wasted on the unnecessary prosecution and imprisonment of drug users and addicts; the focus instead should be on getting addicts the treatment they need. Police should concentrate their efforts on organised drug pushers and gangs" (Liberal Democrat

Manifesto 2010: 74). Indeed, much of the Liberal Democrat narrative adheres to this tenor; whether or not these policies would work better than those of the other parties is uncertain, but it is at least clear that they wish to propose alternatives.

The impact of the Leaders' Debates seemed to overshadow the role of the Party Election Broadcast as central to the communication of the party message. However, high viewing figures along with a series of controversies seemed to keep them relatively high on the public agenda. The first PEB from Labour was watched by 9 million viewers on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April (Deans 2010, 'TV ratings: Party election broadcasts watched by almost 9m', *The Guardian*, 13<sup>th</sup> April) and set the tone for a series of extremely dystopian, fear-inducing images of the future. This particular broadcast (see bibliography for link) consisted of a man walking down a country road while discussing Conservative opposition to Labour's supposedly successful economic measures. The broadcast creates a sense of foreboding and shows a collapsing, flooded, dangerous road as a metaphor for Conservative economic policy. This theme of dystopia was continued throughout the PEBs, with the Liberal Democrats presenting a world littered with broken promises and the Conservatives listing all of the negative things that happen in a minute of Labour power including, among others; "7 incidents of anti-social behaviour, 2 violent crimes committed while more police officers fill in forms than walk the beat" (see bibliography for link). Most notable for our purposes was that crime did not feature on any of the broadcasts except this Conservative one, while the economy was the main focus of almost all of the rest. However, it is interesting that fear was the theme throughout, with Labour in particular attracting much negative attention from their advert which featured a Conservative bureaucrat telling a man he could no longer see his cancer specialist. Fear was apparently still a prominent political tool, although it was notable that the role of crime in this narrative seemed to have been replaced by economic concerns.

The presence of crime in campaign posters was minimal, with two notable instances (see bibliography for posters); a Conservative poster showed a picture of a smiling Gordon Brown and the words: "I LET 80,000 CRIMINAL OUT EARLY VOTE FOR ME". Also, the Labour party issued a poster featuring David Cameron's face on an 'Ashes to Ashes' character's body alongside a caption which read; "Don't

let him take Britain back to the 1980s”, which they later withdrew having realised that the particular character was a well-loved trustworthy policeman. Rather than functioning as a useful tool in electoral politics, the campaign posters throughout this election seemed to highlight the subversion of traditional media, as they became widely vandalized. As noted in the Independent:

The subversion by online parodists of a succession of poster campaigns may have put paid permanently to the idea that electoral success can be bought. From the airbrushed Camerons on the eve of the campaign to Labour's "Ashes to Ashes" attack on the Conservative leader, it has seemed that, the more parties have spent, the more their opponents have benefited.

(2010, 'The People's Election: 15 reasons to celebrate a campaign that could change the face of British politics forever', *The Independent*, 6<sup>th</sup> May)

Indeed, this election threw constant surprises at the parties and an enduring and inescapable theme was that the traditional, rigorously planned methods of electioneering seemed to be consistently undermined by events which could not have been predicted, or were confounded by an underestimation of the power of new media. In attempting to understand the diminished presence of 'law and order' in this election, I would suggest that perhaps the most significant contributing factor was the eventful nature of the campaign itself.

This was a campaign which quite uniquely was fought during a recession, which meant that the economy was consistently at the forefront of every discussion and policy proposal and may even have had an impact on the amount that the parties felt that they could claim to spend on 'law and order' issues. This was in evidence quite clearly in some cases, for instance, the Liberal Democrat proposal to increase policing was made in conjunction with a promise to scrap ID cards as a way of off-setting the cost. This prominent issue, along with the public feeling of mistrust towards politicians in light of the expenses scandal, meant that there were two issues for candidates to answer for which were extremely immediate and significant in the public consciousness. This set the tone for much of the debate and in a large way accounted for a move away from traditional key areas of crime, health and schools as integral to the campaigns. As the election campaign progressed throughout April,

the content of economic debate took on new significance, as an independent think tank, the Institute of Fiscal Studies criticised the parties for failing to reveal in adequate detail how exactly they would make cuts to reduce the deficit. The Economist complained:

The Conservatives, Labour and Lib Dems are joined in a conspiracy of silence. They are failing to disclose the gory details of how and where they would swing the axe on spending and the extent to which they may raise taxes after the election.

(2010, 'The hole in the election', *The Economist*, 29<sup>th</sup> April)

This had the effect of making the markets, as well as the public, extremely nervous and put extra pressure on the parties to provide economic assurances.

The first Leaders' Debate also completely altered the tenor of subsequent exchanges as much attention turned to the increased popularity of Nick Clegg and the likelihood that there may be a hung parliament. The result of such predictions was that the parties were forced to argue around procedural issues, with the Conservatives in particular frenziedly constructing a rhetoric which aimed to make the public fearful of the uncertainty of coalitions. This was followed by an unprecedented focus on Parliamentary process, with the Liberal Democrats pushing their requirement for voting reform on to the agenda, hinting that proportional representation would be a requirement of any coalition. This seemingly overnight transformation of politics through 'Cleggmania' captivated the public and resulted in a huge increase in late voter registration. These conspicuous issues so engrossed the candidates, the media and the public that the everyday standards of electoral politics were now merely background noise against a tide of diverted enthusiasm.

## Law and Order in the 2010 General Election

Having observed the detail of law and order discussion as part of the broader picture of the 2010 election, I have aimed to capture a comprehensive picture of criminal justice narratives along with their place in a broader linguistic realm. By focusing on the multidimensional elements at play, I have attempted to unearth the structures

which enable and can alter the political communication of crime in today's electoral politics.

It has been clear from this case study that there is some cause to question the certainty of penal populism. The lack of prominence of law and order politics in this election demonstrated that populist criminal justice narratives were no longer a feature at the forefront and were not instrumental to political success here. I have demonstrated that the Conservative Party and the Labour Party did revert to populist punitiveness and yet this was not a key feature in their electoral campaigns, nor did it ultimately secure a victory for the Conservatives. You could argue that the Conservatives were deferring to populist punitiveness themes in their treatment of crime and in the end they were the most successful party, but this would ignore the crucial nature of the crime debate; essentially it featured as background noise, a forceful allusion to victims rights in the Leaders' Debates and little else in comparison with the many more prominent issues at stake in 2010. It has been useful here to take a rigorous approach to data collection in aiming to examine the microsociological detail of the construction of crime narratives; we have seen what the party positions on crime were and how exactly they were communicated. However, the most striking conclusion of this case study is that law and order was simply not a prominent feature of the campaign. Considering the history of law and order elections since the 1970s, this is an unprecedented moment and worthy of note in aiming to assess the role of crime in politics. If we wish to better negotiate the vote-driven political landscape in arguing for evidence-based rather than emotion-driven criminal justice policy, it is hopeful to know that in truth, there is no insurmountable link between an irrationally 'tough on crime' approach and electoral success.

Secondly, the huge uptake and substantial power of new media frameworks confirmed a blurring in the reception and generation of information in the construction of narratives. While I would not wish to suggest that social media has overpowered television media or has been employed with the same vigour as the American example, what the introduction of these new frameworks along with examples like Cleggmania and the Gillian Duffy controversy demonstrate, is that there is undeniably a new force in the construction of narratives; the public voice. It

is common to see academic discussions of social media view this realm with some skepticism. We have seen that the boost in popularity propelled by social media does not necessarily translate into an altered electoral landscape. We have also seen that the introduction of social media in politics has the biggest impact in the 18 – 24 demographic. However, I would argue that rather than focusing on the potentially faddish and insubstantial nature of Twitter and Facebook, we ought to take seriously the opening up of a powerful and easily mobilized public voice through these evolving media structures. Certainly there have been swellings of public sentiment in the past, but it is true to say that any such ‘public opinion’ has been delivered through the editorialized voice of traditional media. The new media realm is vast but it is in many ways truly democratic. The most pressing issues of the day rise to prominence in social media and are fed back to politicians, the public are active participants rather than fearful, voiceless and manipulated. It is certainly possible that criminal justice issues will rise through social media, we will see how alternative perspectives on ‘crime’ were allowed to flourish in the phone hacking scandal and the riots. However, in this election, the economy took centre stage and there was little traction in the cynical crime narratives which were presented.

The crucial difference between old media and new media in the construction of knowledge and ideas is that the public voice has an accessible outlet in which they can take part in naturally evolving Interaction Ritual Chains, in the process from small scale interaction to broader righteous anger which has not been preordained or manipulated. In the previous structure, the role of traditional media was to feed us powerful symbols which would trigger this anger. As such, criminal justice became a staple of this success; a victim, an atrocious act, would trigger the necessary mutual entrainment, the reaching for a Durkheimian sacred object which would sate us, give us something to defend. Today this escalation is natural, it is no longer part of the process of gaining electoral votes. As a public, we identify our mutual focus of attention, the traditional press is weakened and we have a voice with which we can powerfully unite behind a single idea. The power of Cleggmania was in that the public was able to say ‘we liked his answers, we liked how he dealt with issues in that debate and we have the power to voice that opinion’. It is true to say that this social media event did not materialize into increased votes, but for a week or so, it

did absolutely derail the expectations of electoral politics. The power of the penal populism dystopia has always been its unstoppable nature, its intrinsic links to the public need for reassurance. Here, the empowerment and redefinition of the public voice has been the key to derailing expectations in the 2010 general election.

## CHAPTER 6

### PHONE HACKING SCANDAL 2011

#### Introduction

While the 2010 election had presented an unparalleled opportunity for the collection of data on crime communication, as we saw, one of the key findings of the case study was that while we could utilise plenty of related data in this area, the topic of ‘law and order’ had not in fact proven instrumental or even relatively prominent in this instance. This has repercussions for the outcomes of this project which I have discussed, but in the short term, it did mean that I would also ideally require some demonstration of crime issues at their most contentious, at the forefront of public discussion. This would allow a different kind of observation of law and order narratives during highly pressurized moments in which the evolving sources of influence might intervene and flavour the narrative in some way.

Therefore, despite the many advantages of studying electoral politics, for a richer body of evidence it seemed that I should ideally aim to conduct another case study which would fit the mould of the *Policing the Crisis* (1979) ‘Handsworth mugging’ example or the *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972) case. These studies focused on unique criminogenic events or moral panics which allowed a distinct observation of the mechanisms which ultimately form the underlying framework in the construction of crime-related meaning. As previously noted, this imbues the particular insight of unveiling the most crucial elements of crime communication, the power sources, the strength of the public voice, the actual capacity for the media to flavour opinion at the time when criminal justice decisions are most likely to be made in haste, in which punitiveness ordinarily takes over as the political sentiment and in which evidence-based policy is discarded in favour of emotional reassurance.

In essence this project is one which is concerned with the handling of crime issues at these extremes and as such, the study of moral panics or scandals, although impossible to prepare for or predict, is ideally suited to demonstrating how law and order is employed, what it comes to mean at these times. This project is not a study of the meaning of crime only within political cultures, it is concerned instead with



fully understanding how these chaotic exterior elements can wholly derail everyday political intentions. As such, it seemed appropriate that I would prioritise any such opportunity to study the extraordinary rather than the ordinary and this was an opportunity which was afforded to me by the Phone Hacking Scandal of July 2011.

The Phone Hacking Scandal could not be considered a classic-type moral panic, as there was no dangerous violent act or typical folk devil. Here, the revelation of violations of human rights and Rupert Murdoch's News International were the focus but there was arguably no disproportionate media-stimulated response which could have exacerbated levels of panic, rather, in this case, the tabloid press were the focus of public ire rather than the instigator. These events are better characterized as a scandal, but this renders them with no less weight for a case study which aims to understand the extremes of the construction of crime narratives. Indeed, as Durkheim (1893) suggested, the unfolding of scandals can tell us a great deal about the formation of 'the public wrath', that this moment allows citizens to express anger and share a common emotion, this is the crystallization of a public opinion at its most heightened. Similarly, as noted, Fine's view of 'scandal' sees extraordinary moments of public attention to an issue as having an instrumental role in the construction of crime narratives, in which "The depiction of the scandal comes to symbolize the problem for the public and thus, the response to the scandal shapes the response to the social problem" (Fine 1997). Therefore, the unfurling of a scandal presents a unique case study opportunity, in which we might begin to assess the impact of the public voice on the response to the social problem.

More specifically, one of the key findings of the 2010 general election study was that the media landscape seemed to be evolving in a way which might instrumentally alter the relationship between the public and the dominant narrative. As such, when the Phone Hacking Scandal began to emerge, the detailed focus on the media at the heart of this event seemed to provide a unique moment of insight into this shifting realm. One of the most resonant critiques of the power of social media had been that its prevalence ought to be viewed with some scepticism, that its faddish nature meant that it may not represent any significant long-term shifts in the political landscape. However, the early stages of the Phone Hacking Scandal seemed to demonstrate that not only had this shift towards a more democratized media truly

empowered the public voice, but that this had played a key role in the undermining of the traditional print press hegemony. Certainly, this scandal seemed to present an unparalleled opportunity in which I might conduct a case study of the shifting construction of narratives in today's media, in which the true power structures at play were being uncovered daily and the ability for the public voice to mobilize around an issue independently was being demonstrated.

## The Case Study Data

As previously discussed, the case study method provided unparalleled flexibility in allowing me to adapt to unfolding events and capture this data. In the early stages of the scandal, as these themes began to emerge, bearing in mind the methodological approach espoused by Yin, that the investigator “must remember the original purpose of the investigation but then must be willing to change procedures or plans if unanticipated events occur” (1994: 57), I began collecting data. Fortunately, having conducted a full case study on the 2010 general election, I was sufficiently familiar with the approach required and was able to reflect on which elements had proven useful and which could be omitted from this study.

In particular, at the beginning of the 2010 case study, I had prepared to gather data on any news source or crime-related communication available, which generated an overwhelming amount of data. The most significant difference in this instance was that the experience of following the particularly prominent narratives of the election had demonstrated to me that the best possible use of my focus in gathering case study materials would be to immerse myself in the events, follow the story, be aware of the resources available to me, but to take an approach which was primarily adaptive rather than constrictively thorough. As I have discussed, the methodological rigour in case studies comes not from an arduous documentation of the entire field of analysis, but in the researcher's capacity to hone in on the most significant elements at play. This allows detail and nuance to be drawn from the sources of interest, rather than merely producing a broad set of data which lacks depth.

More practically, in gathering data on an evidently expansive media landscape, in this instance, given this accumulated experience and the unexpected nature of the project, I also attempted to hone in on certain outlets, such as various online news commentary sources, which were able to capture the prominence of events quickly. Furthermore, I sought out studies which had aggregated information on social media, rather than attempting to accumulate data on twitter use myself, which had previously proven unmanageable.

An added peculiarity of the phone hacking scandal was that it did eventually become a public excavation of fact with regard to the practices of the traditional print press outlets. The Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee as well as the hearings conducted by the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practice and ethics of the press provided rich sources of data which I was fortunately able to utilise in this case study, along with some necessary reflection on the nature of these proceedings. In line with the discourse analysis approach of the previous case study, I employed this information as a source but did take account of the setting and power structures in play in these situations. This form of reflexivity with regard to sources is crucial in conducting a case study, as had been demonstrated by the 2010 election. I had found that the immersive experience of gathering data on a news event in today's overwhelming media landscape had meant that some consideration of the legitimacy of sources was necessary in order to gather data effectively. This meant that the added requirement of assigning sources some level of normative value had become an important part of the process, particularly since I had taken on this case study with very little time to prepare. Therefore, the data utilised in this case study encompassed the broad range of online news, TV news and social media sources which had proven useful in the 2010 election, as well as the testimony given to the Culture Media & Sport Select Committee, and the Leveson Inquiry.

## Chronology

I cannot think what was going through the minds of the people who did this. That they could hack into anyone's phone is disgraceful. But to hack into the phone of Milly Dowler, a young girl missing from her parents, who was later found to be murdered, is truly despicable  
(David Cameron 2011 Statement in Full- *The Guardian*, 8<sup>th</sup> July)

The Guardian newspaper's investigation into phone hacking at the News of the World provoked a moment of ferocious public outcry when it revealed that this practice had seemingly spread from eavesdropping on celebrity sex scandals to hacking the phones of victims of crime. What had been a human rights case of the privileged few now represented a damning indictment of the practices of the UK's most powerful media conglomerate News International, its villainous figurehead Rupert Murdoch now synonymous with abuse of Britain's most vulnerable. The scandal unfurled in a maelstrom of disgust and calls for punishment from newspapers and politicians who had previously quietly maintained a years-long alliance with the Murdoch Empire. The News of the World itself was deemed unsustainable and was forced to close after 168 years (2011, 'News of the World to close amid Hacking Scandal', *BBC News* 7<sup>th</sup> July), following the revelations that it had hacked the phones of families of soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan (Hughes 2011, 'Phone hacking: families of war dead 'targeted' by News of the World', *The Telegraph*, 7<sup>th</sup> July), a group previously singled out for support by News International through the Sun's 'Help for Heroes' campaign. Along with exposure of the targeting of an increasingly shocking roster of crime victims, including the mother of Sarah Payne (2011, 'Sara Payne on phone-hack list', *BBC News* 29<sup>th</sup> July), the practices at News International became the subject of international scorn when members of the US Congress began to investigate claims that victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks had been subject to phone hacking by the News of the World (Stelter 2011 'News Corp Newspapers May Face US Inquiry', *New York Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> July). With each case, the integrity of press attitudes towards victims seemed to deteriorate, however, the revelation that an employee of the News of the World had hacked into Milly Dowler's phone and had deleted a message, giving the police and her family false hope that she may still be alive, seemed to crystallise in the public consciousness as a truly unforgivable act

that epitomised a distasteful lack of regard for the public sense of outrage towards abuse of victims, which tabloid newspapers like the News of the World had personally fostered with campaigns like ‘Help for Heroes’ and ‘Sarah’s Law’.

While the uncovering of the ruthless and yet seemingly routine practice of phone hacking severely damaged the already tarnished reputation of the British tabloid press, some of the details unearthed during the subsequent investigation served to highlight an element of corruption and collusion in an unexpected source; the Metropolitan Police. Not only did “commentators and victims [accuse] the police of a lack of will to investigate hacking because officers were too close to the media” (2011 ‘News of the World Phone Hacking Scandal’, *BBC News*, 17<sup>th</sup> August), but evidence soon emerged that News International had made payments to the police in return for information, a charge which Met Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson eventually conceded may be true and which led to both his resignation and the establishment of ‘Operation Elveden’, a Metropolitan Police investigation into illegal payments made by journalists to police, which as of April 2013 has resulted in 62 arrests (Halliday 2013 ‘Operation Elveden: former Surrey police officer arrested’, *The Guardian*, 24<sup>th</sup> April).

The reports of corruption quickly spread to Westminster when it was revealed that David Cameron’s ‘Director of Communications’ Andy Coulson had personally authorised the payments made to police while he was editor at News of the World (*BBC News*, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2011). The close relationship between Rupert Murdoch and British politicians had been a frequent source of consternation in public discourse, but with the phone hacking scandal came a drastic change in political rhetoric. Labour leader Ed Miliband led a high profile desertion of News International, stating that the British political system had failed to hold the company to account:

News International was an organization which thought it was beyond responsibility. Its power was so immense, its influence so great, from Prime Ministers downwards. Nobody confronted them. Nobody held them to account. Nobody seemed willing to really challenge them. It was one of the great failures of politics that their power went unchallenged for so long. (Kirkup 2011 ‘David Cameron ‘hamstrung’ by hiring Andy Coulson says Ed Miliband, *Telegraph*, 18<sup>th</sup> July)

The events of the phone hacking scandal had indeed revealed much about the internal workings of power within the British media and politics, not only through information gained by press investigations into News International and the Metropolitan Police, but through the subsequent attempts by politicians to win public confidence back. In the weeks following the scandal political parties released documents detailing all meetings involving members of the press, while the Parliamentary Select Committee for Culture, Media and Sport conducted a high-profile hearing with Rupert Murdoch, James Murdoch and former News of the World Editor Rebekah Brooks.

During the testimony given to the committee on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 2011 the previously unfettered power of Rupert Murdoch was not only undermined by a cream pie to the face, but by the weight of public outrage. This was evident in his opening statement, in which he forcefully announced that he considered this “the most humble day of my life” (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Statement in Full, *The Guardian*). As the BBC News website noted (‘Democracy Live’, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2011), this moment was significant in that it represented the first instance of direct Parliamentary scrutiny faced by Rupert Murdoch in his wide-ranging 40 year career in UK media. Certainly, this was reflected in the surrounding old and new media coverage, which followed the MPs questioning of the Murdochs with frenzied interest, poring over Rupert Murdoch’s testimony, which notably conflicted with common opinion by portraying his control of News of the World as distant. Indeed, a significant amount of new information was revealed with regard to the Murdoch relationship with Prime Ministers, with the inner workings of tabloid journalism and their control over particular policy narratives. The committee also heard from former News International Chief Executive Rebekah Brooks whose testimony illuminated even further the methods of tabloid construction of narratives around victims and the role of editors in policy direction. These committee hearings significantly unveiled various influential power relationships at the most senior levels of UK politics, providing unique information on the construction of crime narratives in the UK print press.

In the midst of the phone hacking scandal in July 2011, David Cameron announced that Lord Justice Leveson would chair a public inquiry into the culture,

practices and ethics of the press. An array of witnesses from politics, the media, the police and several high profile victims of press abuse provided oral evidence to the Inquiry about the workings of the UK media. The evidence given during the hearings, which lasted from November 2011 to February 2012, produced reams of expert testimony on the actual day to day practices of the media, on some of the criminal activities carried out regularly by the tabloid press and the perspectives of those who had been subjects of this destructive system on the construction of their personal narratives and how the force of these stories had affected their lives.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2012 Lord Justice Leveson published his report which condemned UK press behaviour as ‘outrageous’, finding that their practices had caused “real hardship and on occasion, wreaked havoc with the lives of innocent people” (Leveson Inquiry Executive Summary 2012: 5). He commented on the relationship between the press and UK politicians which was deemed “too close... in a way which has not been in the public interest” (2012: 4). The Press Complaints Commission which had been considered ‘toothless’ repeatedly throughout the Inquiry hearings was earmarked for replacement with a new regulatory framework. Campaigners such as the group ‘Hacked Off’ which represented victims of phone hacking, expressed disappointment that LJ Leveson had proposed an industry-led self-regulatory system which would be loosely backed by legislation, rather than a more forceful government-regulated approach. However, LJ Leveson argued that this approach had appeared to provide the most effective measure of regulation while still maintaining absolute freedom of the press.

The events surrounding the phone hacking scandal and the months of testimony which would follow were significant in that the public mobilization around this issue seemed to have unearthed the true goings-on of the UK tabloid media. Throughout these hearings we were provided with expert witnesses who would reveal that which had previously been mere conjecture; the confirmation of absolute Murdoch power in UK politics, his unfettered access to Prime Ministers and his willingness to utilise his opinion-shaping power to influence policy decisions. Furthermore, we learned of the significant role of tabloids in the construction of crime narratives, and the propensity of editors like Rebekah Brooks to not only provide a mouthpiece for penal populism, but to actively attempt to shape criminal

justice policy. Beyond this high-level media influence, now structurally immobilized, we saw the force of the public voice and the ability to mobilize around the ‘Ideal Victim’ (Christie 1986). This seemed to crystallize the shift away from the notion of the public as weak and manipulable towards a public which is active in redefining crime narratives, with the tools for serious mobilization around these issues, they are now knowing and complicit.

## Academic Literature

In the wake of the phone hacking scandal, much academic literature has attempted to grapple with the new media landscape as we see it reflected in this fresh light. Providing discussions of the corrupt power relationships which were revealed, the particular journalistic cultures which seemed to have propelled these ingrained unethical practices and the future of media regulation, this work reframes our understanding of this realm and largely focuses on whether we can possibly infuse ethical practices back into this profession.

Fenton (2012) expresses consternation at this vast upheaval, but highlights that the eruption of the scandal should be considered within the broader conditions of the UK media, which were undergoing significant structural upheaval in the preceding years. Indeed, falling newspaper circulation along with a growth in online news outlets and the subsequent redistribution of advertising revenue had taken such a toll on the corporate news world’s profit margins, that fewer journalists were employed and this considerably reduced workforce was required to alter their production in a way which was certainly detrimental to the facilitation of considered news journalism and has arguably engendered unethical practices. Fenton suggests that “fewer journalists with more space to fill means doing more work in less time, often leading to a greater use of unattributed rewrites of press agency or public relations material and the cut-and-past practice that is now referred to as Churnalism’ (Fenton 2012: 4). These fast-paced structural alterations had meant that in the months preceding the scandal, newsrooms starkly contrasted our conventional image of the journalist at work and were rarely governed by transparency and



accountability. As such, Fenton's argument is compelling in that while it does acknowledge the enormity of the scandal itself, the high level corruption and the villainous figureheads of the Murdoch empire, it attempts to broaden our gaze towards some of the more broad economy-driven alterations which may have facilitated these practices.

Carlson and Berkowitz (2013) develop this argument by asking how this single newsroom, or at least single jurisdiction, can raise important normative questions about journalism today and help to redefine the practice. Building on Zelizer (1992), they suggest that "incidents of deviance provide a moment of shared attention in which journalists reaffirm a cognitive geography of what is acceptable and what is professionally deviant and out of bounds" (Carlson and Berkowitz 2013: 2). They see the phone hacking scandal as a moment for the reaffirmation of core norms globally, what they term a 'synecdochic deviancy' in which, as Fenton (2012) suggests, the actions of particular journalists come to represent a broader malaise. The rise of new media, the increasing pressure felt by old media who appeared to be haemorrhaging readers and advertising revenue seemed to have been compounded by the villainy of Rupert Murdoch. Therefore, Carlson and Berkowitz's argument is that we ought not to view the incident as isolated, indeed there is a compelling argument here that if we aim to observe the functioning media landscape, that the phone hacking scandal takes us beyond a single instance of deviancy to an even more vital picture of an industry in chaos.

Coleman (2012b) discusses the media cultures which have led to the scandal, enhancing this account by reflecting on the role of politicians in this sphere. Like Fenton (2012), he notes that "almost imperceptibly, a corrupted journalistic culture has emerged, normalizing a repertoire of routine practices that are wholly incompatible with the norms of democracy" (Coleman 2012b: 8). He suggests that the political role in this culture has evolved since the growth of television media, and that a traditional veneration of politicians by the media was undermined by this growth, wherein "television became the dominant public arena and the press became adept at aggressive framing and populist agenda setting" (Coleman 2012b: 7). He describes the ensuing political climate as engendering a "Machiavellian ethos that has become banefully entangled in the cultural relationships of political

communication” (2012b: 8). In Coleman’s estimation, then, the structural reframing of the media landscape facilitated an atmosphere of disrespect between our political figures and our media, that as the press became more ferocious, politicians duly adapted by becoming more openly manipulative, feeding into a general culture of cynicism in political communication.

Similarly, the role of deteriorating political standards in the onset of the scandal is highlighted by Wring who outlines the “decades of government reluctance to act in a domain where there has been mounting evidence of press abuses” (2012: 631). He links this reluctance to the particular power of the Murdoch press, delineating the Blair government’s courting of this relationship and subsequent public falling out of favour. Wring provides several compelling examples of Rupert Murdoch’s political power in action; his discussions with Tony Blair during the Iraq controversy and his later publication of a hand written letter from Blair which was thought to have severely demeaned the Prime Minister. Wring’s analysis of the Murdoch relationship with power was that this seemed to suggest an unrivalled access to the construction of policy decisions. Price notes that:

Rupert Murdoch doesn’t leave a paper trail that could ever prove his influence over policy but the trail of politicians beating their way to him and his papers tells a different story... like the 24th member of the Cabinet... his presence is always felt (Price 2006 cited in Wring 2012: 636).

This portrayal of Murdoch influence is one which will be further illuminated by the testimony provided during the phone hacking scandal and adds to a much more detailed understanding of the tangible implications of these power relationships on policy matters.

As such, the body of academic work following the phone hacking scandal has tended to derive from within journalistic studies and its concerns are accordingly with the broader structural shifts that have allowed this gross injustice to occur. This work contributes to a richly contoured picture of the communication landscape, the recent shifts in UK media playing a crucial role in the practices which have emanated from this realm. In the context of this research project, this work helps to reconfigure our knowledge of the construction of crime narratives within this deeply fragmented,

economically unstable sphere and emphasizes the impact that this insecurity can have on media output. This combination of economic panic and political access has clearly created a uniquely insidious force in UK politics and this research will aim to examine the impact that this may have had on the construction of crime narratives.

### **Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee**

The Westminster Select Committee for Culture, Media and Sport attracted the intense gaze of the world's media on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 2011, when Rupert and James Murdoch as well as former News of the World Editor Rebekah Brooks were summoned to Parliament to answer questions concerning their involvement in the phone hacking scandal. Unlike the Leveson Inquiry, the evidence provided on that day was not under oath and has subsequently been challenged by MPs, by former Editors and by Legal Advisors to the News of the World who have questioned the validity of some of the claims made (Watt 2011 'James Murdoch likely to be recalled to face MPs after challenges to his evidence', *The Guardian*, 29 July). Nonetheless, the hearings provided a unique opportunity for insight into the machinations of Britain's most powerful media conglomerate, as well as their various underhand entanglements with the police. While much of the focus of the committee was on fact-finding around specific issues of legality, many of the incidental comments made by the Murdochs and by Rebekah Brooks provide a compelling insight into the intimacy of media and politics in the UK and when considered in some detail, can unearth new information on the construction of crime narratives.

Considered within this methodological framework, using discourse analysis principles which encourage the appreciation of text and the employment of language within their specific social and cultural setting (Paltridge 2006), the analysis of evidence given here is conducted with an awareness of the context of the event. I would suggest that the employment of the discourse analysis technique is particularly useful in this instance, during which the gaze of the world enhanced a certain performativity in the hearing, while the event-like atmosphere infused tension, raised

ire and unveiled subtle power dynamics. It is therefore crucial in handling this specific data that an attempt is made to assess the contextual elements at play.

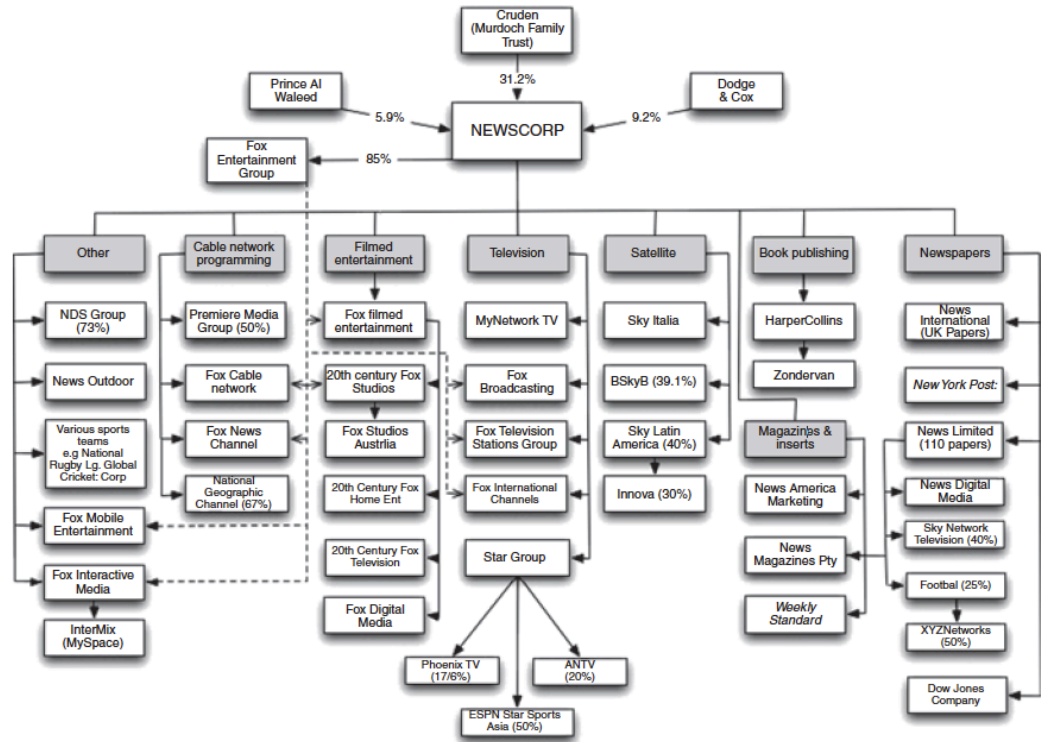
As such, capturing this data involved not only assessing the transcripts of this hearing, but also actively following the unfolding of events. As has been mentioned, in light of experience gained during the 2010 UK General Election, this case study attempted to utilise the most appropriate data, which meant that a complete cross-section of all media sources could not be used. Beyond practical considerations, data taken from the media outlets of News Corp UK & Ireland Ltd, formerly News International, which includes the former News of the World, the Sun, the Times, the Sunday Times or Sky News, as well as News Corp affiliates The Wall Street Journal and Fox News, have not been unquestioningly utilised in the pursuit of fact-finding. While it is arguable that all data is contestable, in this case, the highly politicised and often biased presentation of stories in all areas of the media must mean that only data such as verbatim transcripts and statistical analysis are presented as somewhat neutral, while newspaper reporting is considered within its particular context. An assessment of the varying credibility of sources is an integral element of good case study research, however, in this instance this practise was particularly necessary. For example, it is generally acknowledged that news outlets owned by News International did not report fully on their own demise and so it is understandable that these should be omitted in certain circumstances. Similarly, the Guardian and the New York Times “were instrumental in cracking open the massive phone-hacking scandal” (Farhi 2011, ‘Guardian, NY Times worked to break News corp. Hacking case’, Washington Post, 21<sup>st</sup> July), both presenting huge journalistic efforts to reveal information against significant pressure and legal blocks from News International, and as such both the Guardian and the New York Times contain valuable backlogs of data on this issue and are referred to more frequently. This case study considers the events of July 2011, rather than a content analysis of press coverage and as such must prioritise these particularly relevant sources, rather than maintain a scrupulous equivalence in consideration of all media outlets.

The wide-ranging evidence that emerged from the Culture, Media and Sport committee hearings seemed to first and foremost provide a unique unveiling of previously closely guarded informal power relations. The phone hacking scandal

itself had focused the public gaze on the potential insidiousness of the close relationships that seemed to operate between the Murdoch-led News International journalists and high level politicians as well as senior officers at the Metropolitan Police. This general culture of impropriety had long been speculated upon since the growth of the former News International, however a lack of public challenge had been bolstered by the effective stranglehold over electoral politics enjoyed by the Murdoch media conglomerate, a power which had operated so forcefully that only in the wake of the phone hacking scandal did it eventually unravel.

As noted, Ed Miliband's comments on the unfettered power of the Murdoch press represented a significant break from tradition, whereby Westminster politicians had traditionally courted the Murdoch press with the aim of gaining electoral success, or similarly they had remained silent around the issue of the increasingly pervasive power of the organization, through fear of public reproach. The line between explicit deal-making and a more immaterial courtship had always been uncertain, with unofficial, speculative accounts lacking the weight of evidence and at their worst, stretching plausibility with an overtly conspiratorial tone. As noted, Price (2006) argues that the cause of this uncertainty is a lack of tangible proof, that Murdoch rarely leaves a paper trail "but the trail of politicians beating their way to him and his papers tells a different story" (Price 2006 in Wring 2012: 636).

A detailed account of the inner workings of powerful media relationships had been somewhat outwith the reach of academic research, with most attempts to explain this phenomenon gesturing towards the drivers of economic growth in concurrence with a sense of opportunism in politics, particularly since the spin-heavy 1997 General Election. Much media-oriented research naturally focused no higher than the newsroom and it was rare to find accounts which grappled with these kind of high level relationships. For instance, Arsenault and Castells (2008) apply Castells' discussion of the 'Network Society' (2007) to the case of Rupert Murdoch in order to provide an updated picture of power in contemporary media which emphasizes the key elements of a "ruthless pursuit of market expansion and the leveraging of public and political-elite opinion" (Arsenault and Castells 2008: 491). They delve into the structural hierarchies of NewsCorp (see below):



### NewsCorp Organizational Structure

“Source: Ownership percentages were obtained from US Security and Exchanges Commission (SEC) filings. This chart is current as of December 2007”

(Arsenault and Castells 2008: 492)

They detail the gradual acquisition of these various parts from Rupert Murdoch’s inheritance of the *Adelaide News* in 1952 to this five continent behemoth which “reaches approximately 75% of the world’s population, and has approximately US\$68 billion in total assets and US\$28 billion in annual revenue” (Arsenault and Castells 2008: 491). Within this structure, the figure of Rupert Murdoch looms large, as Marty Singerman of the *New York Post* suggested to Anand and Attea (2003): “[Murdoch] is at the front-line of execution, and dictates hierarchy. If he needs information, he will not hesitate to call your subordinates since they probably know more about the details of the project. Consequently, many employees think that Rupert is their boss” (Anand and Attea 2003: 14). This testimony, while taken from a high level employee, would contradict claims made by Murdoch himself at the

Culture, Media and Sport Committee and while Murdoch's account ought not to be considered a neutral, more truthful version of events, it certainly highlights that speculation from below in these pieces of research can only tell us a fragment of the picture. Specifically, in aiming to understand the nature of the relationships between senior politicians and the press, even rigorous projects like that conducted by Arsenault and Castells can only infer details from the outside, from a broad overview of the business activities occurring.

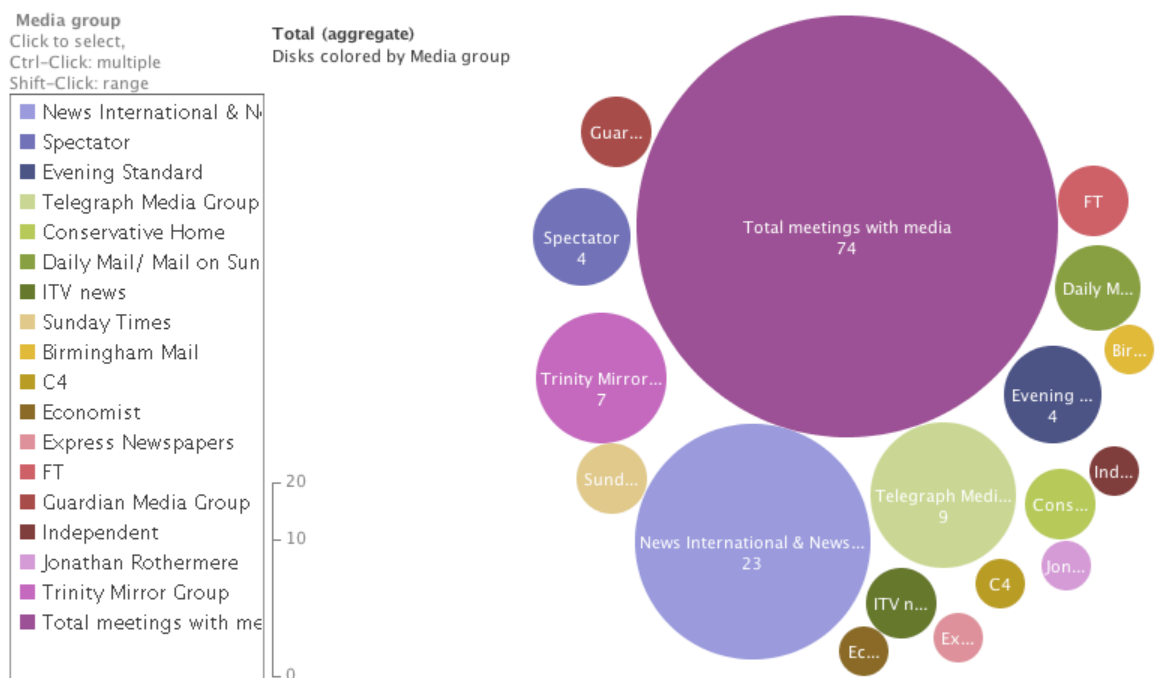
Regarding Murdoch's power in politics, Greenslade (2007) emphasizes his ability to switch allegiances regularly, an empowering tendency bolstered by a general interest in who he might support, citing his high profile endorsement of Tony Blair in 1997 and his more recent shift to the Conservative Party, a move which was the subject of intense speculation in 2007. Arsenault and Castells portray this as a long-standing tactic, noting that "in 1972, Murdoch donated AUS\$90,000 in legal but secret contributions to Australia's Labour prime minister, Gough Whitlam. In 1975, he aggressively campaigned for Whitlam's ouster in all his publications" (2008: 497). Indeed, this kind of practice fostered a sense that support from the Murdoch publications was crucial in securing electoral success, a reputation which was reinforced by the print press elements of News Corp, the famous '*Sun* wot won it' headline a key example of such grandstanding (Linton 1995). However, Curtice argued that in truth the '*Sun* effect' was not quite as powerful as the perception suggested:

British commentators are mistaken to assume that because the country's press has a measurable impact on individuals it therefore can determine aggregate outcomes. Indeed, relative to the often highly evocative and strident manner in which the British press often conducts itself, its partisan impact is a small one... Above all, we have seen that a pro-Labour imbalance in the press in the 1997 election was insufficient to avoid a decline in Labour's overall level of electoral support. (Curtice 1999: 28).

Essentially, the impact of Murdoch's power on politics and potentially on policy decisions is difficult to define without broad analysis of electoral trends or a detailed knowledge of his business assets. Rather, more practically, a microanalysis of personal relationships as described through testimony can possibly provide some enhanced insight, qualified by an awareness of potential bias, into the role of these

high level media players in the construction of policy, and? into the broad definition of issues like crime, not only in media outlets but in society more generally, as delivered via political communication.

The data unearthed during the events of July 2011 provides us with such an opportunity, via a unique glimpse into the boardrooms of the former News International and a great deal of new information on the structures that operate at the levels of power in British media and politics. Not only does the confirmation of these relationships allow us to understand more about the potential motivations behind the construction of crime narratives, through certain interactions between politicians, the media and police, but it can allow us to better view this field and move towards a more realistic picture of the power of these relationships.



The potential impact of News International on UK politics began to emerge in many of the immediate reactions to the phone hacking scandal. This chart, provided by the Guardian datablog (Rogers and Sedghi, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2011), represents David Cameron’s meetings with members of the media (by group) since becoming Prime Minister in May 2010 and is based on data released by the government following the phone hacking scandal. This information was notably divulged as part



of David Cameron's "attempts to bring a new level of transparency between Britain's elected leaders and the media" (Hope 2011, 'David Cameron could publish meetings with all media executives, *The Telegraph*, 18<sup>th</sup> July) and, along with the disclosure that "the Prime Minister had met with Rupert Murdoch's executives on no fewer than 26 occasions since last May" (*Telegraph*, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2011), provides us with some confirmation of the perceived importance of media executives to Prime Ministers and in particular, as had been suspected, Rupert Murdoch. What we can realistically infer from this information is that the courting of Murdoch's support by political parties still took place as recently as the last election and Parliamentary term, thus supporting Ed Miliband's assertion. This deference to Rupert Murdoch on the part of politicians and a willingness to court his favour certainly demonstrates a lack of complete autonomy in political decision-making and perhaps could support an explanation of the recent preference for tabloid-values in the construction of crime narratives. It may be a stretch to suggest that the moral agenda of the News of the World had ever leaked into policy-making, but at least in political communication, where an ill-founded perception that public support for Murdoch values is thought to gain votes, it seems plausible that this level of contact could have some impact.

The testimony provided at the Culture, Media and Sport Committee was particularly revelatory in this sense that the MPs on the panel were afforded the opportunity to publicly probe Rupert and James Murdoch on the substantive potential for influence by News International. This process unearthed a wealth of anecdotal evidence concerning Rupert Murdoch's access to Prime Ministers, much of which was exhumed with some resistance. A particularly strained exchange between Rupert Murdoch and MP Jim Sheridan regarding Murdoch's access to the Prime Minister revealed how au fait he had become with an unrivalled level of political access:

Jim Sheridan: Mr Murdoch senior...Why did you enter the back door at No. 10 when you visited the Prime Minister following the last general election?

Rupert Murdoch: Because I was asked to.

Jim Sheridan: You were asked to go in the back door of No. 10?

Rupert Murdoch: Yes.

Jim Sheridan: Why would that be?

Rupert Murdoch: To avoid photographers at the front, I imagine. I don't know. I was asked; I just did what I was told.

Jim Sheridan: It is strange, given that Heads of State manage to go in the front door.

Rupert Murdoch: Yes.

Jim Sheridan: Yet you have to go in the back door.

Rupert Murdoch: That is the choice of the Prime Minister, or his staff or whoever does these things...Which visit to Downing Street are you talking about?

Jim Sheridan: It was just following the last general election.

Rupert Murdoch: I was invited within days to have a cup of tea and to be thanked by Mr Cameron for the support. No other conversation took place. It lasted minutes.

Jim Sheridan: That is the one when you went in through the back door?

Rupert Murdoch: Yes. I had been asked also by Mr Brown many times.

Jim Sheridan: Through the back door?

Rupert Murdoch: Yes. And my family went there many times.”

(Uncorrected Transcript of Oral Evidence of Tuesday 19 July 2011 at Q. 211 – 220)

The tone of the exchange is rather tense and infused with accusatory subtext. The implications being made by Jim Sheridan are that Rupert Murdoch enjoyed an astonishing level of access to the Prime Minister, one which exceeded that of various heads of state. The detail of Rupert Murdoch entering through the back door of number 10 immediately after the election was heavily focussed on in the subsequent media coverage and this seemed to highlight the sense that there was some sinister element to this relationship, and that both Rupert Murdoch and David Cameron did not want to reveal publicly exactly how influential this relationship was. In the

subsequent verbal exchange, we find that Jim Sheridan repeats the detail several times, namely that Murdoch had specifically entered through the back door, which has the effect of emphasising his surprise that this would occur. He repeats the words ‘back door’ several times with the apparent aim of trying to have Rupert Murdoch address this detail, of trying to elicit some response on the unusual nature of this arrangement and its implications regarding his unfettered access. However, Murdoch’s response, in line with much of the rest of his testimony, aims to project innocence by addressing only the direct questions posed rather than speaking to any of Sheridan’s accusatory subtext. For instance, when Sheridan asks initially ‘Why did you enter the back door at No. 10 when you visited the Prime Minister following the last general election?’ he responds ‘Because I was asked to’. This exchange provides a fascinating example of the power dynamics at play here, wherein Sheridan really wants Murdoch to answer why he had entered through the back door rather than the front door, he really wants some elaboration on why this unusual arrangement took place and essentially what he wants to know is what the nature of this relationship is, what it means to be entering through the back door at number 10. The answer given is wholly unsatisfying because of the vast implications intertwined with this question and while Murdoch appears to answer honestly, his answer betrays a general unwillingness to engage, almost a belligerence. The root of Sheridan’s accusatory tone is that in essence by asking this question and by repeating it several times he is suggesting that Murdoch’s access and power is in some way underhand or undemocratic. As a result, when Murdoch refuses to engage with the true spirit of the question his response is jarring rather than honest and belies a discomfort with the inferences being made. As we see from the exchange, this dynamic continues, with Sheridan mentioning the back door again and again and yet never explicitly verbalising the implied accusations. Murdoch is able to deflect by mentioning innocuous details and yet the outcome is still a sense that there is something underhand at play here. Despite the fact that Murdoch suggests that his meeting with Cameron lasted only minutes, this fails to address the implication that he enjoyed an incomparable influence, one which is concerning enough to need to be hidden from the public.

The questioning at the committee circles around these implications throughout, also honing in on Murdoch's actual influence on policy matters:

Rupert Murdoch: I never guaranteed anyone the support of my newspapers. We had been supporting the Thatcher Government and the Conservative Government that followed. We thought it had got tired and we changed and supported the Labour party 13 years ago, or whenever it was, with the direct loss of 200,000 circulation.

Jim Sheridan: Did you ever impose any preconditions on either the Labour or Conservative party?

Rupert Murdoch: No.

Jim Sheridan: No preconditions whatever?

Rupert Murdoch: No. The only conversations that I had with them—with Mr Blair that I can remember—were arguing about the Euro.

(Uncorrected Transcript of Oral Evidence of Tuesday 19 July 2011 at Q. 222 – 223)

Again, Sheridan's questioning belies a lack of belief at Murdoch's testimony and while Murdoch aims to protest his innocence, some of the detail of his relationship with Prime Ministers is divulged here. Indeed, as we will see later, Murdoch's protestations at having never made guarantees based on policy decisions is later heavily contradicted by former Prime Minister John Major giving evidence under oath to the Leveson Inquiry. However, basing analysis on this testimony alone, we do see a certain cavalier attitude towards support and a confirmation of the kind of policy discussions which had been speculated at by Price (2006) and Wring (2012). Murdoch reveals that he argued with Blair over the Euro, which confirms, along with the rest of the testimony, a surprising level of access wherein policy matters were routinely discussed.

Enhancing this evidence, further detail of the working relationship between the print press and 10 Downing Street during the previous Labour governments is also provided by Rebekah Brooks' testimony:

Philip Davies: Could you tell us how often you either spoke to or met the various Prime Ministers that there have been since you have been editor of News of the World, of The Sun, and chief executive of News International. How often would you speak to or meet Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron respectively?

Rebekah Brooks: The fact is I have never been to Downing Street while David Cameron has been Prime Minister, yet under Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Prime Minister Tony Blair, I did regularly go to Downing Street.

Philip Davies: How regular is regular?

Rebekah Brooks: On Prime Minister Gordon Brown, in the time that he was in Downing Street and also while he was Chancellor, I would have gone maybe six times a year.

(Uncorrected Transcript of Oral Evidence of Tuesday 19 July 2011 at Q. 560 – 561)

It should be noted that the testimony provided by Rebekah Brooks, although extremely high profile in itself, occurred under slightly less tension than that of the Murdochs' hearing, perhaps due to the intense public interest around the Murdoch testimony. As a result, the tone of this hearing could be described as much less emotionally-charged, more as a fact finding exercise, which was evident in that while much of the evidence given by Rupert and James Murdoch was tinged with a tone of contrition and innocence, of aiming to seem aligned with victims, here we are provided with a wealth of detail. Indeed, Rebekah Brooks seemed tasked with elaborating on the detail of the inner workings of News International. While the Murdochs generally suggested that they did not know that phone hacking was taking place, that they were sufficiently removed from the newsroom to mean that they

would have no knowledge of this, Rebekah Brooks took care to portray the environment at News International as ethical in its day to day workings.

In her testimony (above), we see a similar level of access available to working editors like Rebekah Brooks during the Labour governments of the last 15 years. She is happier to confirm this influence than Rupert Murdoch, possibly with the aim of portraying the News International relationship with 10 Downing Street as an established tradition, rather than a sinister practise. However, when Phillip Davies went on to ask her if she believes that “there was a shift, and actually News International became part of the establishment, as opposed to being anti-establishment?” she goes on to describe the kind of influence she could try to have over certain policies that the paper disapproved of:

Rebekah Brooks: Throughout my editorship of The Sun, as you know, one of the main campaigns that we have had is for "Help for Heroes". I think The Sun is absolutely the paper for the military, and that caused us to have very, very uncomfortable conversations, particularly with Prime Minister Gordon Brown. One of the issues that still is apparent today, as it was back then, is the lack of awareness of other aspects of the media and of Parliament to acknowledge that currently we have soldiers fighting a war in Afghanistan, and people seem to forget that. I would not say that any Prime Minister would think that The Sun was not fighting for the right people. In fact, The Sun continues to fight for the right people.

What is most powerfully demonstrated here is a sense of pride over the purported duty of the tabloid press to bring issues to the attention of the Prime Minister and to essentially utilise the high level of influence enjoyed by News International for a perceived good. Crucially, the sense that this is a force for good betrays a lack of understanding that this influential relationship could be perceived as destructive in any way. Rebekah Brooks as a former editor of a tabloid newspaper clearly subscribes to the views held within these publications, views which we have seen are often constructed under the pressures of economic decline and as such are

notoriously reactionary. Unsurprisingly, she admits that this approach regularly extends to criminal justice issues:

Rebekah Brooks: The one thing that I would say is that under my editorship we had a series of terrible and tragic news stories, starting with Sarah Payne, Milly Dowler's disappearance and subsequent murder and then of course the Soham cases. As you know, part of the main focus of my editorship of the News of the World was convincing Parliament that there needed to be radical changes to the Sex Offenders Act 1997 which came to be known as Sarah's law and were very similar to laws imposed in America under Megan's law. So I suppose, if I had a particular extra involvement in any of those stories, then it would have been on the basis that I was trying to push and campaign for readers' rights on the 10 pieces of legislation that we got through on Sarah's law, and campaigning for those to be put forward.

Again, Brooks portrays herself as campaigning in a noble way for certain criminal justice issues. However, it is telling that here she focuses on much-maligned coverage of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 and takes the opportunity to redefine those events as worthy. Savage and Charman (2010) describe the *News of the World* campaign as later being abandoned by the mother of murdered schoolgirl Sarah Payne due to their controversial 'naming and shaming' tactics:

The problem was that the naming and shaming campaign was alienating those we needed on our side the most: the police and probation services, the professionals who dealt with child safety issues on a day-to-day basis. We decided that if the proper authorities would back us and help Sarah's Law, we would drop naming and shaming. (Payne 2004: 98)

When prompted on the appropriateness of these laws and her place in promoting them, she reflects on her role as someone who guides public interest:

Rebekah Brooks: Like I said, many people disagreed with the campaign, but I felt that Sarah's law, and the woeful Sex Offenders Act 1997 that needed to be changed to protect the public, I felt was absolutely in the public interest.

We see that in these kinds of criminal justice issues, that even in the face of opposing public opinion, there is still a level of confidence in the righteousness of intervention at this high level. These pieces of evidence confirm that not only did News International executives regularly enjoy an audience with Prime Ministers, regardless of their political allegiance, but that they felt comfortable using the forum to discuss issues like the Euro and provocative matters of criminal justice. We see from the tone of the claims made here that this appears to have been done in the assumed best interest of the public, but that these assumptions were made based on tabloid-oriented views. It seems that these power relationships must be considered an integral part of the construction of crime in the media, but also in political discourse. Finally, Rebekah Brooks is asked:

Q576 Paul Farrelly: Would you agree, Ms Brooks, that part of the public concern here is about the closeness of the police and now politicians to News of the World and News International?

Rebekah Brooks: I have seen that the News of the World has been singled out for that closeness. I think if you were going to address it, it is wholly unfair in discussing the closeness of police and politicians to the media to single out the News of the World.

Q578 Paul Farrelly: Okay, but it is a fact that this has been a criticism, yet you, on your watch as chief executive of News International, manage a triple whammy, because you employ the former Director of Public Prosecutions to advise you on your approach to evidence and handing it over to the police. While he was the DPP, and along with his successor, Ken Macdonald was not above criticism for frankly rubber-stamping the complacent police approach to the inquiry. Do you think that was an error of judgment given the circumstances?

Rebekah Brooks: Just to clarify the Ken Macdonald issue, which I think is important: he was hired by News Corporation and he has been rigorous in his separation of payments to police and the illegal interception of voicemail. He has not commented in any shape or form on the illegal interception of



voicemail, and if that conversation has arisen, he has withdrawn himself from the room and the conversation. I hear what you say but—

Q579 Paul Farrelly: But you can forgive people for shaking their heads, can't you?

Rebekah Brooks: Well, I can forgive people for shaking their heads if they believe that the question you put to me was true, but I think if people understand that he was hired by News Corporation, not News International, that he is reporting directly into the board and that he is only discussing payments to police officers, then I do not think people would shake their heads. He has been rigorous in not involving himself in the illegal interception of voicemail.

We see here the beginning of a still on-going unveiling of wide-scale power relations which stoked the sense of public outcry that was mobilised not by the tabloid voice, but by the symbolic resonance of the nature of the revelations. Indeed, throughout the phone hacking scandal, the high profile Culture, Media & Sport Committee hearings and the year-long Leveson Inquiry, we saw confirmation of almost absolute power of the Murdochs alongside disintegration of the singular tabloid voice. We see in these examples the unfettered access to Downing Street enjoyed by News of the World executives, a relationship which had consistently been the subject of speculation and was now expounded in minute detail.

The Leveson Inquiry's hearings and findings were vast and are still ongoing, however, within the context of a greater appreciation of the power structures which had been at play in the media, I would highlight the example of former Prime Minister John Major, who in his testimony to the Leveson Inquiry was the first person to state categorically under oath that Rupert Murdoch had utilised his power for policy changes. Mr Major states:

It became apparent in discussion that Mr Murdoch really didn't like our European policies, which was no surprise to me, and he wished me to change our European policies.

If we couldn't... his paper would not and could not support the conservative government.

It is not very often that someone sits in front of a Prime Minister and says 'I would like you to change your policy and if you don't change your policy my organisation cannot support you.

(John Major, Leveson Inquiry, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012)

The implication made by John Major was that Murdoch was willing to utilise his power as the singular tabloid voice at this time and that this unfettered access to Prime Ministers was indeed being taken advantage of. I build this argument, despite the recent alterations in the media landscape, not only because tabloid forces do still exist today and operate under various new forms, but also because this locates the source of manipulative criminal justice narratives of the past in these individuals, these high level power relationships. As such we can view their dismantling as significant in moving forward with an optimistic account of the crime narrative landscape and these pieces of evidence also provide significant explanatory force regarding the source of power in previous incarnations of 'crime' in politics.

The revelations of the Phone Hacking Scandal also very potently reinforce the notion of the 'Ideal Victim' in the public imagination. It is clear from the evidence provided by this scandal that Christie's (1986) depiction of the Ideal Victim as a "person or category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim" (Christie 1986: 1), is the modern day equivalent of the Durkheimian sacred object. This is the power source which feeds into our *Interaction Ritual Chains*, as we are tempted to protect our symbolically-laden 'Ideal Victims' and are provoked into uproar. We saw this uproar mobilised forcefully in this scandal with the shutting down of the News of the World and the shift from human rights violation to 'crime', to scandal, following the Milly Dowler revelation. I will discuss the conclusions of this case study in more detail within the context of the broader project in my final conclusion, although it is apt to note at this point that the revelation of power sources and confirmation of the force

of the 'Ideal Victim' lend significant explanatory force to our accounts of the crime narrative landscape.

## Example: Primary Empirical Material and Discourse Analysis

### FIELD NOTES

19<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2011

Rebekah Brooks at Commons' Culture Media and Sport Committee.

Notes: This committee follows the high profile Committee hearing of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee in the morning/ afternoon with Rupert and James Murdoch, in which the whole room was full of interested parties, reports, members of the public. This committee was where Rupert Murdoch memorably had a pie thrown at his face. In essence, this committee follows the Murdoch committee and so is far less high profile.

The coverage on social media is far less busy.

Note of the members present:

- 1) Mr John Whittingdale (Chair)
- 2) Dr Thérèse Coffey
- 3) Ann Coffey
- 4) Damian Collins
- 5) Philip Davies
- 6) Paul Farrelly
- 7) Cathy Jamieson
- 8) Alan Keen
- 9) Louise Mensch
- 10) Mr Adrian Sanders
- 11) Jim Sheridan
- 12) Mr Tom Watson

The full transcript will be available from Parliament.uk in the week or so after, for now I take notes on some of the notable comments made:

- RB adds own personal apologies to those made by James and Rupert Murdoch.
- Calls voicemail intercepts abhorrent.  
NOTE ADDED: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87pXFH7gTZw>  
Find as ‘Rebekah Brooks apologises’

Rebekah Brooks: The one thing that I would say is that under my editorship we had a series of terrible and tragic news stories, starting with Sarah Payne, Milly Dowler's disappearance and subsequent murder and then of course the Soham cases.

As you know, part of the main focus of my editorship of the News of the World was convincing Parliament that there needed to be radical changes to the Sex Offenders Act 1997 which came to be known as Sarah's law and were very similar to laws imposed in America under Megan's law.

So I suppose, if I had a particular extra involvement in any of those stories, then it would have been on the basis that I was trying to push and campaign for readers' rights on the 10 pieces of legislation that we got through on Sarah's law, and campaigning for those to be put forward.

Notes for discourse analysis...

#### 1: DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

- Identifiable social relationship here is the Commons committee chamber, in which RB is required to answer questions posed by table of MPs (see above)
- In this instance she's not under oath
- Lexical references indicate lots of planned statements. Tends otherwise to direct answers closely to the question posed ‘So I suppose, if I had any involvement...’

## 2: DISCOURSES

- At this stage the discourses are following the patterns established by this format in a very regimented way. Back and forth of question and answer.
- There is some variation and emotion when RB wants to seem to express empathy towards victims

## 3: ACTION ORIENTATION

- The identity of the questioner doesn't seem to matter much, doesn't shift RB responses or tone from contrite, measured.

## 4: POSITIONINGS

- The unspoken issue at play here is the level of power really afforded to RB, whether she was in charge of/ encouraged staff members to perpetrate this crime.
- There is also some interest around where the blame may lie at the top level of News International, so the power positions here are unspoken, but highly relevant in the questioning.

## 5: PRACTICE

- General air of formality and politeness
- Attempts to appear to care for victims through Megan's Law, aim to frame RB as caring and to deflect a sense of criminality, she is an enforcer of victims' rights

## 6: SUBJECTIVITY

- Prior knowledge about RB gleaned from newspaper/ journalistic commentary at the time tells us more about her potential criminality.
- Crucially, though, in aiming to defend or protect herself, here she reveals much of her day to day work around criminal justice issues.

- For our purposes this is quite revealing, telling us more about a different issue, the level of access available to high ranking journalists at 10 Downing Street and how much News International can affect policy.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE RIOTS OF AUGUST 2011

#### Introduction

Following the analysis of two major political media events of recent years, this chapter consists of a third case study, namely the UK riots of August 2011. In keeping with the case study format already established, I will provide some context for the events of the riots, as well as a full chronology of the unfolding of rioting activity and attempts to control the ‘crime’ narrative. In this chapter I will focus on political statements, particularly those which were made by high profile political figures such as the Prime Minister, the Mayor of London, the Home Secretary and the Justice Minister. It will be argued that the riots represent an empowerment of the public voice, enhanced by the ability to protest through new forces for communication.

By August 2011, a series of revelatory events had generated a conspicuous sense of public despair towards seemingly untrustworthy, manipulative authority figures, the developing outrage having begun years previously with the fallout from the 2008 financial crisis. The events of this period had rendered bankers as reckless, particularly through their seemingly widespread practice of trading using callously constructed financial instruments, such as subprime mortgages and ‘short-selling’ which profited from increasing private debt and general economic demise (Larsen 2008, ‘FSA bans short-selling of banks’, *Financial Times* 19<sup>th</sup> September). Meanwhile, governments worldwide were accused of having been largely inattentive to the regulatory requirements necessary to avoid these actions resulting in a crippling recession (2008, ‘Financial Crisis shows bank regulation is broken’, *The Telegraph* 22<sup>nd</sup> December). The apparent lack of liquidity of the banks due to these practices resulted in the trading of debt and subsequent bailout of £500 billion in the UK alone (Swaine 2008, ‘Bank bailout: Alistair Darling unveils £500 billion rescue package’, *The Telegraph* 8<sup>th</sup> October). Among the wide-ranging consequences of the financial crisis and the subsequent recession was the legacy of outrage felt at the lack

of meaningful punishment delivered upon those who had played an integral part in the country's economic downturn. A YouGov poll of the UK public in 2010 demonstrated the extent of the anger towards bailed out banks such as the *Royal Bank of Scotland* who, despite 84% of its shares being owned by the taxpayer and having achieved a £5 billion loss, had still set aside £1.3 billion for bonus payments (Asthana 2010 'New poll reveals depth of outrage at bankers' bonuses', *The Guardian* 21<sup>st</sup> February). The poll found that "76% of people would support a cap on bonuses" (*The Guardian* 21<sup>st</sup> February 2010) and confirmed the pervasive sense of injustice felt in the public towards elites of the financial sector and those in government who seemed to endorse these rewards, rather than providing any meaningful support for a more punitive approach.

The public trust in politics was subsequently damaged almost irrevocably by the MPs expenses scandal of May 2009, in which *The Telegraph* newspaper published leaked uncensored information on outrageous abuses of the Westminster system by opportunistic Members of Parliament. Memorable claims such as the maintenance of a moat (Prince 2009 'MPs expenses: clearing the moat at Douglas Hogg's manor', *The Telegraph* 12<sup>th</sup> May) and a duck island (Allen 2009, 'MPs expenses: Sir Peter Viggers claimed for £1,600 floating duck island', *The Telegraph* 21<sup>st</sup> May) became vivid, symbolic reminders of the detachment between the public struggling under a lengthy recession and almost cartoonish elites enjoying publicly funded luxuries. As Pattie and Johnston note, this scandal "unleashed a powerful and highly vocal tide of public anger with elected politicians" (Pattie and Johnston 2012: 730), which would end numerous political careers, reinforce class divisions and have a long-lasting impact in undermining the public sense of positive democratic representation in Parliament.

July 2011 and the Phone Hacking Scandal served to impair the perception of politics even further, enhancing cynicism by portraying high level politicians as in servitude to the Murdoch press, embroiled in the insidious betrayal of victims of crime and widespread violations of the civil liberties of the unknowing, helpless public. As has been discussed, the reputation of the police was also severely undermined, with revelations that officers from the London Metropolitan Police (hereafter Met) had not only regularly accepted bribes from the News of the World in



exchange for information (2011, 'News of the World paid bribes worth £100,000 to up to five Met officers', *The Guardian* 7<sup>th</sup> July), but that Met investigations into phone hacking had dismissed criminality after only an eight hour investigation, instead officers were found to have enjoyed champagne lunches with newspaper executives (Dodd 2012, 'Leveson report criticises Met police over phone-hacking investigation', *The Guardian* 29<sup>th</sup> November).

A month later, when Mark Duggan, a 29 year old black man from Tottenham, North London was fatally shot by Metropolitan police officers in circumstances which provoked wide-scale criticism of the excessive police response and are currently the subject of an Independent Coroner's Inquest (see [dugganinquest.independent.gov.uk](http://dugganinquest.independent.gov.uk)), the unprovoked nature of the attack and the subsequent mishandling of events by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (2012, 'IPCC should be scrapped, says family of Mark Duggan', *The Telegraph* 28<sup>th</sup> June), raised tensions between locals and the police which led to a violent protest. (2011 'Riots in Tottenham after Mark Duggan shooting protest', *BBC News* 7<sup>th</sup> August). This event sparked five days of rioting across England, in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Salford, Liverpool and Nottingham which resulted in five deaths, £220 million of property damage and 3,100 arrests (Langston 2012, 'Remembering the UK riots', *VICE* 6<sup>th</sup> August). The causality of events was widely debated, creating diffuse consternation at issues of racialization, consumerism and "criminality pure and simple" (David Cameron speech, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011). I will discuss the events of the riots in some detail as part of this third case study, however, I would note initially that within the context of this research, it quickly became clear that these events could serve as a vital additional case study and would go some way towards expanding on some of the findings discussed as part of the 2010 election and the Phone Hacking Scandal. As noted, one of the defining elements of these riots was that they could not easily be captured with one single explanation, or blamed on a particular social ill. However, what was prominent at the time was an unavoidable sense of challenge towards society's accepted norms, a fighting back from the blatant mistreatment of recent years, the youths looting shops and protesting violently a powerful public reaction against corrupt authority figures, against unjust policing, mistrustful politicians, bankers, the upper class, against the brutal powerlessness of

those not in the elite. As we will see, this was by no means an organized anti-capitalist protest, the aims were not focused around one issue, nor did events unfold in this manner. However, looters and rioters testified/argued? that their actions were regularly justified under some form of regaining control, or a disregard for the rules of the elites, of the police, of those who had so thoroughly betrayed public trust in the years leading up to Mark Duggan's death.

In the case study of the 2010 election, I discussed the vast uptake and substantial power of new media frameworks and the mobilization of non-elite narratives, supporting the public voice as a new force in the construction of crime. We saw in the Phone Hacking Scandal the potential strength of expression through these new outlets to derail destructive, manipulative, dystopian narratives and to allow public outrage to have a serious impact on previously unfettered power relationships. Not only did the riots provide a potent example of this kind of mobilization of public voice through new media, in which rioters congregated through Blackberry Messenger and clean-ups were organized via Twitter, but it demonstrated the force of these new formats as a challenge to established power. As a result of these shifts we also saw panicked calls to shut down social media and mediated elements of youth culture were invoked in an attempt to pin down the 'folk devil' (Cohen 1972) as a racialised underclass, rabid in pursuit of consumerist tokens, speaking in Jamaican patois and relating to one another through text speak and rap (Quinn 2011, 'David Starkey claims the whites have become black', *The Guardian*, 13<sup>th</sup> August). What was immediately evident amidst this flurry of activity was that there seemed to be an unequivocal demonstration of the power of these new media structures as well as a fearful, disproportionate response.

As such, this seemed like a vital opportunity in which to observe this realm in action at a moment of intense extremes, to attempt to capture the full potential of the new media landscape in taking control of the meaning of crime. Similarly, in observing the construction of crime narratives, the riots presented perhaps the most prominent example of classic-type political communication of law and order during my research period. In many ways because of the uncertain nature of the riots, the political response was one in which strong statements of the meaning of crime and criminality were brought to the fore. I will consider these statements in detail,

however, at this point it is apt to note that the riots presented a reframing of the meaning of crime in action and this flurry of criminal activity provided a unique opportunity to develop some answers to the questions posed by previous case studies. In the 2010 election we saw that an uncertainty around shifting priorities put politicians in a responsive mode, constantly adapting to evolving pressures. We saw that classic-type populist narratives were not overly prominent, that they had not truly been an essential part of the campaign or at the forefront of strategy. Similarly, the use of crime in the riots was employed in order to seem responsive, to appear not to be ceding the ground or losing control. With their brutal and almost random acting out, rioters infused a sense of powerlessness which politics dealt with using crime narratives as a tool for legitimacy. In essence, while these events arrived very much out of nowhere and unfolded in chaos, even in their early moments they seemed to present an invaluable opportunity to develop some of the discussion touched upon in previous chapters and as a result, I began collecting data in order to form a case study of the riots.

### **The Case Study Approach**

Once again, the inherent value of the case study approach was evident in light of the seemingly rich body of data available and the opportunity for insight into the core questions of this project. In similar circumstances to the phone hacking scandal, while the activities around the riots erupted quickly and without warning, the adaptive nature of this kind of case study research allowed me to begin immersing myself in the data as events unfolded. While experience from previous data collection had underscored the value of a broad view of events, I was also able to take advantage of having a more detailed perspective on some of the themes that had become prominent in the research so far. As a result, I made an effort to focus on prominent instances of political communication, which did occur on several high profile occasions during the riots, as well as aiming to capture the utilization of new media outlets, which was as varied and chaotic as before but also became a key element of criminal activity. As Yin noted, case studies ought to be considered the

most appropriate approach “when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with some real-life context” (Yin 1994: 1). In this instance, the broad view of the activities around this time does help us to contextualize the political response to criminal activity and the employment of new media, while the lack of control afforded to the researcher is viewed not as problematic, but as integrated into the methodological approach.

The ongoing criminality occurring during the riots lent a slightly different tone to this case study than the phone hacking scandal, which was also an unpredictable event and was captured as it unfolded with little time for preparation. However, while the phone hacking scandal was more of a media event, with evidence of previous criminal activity emerging as I conducted the case study, in the case of the riots an analysis of the meaning of crime and its development through new media required an awareness of criminal acts occurring while the research was ongoing. While this might have presented an ethical challenge in research which required participant observation, fortunately the case study method meant that I could avoid these issues while still being able to capture the unfolding of events and the detail of the political construction of crime during this highly charged time.

My approach to gathering data here built on experience gained during the phone hacking scandal, particularly since once again the nature of this event allowed for almost no preparation. As such, I employed similar techniques of prioritizing sources and honing in on key events, I followed the unfolding of activity using a host of media sources, which included print press, television news and commentary such as the UK nightly current affairs television programme ‘Newsnight’ and online news sources. In particular, I will focus here on public political statements made by Prime Minister David Cameron and Kenneth Clarke (the then Justice Secretary), made both in speech form and in newspaper articles. I will also aim to capture the particular use of social media in the riots, which unfolded in various chaotic ways and which served to expand my discussion on the purpose of this realm in criminal justice narratives. Finally, retrospective evidence on the riots will be added using the detailed and large-scale body of data provided by the Guardian/LSE project *Reading the Riots*.

This unique research partnership between the London School of Economics and The Guardian represented an opportunity to conduct, as Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger suggested “high-quality social research at a speed and in a way that maximizes its likelihood of affecting public and political debate without sacrificing any of its rigour” (Lewis et al, *Reading the Riots Report* 2011: 2). Taking advantage of these resources, their project employed 77 researchers and data analysts to attempt to fill the perceived gap created by the lack of an inquiry like the Scarman report that had followed the 1981 Brixton riots. Confidential interviews with 270 people who were directly involved in riots in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Salford, Liverpool and Nottingham were conducted, producing 1.3 million words of first person accounts. Furthermore, around 2.6 million tweets were analysed.

Researchers involved in the social media element of the project found that a significant amount of innovation was required in order to grapple with this data. Procter, Vis and Voss (2013) take on the vast challenge of advancing research in social media, suggesting that “the rapid growth over the past 10 years of the Web as a publishing tool, and the recent explosion of social media such as blogs (and micro-blogs such as Twitter) and social networking sites (such as Facebook) presents both an opportunity and a challenge to social researchers” (Procter, Vis and Voss 2013: 197). Their work builds on Thelwall and Stuart’s (2007) research into communication technologies in crisis situations, which found from a study of responses during Hurricane Katrina that new media was useful for sharing information as the event unfolded and that the more traditional media outlets built on this in covering the aftermath (Thelwall and Stuart 2007). In advancing this research, Procter, Vis and Voss (2013: 198-199) focus on the transmission of information in the riots, using a vast and privileged body of data which would likely not have been available had they not been a part of such a high profile, wide-ranging project:

The Twitter corpus was provided to the Guardian newspaper and its collaborators under an agreement with Twitter. The sampling frame was public tweets sent during the period 1pm on 6 August and 8pm on 17 August 2011. The corpus was defined by those tweets matching one or more of 54 hashtags drawn up by the team of Guardian journalists who covered the riots. The resultant corpus contains 2.6 million tweets and 700,000 distinct user accounts. User profiles for all the accounts in the corpus were also provided by Twitter.

Not only were the researchers grappling with a huge amount of data, a vast number far beyond any level of media research previously conducted, but they were faced with a form of communication which was completely distinct from any other. Considering these issues, it is unsurprising perhaps that they suggest “the volume makes it impossible to analyse using conventional media research methods and tools” (Procter, Vis and Vas 2013: 199). Instead they constructed a built for purpose coding system using a continuous integration tool which generated groups of code frames and facilitated large scale analysis. The project grappled with an issue that I had also encountered and had approached from a different perspective throughout my research, namely that while the use of social media was widespread and in a constant process of evolution, this meant that these significant alterations in the communicative sphere were extremely difficult to capture. Ultimately, this heroic attempt to use quantitative methods to define this infinite pool of data does provide a summary of activity and some insight into the function of Twitter during the riots and I will utilise this as part of an approach which aims to analyse the role of social media more broadly.

## Chronology

The August 4<sup>th</sup> shooting of Mark Duggan provoked uproar between residents of Tottenham (a district in northern London) and the police. While the knowledge that Duggan had not actually discharged the weapon on his person was not yet public, insinuations that the police had falsely claimed that Duggan initially shot at them and a failure on the part of the police to liaise properly with Duggan’s family in the aftermath of his killing stoked tensions and resulted in a protest in Tottenham two days later that quickly became violent: “Senior officers refused to meet the crowd and provide the answers the community were demanding, and when rumours started that a police officer monitoring the protest had assaulted a young girl, the crowd got angry” (Langston 2012, ‘Remembering the UK Riots’, *VICE* 6<sup>th</sup> August). Much of the discussion surrounding the August riots focused on an uncertainty around the actual causes of the spread of the rioting. A sense of chaos was pervasive and was

subsequently reproduced in riots coverage due to a lack of understanding over how this single protest could provoke a series of similar events and widespread looting:

The fact that it was birthed from a very spontaneous and personal sense of grief, by people who likely had no riot experience, made things very unpredictable. And then of course there was the basic severity of it all, practically unheard of amongst a generation of British kids who many had assumed to be sullen and pissed off but ultimately apathetic ('Remembering the UK Riots', *VICE* 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012).

As this protest escalated, rioters threw bottles and set fire to police cars, while looting began on Tottenham High Road which spread to shops in Wood Green and continued until dawn (Reading the Riots 2011: 16). These actions seemed to set a precedent, as the next day looting occurred in the Enfield and Brixton areas of London, sending the message that this kind of theft was easily mobilized in the current mood and with large enough groups. The 8<sup>th</sup> August was described by *Reading the Riots* as "one of the most intense 24 hours of civil unrest in recent English history" (Reading the Riots 2011: 17), with 22 of London's 32 boroughs affected, large scale battles against the police occurring in Hackney and widespread arson in Croydon. Similar looting and clashes with the police continued over the next three days, spreading to other cities in the UK including Manchester, Salford, Liverpool, Nottingham and Birmingham, where three young men were fatally injured by a car while protecting their property (2011 'Three killed protecting property during Birmingham riots', *BBC News* 10<sup>th</sup> August). The activities of the rioters caused widespread consternation among the general public? over the seemingly unpredictable, uncontrollable violence and what the causes of these eruptions could be. In some cases, individual incidents seemed to have been provoked by small-scale incidents against a backdrop of existing tensions, general violence and opportunism. For instance, a first hand account from the second day of rioting suggests that exacerbated local tensions between the community and the police and overly assertive policing seemed to escalate quickly in the sensitive circumstances:

After running around East London for a while, I found a large crowd on Mare Street. For some reason, the police decided to stop and search two black guys seemingly at random, highlighting the racial profiling that has been driving a

wedge between the authorities and ethnic minorities for decades and contributed to the unrest in Tottenham. The police found nothing but their actions had wound up the crowd, and when they pulled another young kid aside for a pat down, someone lobbed a paving slab at them (Langston 2012, *VICE*, 'Remembering the UK Riots' 6<sup>th</sup> August).

Following the inciting incident that had inflated tensions between minority groups and the police, race was regularly focused on as an issue at the heart of the riots. Muriij and Neal (2011) suggest that race was brought to the fore in reflective and explanatory discourses due to “the ‘familiarity of the topologies of urban disorder [being] profoundly disrupted in the period... when the unrest... mutated into something less recognizable and something much more socially and spatially surprising” (Muriij and Neal 2011: 2.6). However, while Ministry of Justice data on ethnicity revealed that ethnic minorities were not necessarily overrepresented; “37% of those appearing in the courts on riot-related charges were white, 40% were black and 6% Asian” (Reading the Riots 2011: 13), Muriij and Neal argue that nonetheless, “the 2011 riots were racialised because the events in North London most visibly involved young African-Caribbean men... and because the unrest that was used as a reference point was the racialised disorders of the 1980s rather than the culturalised disorders of 2001” (Muriij and Neal 2011: 2.7). Building on these general misconceptions, race was prominently featured in historian David Starkey’s notorious rant on *Newsnight* in which he referred to Enoch Powell’s ‘rivers of blood speech’ in support of a spurious argument that the riots could be attributed to what he portrayed as an insidious shift towards the dominance of black culture:

The problem is that the whites have become black... His [Powell’s] prophecy was absolutely right in one sense. The Tiber did not foam with blood but flames lambent, they wrapped around Tottenham and they wrapped around Clapham. But it wasn’t inter-community violence. This is where he was absolutely wrong. What has happened is that a substantial section of the chavs that you wrote about have become black (‘David Starkey claims ‘the whites have become black’, *The Guardian* 13<sup>th</sup> August 2011).

This high-profile media incident served to sustain focus around race issues as a talking point despite the fact that, as Muriij and Neal comment, “What the disorders



provided insight to was the extent and depth of the super-diversity of England's urban spaces in which rioters, victims, bystanders, youth workers, commentators and residents were utterly multicultural and heterogeneous" (Murij and Neal 2011: 2.9).

Similarly, early estimates of gang involvement were later re-evaluated and played down as the riots unfolded, with increasing awareness that some more nebulous force had prompted the spread of rioting rather than any kind of traditional, coordinated gang activity. *Reading the Riots* details this shift, noting that, "After initially claiming that as many as 28% of those arrested in London were gang members, the Metropolitan police revised this to 19%, a figure that dropped to 13% countrywide" (Reading the Riots 2011: 21). The study suggests that while some gang members were present, they were not as David Cameron claimed on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2011 "at the heart of the protests [or] behind the co-ordinated attacks" (Reading the Riots 2011: 21). We can see that to blame gang activity would have provided a handy narrative here, explaining the unusual spread of looting and violence and the quite fast-moving co-ordination among rioters.

However, it was later revealed that this level of organization had been primarily facilitated through widespread social media tools. For instance, *Reading the Riots* found that a particular message had been easily spread around particular personal communication networks using the 'Blackberry Messenger' (BBM) instant text message service available to Blackberry mobile phone users and had "pinged out, first on to a few phones, then dozens, then hundreds across north London: '*Everyone in edmonton enfield wood green everywhere in north link up at enfield town statin at 4 o clock sharp!!!*'" (Reading the Riots 2011: 30, emphasis in original). As information unfolded linking riot gatherings to a spread of BBMs, commentators lashed out at social media communication more generally. High profile calls to close down Twitter were made by David Cameron and Conservative MP Louise Mensch (Halliday 2011, 'Tory MP Louise Mensch backs social network blackouts during civil unrest', *The Guardian* 12<sup>th</sup> August) and were largely aimed at the wrong outlet, with authorities such as the Greater Manchester police claiming that on the contrary, Twitter had been useful in "allow[ing] authorities to correct rumours before they gather[ed] momentum" (The Guardian 12<sup>th</sup> August 2011). However, the ability for large, unconnected groups to mobilise in particular areas had

indeed been facilitated by this spread of BBMs and had allowed rioting to take place without the input of gangs, adding to the sense of panic around the unknown, a new uncertainty around the cause and spread of such activities.

With no singular cause or particular narrative to follow, along with the prominence of looting, many commentators turned to ‘consumerism’ as the driving force behind riots. Zygmunt Bauman suggested that “this particular social minefield has been created by the combination of consumerism with rising inequality” (‘Interview- Zygmunt Bauman on the UK Riots’, *Social Europe Journal* 15<sup>th</sup> August 2011). He spoke of the rioters as ‘frustrated consumers’ in revolt: “This was... a mutiny of defective and disqualified consumers, people offended and humiliated by the display of riches to which they had been denied access” (*Social Europe Journal* 15<sup>th</sup> August 2011). Indeed, the vivid scenes of high street looting seemed to support this theory, in which the consumerist-in-nature choices of the theft of items such as trainers and TVs were cited as evidence of a widespread social ill that could be linked to increased inequalities: “This is what happens when people don’t have anything, when they have their noses constantly rubbed in stuff that can’t afford, and they have no reason ever to believe that they will be able to afford it” (Lyons 2011, ‘The UK riots: the psychology of looting’, *The Guardian*, 9<sup>th</sup> August). While a certain level of confusion had arisen initially around the motivations or political focus of the rioting, the looting element seemed to crystallise opinion around this general, rabid consumerism and along with the enhanced communicative capacity provided by social media, helped to redefine these as a wholly new type of rioting.

While reports emerged that those involved had not necessarily come from an impoverished background and that consumerist looting seemed not to be framed as a direct attack on corporations, discussion around the opportunistic nature of rioters emerged and became an integral element of the political narrative on rioting. I will consider the various political statements made at this time in some detail in this chapter. However, it is worth noting here that this time of uncertainty and panic provoked several strong statements, attacking in tone, which defined the acts of the rioters in memorable, bold soundbites: “This is criminality pure and simple” (David Cameron, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011). We saw the Conservative ‘Broken Britain’ theme revived and Ken Clarke deemed those involved “a feral underclass” (Kenneth Clarke

blames English riots on a 'broken penal system', The Guardian 5<sup>th</sup> September 2011). While Clarke took the opportunity to argue for penal reform, most attacks from the Prime Minister adopted a moralistic tone and served to define the acts as opportunistic, rather than structurally-rooted, or in any way an anomic response to broader societal issues of inequality.

The research conducted by *Reading the Riots* confirmed that the rioters themselves viewed the cause of looting as opportunism, concluding that "a perceived suspension of normal rules presented them with an opportunity to acquire goods and luxury items they could not ordinarily afford" (Reading the Riots 2011: 5). Phase 1 of the findings also suggested that as had been indicated, the role of gangs had been initially overstated, that a local anger at the treatment from police had played an integral role in exacerbating tensions, and that Twitter and Facebook had not been used by the rioters themselves, but rather BBMs were "used extensively to communicate, share information and plan in advance of the riots" (Reading the Riots 2011: 4). Furthermore, while some reports highlighted instances of rioters who were socioeconomically secure, *Reading the Riots* found that 59% of rioters were from the most deprived 20% of areas of the UK (Reading the Riots 2011: 5). Notably, while consumerism and opportunism had featured heavily in rioters' accounts, several other 'motivating grievances' were given: "from the increase in tuition fees, to the closure of youth services and the scrapping of the education maintenance allowance" (Reading the Riots 2011: 5). The study paid particular attention to the grievances cited in interviews, with the particular aim of asserting whether copycat instances had truly been as mindless as suggested. As was reported after analysis of the interview data, "what a great many shared, and talked animatedly about, was injustice and inequality" (Reading the Riots 2011: 24), many citing more general grievances with the government and the economic situation:

I think some people were there for justice for that boy who got killed. And the rest of them because of what's happening. The cuts, the government not doing the right thing. No job, no money. And the young these days needs to be heard. It's got to be justice for them. [A woman in her 30s, involved in riots in North London.] (Reading the Riots 2011: 25).

The events of the riots represented social unrest at its most modern; a lashing out that seemingly had its roots in economic injustice, that manifested itself through an expression of consumerism and which was facilitated by youth-orientated new media. As we will see, the response to the riots was panicked and aimed to criminalise the participants in order to redefine them as a knowable force. The communication of crime was used here not only to reinforce legitimacy, but subsequently? as a tool to reframe the issue, to redefine rioters as criminals motivated by the kind of criminal urges that come from a lapse in moral judgement, rather than to acknowledge an endemically frustrated youth, worn down by a harsh economic climate and newly mobilized through rapidly evolving media outlets.

### Academic Literature

Beyond *Reading the Riots* (2011), various strands of academic work have aimed to explain the chaotic events of August 2011. The unfolding of political debate and the honing in from widespread confusion to a stance of overt certainty was detailed by Muriij and Neal (2011), who argued that the ambiguity of the time was eventually dealt with through a political adoption, particularly from the coalition parties, of “totalizing explanations sought in relation to criminality and morality” (Muriij and Neal 2011: 3.1). They suggest that Home Secretary Theresa May initiated a forcefully simplistic explanation of events, deeming them “‘pure thuggery’ and the rioters as ‘criminals’” (Muriij and Neal 2011: 3.1). This narrative was continued by Mayor of London Boris Johnson who adopted a similar tone, maintaining that “It’s time we stopped hearing all this (you know) nonsense about how there are deep sociological justifications for wanton criminality and destruction of peoples’ property” (Muriij and Neal 2011: 3.1). Ultimately, they argue that we see a new approach emerging, in which a ‘complexity viewpoint’ is in play along with these initially dominant ‘simplistic causal explanations’.

Baker (2011) agrees that “the recent unrest was significantly enhanced by the development of new social media, requiring new understandings of mediated crowd membership in the twenty-first century” (Baker 2011: 1). Building on Thompson

(2000), Baker argues for a recognition of the ‘media age’ in which new media developments have redefined emotional relations and “have had a considerable impact on mediated forms of crowd membership by increasing the speed of public communication, and the scope of social networking to a plurality of non-present others” (Baker 2011: 1.2). She discusses the lack of necessity for ‘the crowd’ to be defined by bodily co-presence, or in a “spatial and temporal proximity”, rather the influence of new media on the political realm and on the public ability to gather round an issue, now represents “an interactive community that both traverses and intersects geographical public space and the virtual public sphere” (Baker 2011: 1.2). Baker argues that in opposition to Giddens’ (1991) contention that these new media forms can act as “disembedding mechanisms, that dislocate social relations from the confines of time and space” (Baker 2011: 2.2), crucially we ought instead to view these technologies as not replacing traditional group gatherings or face to face communication, but extending these to enhance our communicative experience. A further obvious benefit from this augmented virtual-real realm is the capacity to draw in a much wider net of participants. Particularly, as we have seen in the activities of the 2010 election, the democratic nature of public debate is enhanced by increased public participation and in acts of protest, whether peaceful as in the Occupy Movement or as in the more chaotic riots, there is certainly an ease of large-scale mobilisation. Indeed, Baker’s vision of the mediated crowd and the fusion of real space and virtual space in the crowd develops our understanding of the riots, in that we see an initial act occur as part of a very traditional crowd gathering, the tensions rising from established community issues and the heating up and production of chaotic bursts of energy through the physical congregation. We then see that the particular demographic involved in this initial event is one which enjoys a certain comfort level in the mediated realm. In this case, the Blackberry Messenger function is the extension of the geographical crowd into the mediated crowd and while the spread of the riots baffled many commentators, for those involved, the intimacy of communication now regularly experienced through these modes meant a natural progression. In essence, the riots demonstrate more than ever that the new media realm must be appreciated as a forceful element in present day communication,

particularly in times of political tension, of outrage, of protest and of democratic exchange.

### **'Criminality Pure and Simple': The Development of a Narrative**

The chaos of the riots and the surrounding fear stirred by a lack of focus for public ire provoked political responses that reached initially for force. The panic created by the unpredictable spread of such acts and their accompanying violence, vandalism, looting and altercations with the police was tackled by politicians with a deployment of traditional crime narratives that aimed to reframe the events as a known force rather than something completely outwith the experience of our public authority figures. Rather than exploring the complex motivating factors at play here, most initial public statements adopted moralistic 'us versus them' themes, reaching for legitimacy by framing the rioters as the villainous 'other'.

As Muriq and Neal (2011) discussed, Home Secretary Theresa May was first to frame the riots in these terms through her statement from the Home Office on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2011 (2011, 'Theresa May: London rioters will be brought to justice', *BBC News* 8<sup>th</sup> August). What was particularly noticeable in political communication during the riots was the various attempts by politicians to both reinstate order through authority and in various examples attempting to seem to be addressing public needs by speaking from the affected areas. Both approaches yielded varying levels of success, but here the government response is launched by the Home Secretary, from the Home Office, with Home Office insignia visible behind her, projecting a certain air of authority from which she makes several assertive, repetitive statements. She begins:

The riots that took place in Tottenham on Saturday night and the subsequent disturbances in other parts of London are totally unacceptable.

We hear several political expressions around this time of the riots being 'unacceptable' and the majority of the statement given by Theresa May stays in this

realm, offering general denigration of the acts and stating forcefully that they are disapproved of, while skilfully avoiding addressing any of the complex issues at the heart of the riots.

Once again I would like to pay tribute to the brave police officers who put themselves in harms way to protect the public, their property and local businesses...

Here there is an attempt to reinforce the police as a body who are wholly in service of the public and are on the side of the public, against the rioters who are 'othered'. This introduces an attempt to re-establish state legitimacy and project some confidence that the government can take control of the spiralling situation.

Let me be absolutely clear. Those responsible for this violence and looting will be made to face the consequences of their actions.

So far there have been at least 215 arrests and 27 people have been charged, but as the police take statements from witnesses, as they look at CCTV evidence, then more arrests will be made.

This mention of CCTV evidence and the gathering of witness statements is included as an attempt to suggest to the public and to rioters that the police do have an upper hand in tackling criminal activity. One of the significant struggles for the government and the police at this point in the riots was to regain some level of control over a situation they seemed not to be on top of, they seemed not to understand at its root and they seemed unable to stop. In this small way, Theresa May attempts again to reframe these events as a traditional crime, with which the police have experience and technological capabilities to best the wild criminal activities occurring on the streets of London.

Since Saturday night, Londoners have made clear that there are no excuses for violence and I would call on all members of local communities to work constructively with the police to help them bring these criminals to justice.

Again, this aims to reframe ‘Londoners’ as victims of a rogue criminal cohort rather than in association with this disaffected group and implores them to associate with the police effort to tackle this traditionally defined ‘crime’. An interviewer goes on to ask:

Home Secretary having said all of that there is trouble again tonight in London... Why couldn't you or the police stop this? Is there going to be more trouble tonight?

In the question and answer segment of this statement we see that the Home Secretary is pressed on the chaos and the seeming lack of control held by the police, but her response is to repeat again and again that these acts are inexcusable:

Let's be absolutely clear that there is no excuse for violence, there is no excuse for looting, there is no excuse for thuggery. The police will obviously deal with any emerging situations as they consider best.. appropriate for those situations. But I am absolutely clear there is no excuse for looters or thuggery or violence on the streets.

The phrase ‘let's be absolutely clear’ is used here several times and by other politicians throughout the riots in an attempt to hammer home some legitimacy through clarity in this unruly situation. The phrase ‘there is no excuse’ is repeated again and again to emphasise indignation at these events but also to define the acts as clear, as criminal, as unrelated to complex socioeconomic factors. Throughout the riots we see a frustration from politicians at such claims and a forceful deflection away from any laying of blame at their own feet. The emphasis on clarity and ‘no excuse’ helps rhetorically to maintain a position of legitimacy and it seems to



provide a way forward that might not necessarily deal with the rioting but will at least serve to calm public nerves. The interviewer continues:

Do you understand for some people the perception may be... there are kids going round on bikes, there are youths arranging to meet across London on their phones, it looks lawless out there, the police look like they're on the back foot.

This mention of lawlessness directly contradicts the Home Secretary's rhetoric and results in an assertive repetition of these themes of 'othering' the rioters, of evoking a deceptive level of clarity and of pushing away complex explanations as 'excuses' which ought to be dismissed in favour of force:

The police have been policing our streets and again I say I pay tribute to the officers who are putting themselves in harm's way to protect people, their property and local businesses, but I say let's be clear, there is no excuse for violence, there is no excuse for looters, there is no excuse for thuggery on our streets and those who are responsible will be brought to justice and they will face the consequences of their actions.

Violence, looters and 'thuggery' are evoked in direct contrast to the officers putting themselves in harm's way to protect the public. A clear line is drawn in constructing these events into helpless communities and honourable police officers versus the thuggery of the criminal rioters. Again, focus is put on bringing rioters 'to justice', which deflects away from considerations of why the riots might be occurring, allowing no room for consideration of motivating factors, brushing this aside as simple thuggery, basic understandable, unavoidable inherent criminality. 'No excuse' is repeated again and again in an attempt to say that there will be no consideration of causal factors, a point that the interviewer presses again:

Final point, the deputy mayor for London Kit Malthouse thinks this is basically criminals using this for cover to just quote 'steal trainers and steal

TVs'. Do you agree with that or is it about something deeper, economy and jobs?

Theresa May responds:

I think this is about sheer criminality, that is what we have seen on the streets, the violence we've seen, the looting we've seen, the thuggery we've seen, this is sheer criminality and let's make no bones about it and that's why I say that these people will be brought to justice, they will be made to face the consequences of their actions and I call on all members of local communities to work with the police constructively to help the police to bring these criminals to justice.

Violence, looting, thuggery, repeated again, 'thuggery' the added descriptive word, defining the acts again as the inevitable actions of the thugs of our society. 'Sheer criminality' emphasises this point again, while the focus on being 'brought to justice' deflects attention to the punishment rather than tackling the cause. It is clear from Theresa May's very forceful, repetitive statement, deflecting from causal factors and towards reframing the debate, that very little is being given away here. What is most telling about the noticeable level of repetition here is that it uses up time while giving away very little. May's statement cedes very little control by utterly refusing to engage with broader causal factors. Indeed, the higher purpose of wanton criminality is invoked to facilitate this denial, presumably because to focus on criminal acts and the need for immediate action would undermine the argument that broad socioeconomic factors or wide-scale dissatisfaction with the status quo could have been at the heart of this unrest. We see here that in times of panic and of narrative chaos, that 'crime' is a powerful tool in clutching at legitimacy and in deflecting from accusatory complexity.

David Cameron continues this theme of force and of dismissing nuance in his first address to the public, in this case utilizing all of the ceremony of the office of Prime Minister to emanate control. He delivers a written speech, with no questions taken, from a podium in front of 10 Downing Street and with a police officer visible

behind him. He begins by citing some of the official agencies with which he has met, invoking COBRA and high-ranking officials to assert authority:

I've come straight from a meeting of the government's COBRA committee for dealing with emergencies, where we've been discussing the action that we will be taking to help the police to deal with the disorder on the streets of London and elsewhere in our country. I've also met with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner and the Home Secretary to discuss this further ('UK riots are sickening', ITN 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011).

He then turns his attention to reinforcing the 'us versus them' theme, the 'othering' of the rioters:

And people should be in no doubt that we will do everything necessary to restore order to Britain's streets and to make them safe for the law-abiding.

This not only aims to calm public fears by promising order but by defining the rioters, as Theresa May had done, as a known force, as clearly in opposition of the law-abiding, rather than allowing for the possibility that their might be some fluidity in definition here. Absolute condemnation is then invoked:

Let me first of all completely condemn the scenes that we have seen on our television screens and people have witnessed in their communities. These are sickening scenes, scenes of people looting, vandalizing, thieving, robbing, scenes of people attacking police officers and even attacking fire crews as they're trying to put out fires.

Notably, Cameron addresses 'the scenes' that the public have witnessed. This statement, more explicitly than ever, is not just for the victims of crime, nor merely aimed at rioters themselves, but it is for the fearful public, those who have merely seen or heard of events and have felt personally insecure. Again, pitting rioters

against fire crews aiming to put out fires makes the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ clearer than ever and certainty is restored.

This is criminality pure and simple and it has to be confronted and defeated.

Perhaps Cameron’s most iconic statement of the riots, ‘criminality pure and simple’ dismisses nuance and instead suggests that there is some unavoidable, instinctive, choice-driven notion of criminality that is revealed when the opportunity is provided. This deflects blame or even discussion away from socioeconomic issues, away from dissatisfaction with unemployment. ‘Confronted and defeated’ rather than understood and treated is utilised here as a theme that tells us a great deal about the potency of the notion of ‘crime’ in today’s political realm. More than ever, when the opportunity to control events or to command the narrative shifts towards a vocal and empowered public, a public who by their nature infuses multiple, uncontrollable narratives into the discourse, the fallback position of the government in desperate need of a boost in legitimacy is a crime narrative that is active, panicked, that relies on a simple, classic good versus evil theme. This isn’t really about populism, since there is no developed, manipulative construction and satisfying of public fears here; penal populism requires political control, and it requires the deployment of cynicism through willing media forces that just doesn’t exist in this realm. This is a fall-back position in a time of panic, that seeming to cede the ground, to fail to employ this one-note, last resort attack on criminality at least provides certainty in a time of mass confusion. Along with falling back on punitiveness, we also see familiar allusions to victimhood, themes which again are drawn into simplistic ideal victims versus the ‘other’ criminal element, an approach which does not under any circumstances allow for consideration of broad-scale victimization which may have had a hand in these events:

I feel huge sympathy for the families who suffered, innocent people who have been burned out of their houses and to businesses who have seen their premises smashed, their products looted and their livelihoods potentially ruined.

I also feel for all those who live in fear because of these appalling scenes that we have seen on the streets of our country.

Again, the public are drawn in and reframed as victims rather than outraged citizens. This turns any ire towards the government or towards broader causal factors instead against the apparently knowing, blameworthy element of our society. We see the justice system employed in defence of this forced dichotomy:

People should be in no doubt that we are on the side of the law-abiding, law-abiding people who are appalled by what has happened in their own communities... I am determined, the government is determined that justice will be done and these people will see the consequences of their actions. And I have this very clear message to those people who are responsible for this wrongdoing and criminality. You will feel the full force of the law. And if you are old enough to commit these crimes you are old enough to face the punishments. And to these people I would say this, you are not only wrecking the lives of others, you're not only wrecking your own communities, you are potentially wrecking your own life too.

The 'force of the law' is employed here to satiate the fearful public. The Prime Minister and the government have very little credibility in this debate and yet they have at their disposal the full force of the criminal justice system. As such, this is the tool employed here to send out the message of control, to calm nerves and end the chaos.

This thorough and high profile rhetorical assault that aimed to regain control over events continued later that day in Clapham Junction on the 9<sup>th</sup> August when London Mayor Boris Johnson took to the streets to address crowds, flanked by Home Secretary Theresa May. A great deal of criticism at the time had circulated around various politicians continuing to holiday during what would ordinarily mark a Parliamentary recess and an uneventful time in politics, but which had clearly

descended into an emergency state. Johnson in particular received a certain amount of criticism for not seeming to have returned quickly enough (Hardcastle 2011, 'Boris Johnson unwisely refused to cut short his holiday when the riots broke out in London', *Daily Mail* 10<sup>th</sup> August) and as such, headed immediately upon his return on to the streets of the affected areas of London to make public statements. This act was possibly intended to visually reframe Johnson as back at the heart of the issue, although the practicalities of conducting a media event of this nature clashed with the obvious tensions still felt in these communities and resulted in a raucous, muddled back and forth with locals that challenged Johnson's intended approach of seeming forceful, of aiming to regain control.

At 15.10 Johnson arrives at his first destination in Clapham Junction with Theresa May, met with a crowd erupting in heckles. His body language emanates discomfort, he asks for quiet, he directly faces crowd members with arms folded and incensed facial expressions, crowd members themselves ask other bystanders for quiet which seems to symbolically undermine any power held by Johnson in this situation. He begins by thanking those who have been involved in the cleanup effort, stating "That is the real spirit of London... how very sorry I am for the loss and damage you have suffered" (Davies 2011, 'Boris Johnson heckled in Clapham Junction over London riots', *The Guardian* 9<sup>th</sup> August). Hecklers in the crowd continue to interrupt his speech shouting; "What happened... Where were the police?" (*The Guardian* 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011). The unruly nature of this situation stands in direct opposition to the control exerted by May from the Home Office. Here, Johnson aims to take advantage of this positioning to regain authority, yet the visceral fury of those locals who had felt victimized by the riots and fearful of continued chaos used their voices to undermine his authority, to force him to directly engage with their true complaints. This puts Johnson in the difficult position of not being easily able to control the narrative as May and Cameron had and is a poignant reminder of the gradual erosion of the political capacity to do so. Indeed, again and again we see in politics that public figures are forced to hear the public voice and this is an instance in which the collective public wrath is unavoidable.

Johnson ignores the questions posed and continues to try to elevate his voice to shout over the hecklers, stumbling and repeating several times; "I also want to say,

I also want to say... can you hear me at the back?" (Taken from notes on televised speech, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011):

I also want to say to the people who have been involved in instigating these riots, those who have been robbing and stealing, that they will be caught, they will be apprehended and they will face punishments that they will bitterly regret.

This builds on Cameron's message that the full force of the law will be deployed as the most powerful tool in the government's arsenal to try to calm the chaos. Johnson uses less neutral wording, that the rioters will 'bitterly regret' their involvement and this only belies a certain level of panic behind the intent. The heckling continues and it's notable that much of the public questioning does not focus on punishment or the criminal justice system or in laying blame, but in issues of policing. Johnson eventually responds by shouting over the crowd:

I know there are questions about the police response and about police numbers, I understand that, and we are certainly going to be dealing with those

A woman then forcefully interrupts:

You talk about robust policing. What does that actually mean?

To which Johnson responds:

Tonight, we are going to have huge numbers of police on the streets...

... he begins until he is interrupted again:

But where were they? By 5pm, we knew they were going to hit. I was in my salon when a brick came through the window, and no one was there to defend me.

At this point, Johnson is being drowned out by heckles, he runs his hands through his hair, he sounds severely lacking in confidence in the claims he makes about policing.

Someone in the crowd starts to ask about Mark Duggan which he stutters over and starts to become panicked as he loses control of the situation. His voice lowers and lowers until he seems to address a totally different point, at which point he becomes animated again and bellows a forceful statement:

I think it is time that people who are engaged in looting and violence stopped hearing economic and social justifications for what they... for what they've done.

He ends the statement on this note, having largely failed to communicate in any meaningful way with the angry residents around him and having also failed to take command in the manner that Cameron or May had done so previously. What is interesting about Johnson's last minute denigration of 'economic and social justification' is the confirmation that these kind of broad level discussions around causality have been positioned by the Conservative party in direct opposition to their forceful law and order stance. Despite failing to deliver this certainty, we can see the political position-taking here is pre-emptive against attacks on the government for being to blame for these riots. Again, this is a crucial element of the nature of criminal justice rhetoric in politics today, that the main aim seems most prominently to avoid blame.

### Shifting the Narrative

In the early stages of the riots, in which this forceful public order protection narrative was at the heart of discussion, no party wished to cede the ground or take blame for seeming not to be forceful enough on dealing with criminality. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August Labour leader Ed Miliband stated "Different people have different views but there are no excuses" (2011 'Ed Miliband: No excuses for rioting', *BBC News*, 9<sup>th</sup> August), which alluded to the notion that there were broader discussions to be had, but that the Labour party would not be the scapegoat for Boris Johnson's outrage at the economic and social debates which were being framed as justifications.



Indeed, on the 11<sup>th</sup> August, in his House of Commons speech, Ed Miliband went on to explicitly state “there can be no excuses, no justification” (Ed Miliband speech, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2011), again semantically avoiding becoming the ‘soft on crime’ party here. He also took the opportunity to seem to be pushing for tough sentences:

Does the prime minister agree that magistrates and judges need to have those circumstances at the front of their mind so that those found guilty of this disgraceful behaviour receive the tough sentences they deserve and the public expect?

In this instance, Miliband refers to ‘aggravating circumstances’ which might make sentences harsher, rather than ‘mitigating circumstances’ which might aim to explain why the crimes had been committed. Again, there is an ‘acting tough’ that happens here for show, to technically maintain the position of just as ‘tough on crime’ as the other parties. We see then that once this necessary justification of position has taken place, that Miliband attempts to mention the unmentionable, to suggest that there may be some complex causality at play here:

The prime minister said in 2006 "Understanding the background, the reasons, the causes. It doesn't mean excusing crime but it will help us to tackle it. To seek to explain is not to seek to excuse. Of course these are acts of individual criminality. But we have a duty to ask ourselves why there are people who feel they have nothing to lose, and everything to gain, from wanton vandalism and looting.

In reaching to a quote from the past, we see that Miliband is aiming to reframe the debate not in terms of these panicked times, but rather with reference to broader ideological stances on crime. In essence, this demonstrates the force of the moral panic or the high profile criminal event in defining criminal justice approaches in politics and in subsequent policy. It is in moments such as these that parties are forced to individually reframe and publicly restate their stance on approaches to crime. In political decision making on crime, there is rarely a behind the scenes, carefully orchestrated policy approach in which long term research projects are considered. Particularly in Westminster politics, we see that high profile events such

as this, such as the Bulger murders and the subsequent ‘Prison Works’ phenomenon, these unpredictable criminal events and the reactions they elicit are integral in the formation of criminal justice approaches. Miliband’s careful assertion that to attempt to understand does not excuse is necessary in this fearful environment and it does aim to push the dialogue towards longer term considerations:

The causes are complex. Simplistic responses will not provide the answer. We need to look at and act on all the issues that matter: The responsibility we need from top to bottom in our society, including parental responsibility. The take what you can culture, that needs to change from the benefits office to the boardroom. A sustained effort to tackle the gangs in our cities, something we knew about before these riots.

We see longer term approaches referred to here and even allusions to the ‘take what you can culture’ of the boardroom, connecting the street-level acts of the riots to broad frustrations at the abuses committed by UK elites and the subsequent strain created by inequality. This narrative was further developed by Ed Miliband on the 12<sup>th</sup> August when he explicitly linked the riots to various recent scandals:

There is an issue which went to all our souls - this is an issue not just about the responsibility and irresponsibility we saw on the streets of Tottenham. It's about irresponsibility, wherever we find it in our society. We've seen in the past few years MPs' expenses, what happened in the banks, what happened with phone hacking (‘Riots and looting? Blame expenses cheat MPs, phone hackers and bankers for society losing its ‘sense of right and wrong’ says Miliband’, Daily Mail, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2011).

The speech given by David Cameron to the House of Commons on the 11<sup>th</sup> stuck rigidly to the forceful ant-crime, anti-criminal ‘othering’ of his initial statement, using harsh, evocative wording, repeating some of his previous comments:

The whole country has been shocked by the most appalling scenes of people looting, violence, vandalising and thieving. It is criminality pure and simple.

And there is absolutely no excuse for it ('UK riots: text of David Cameron's address to commons', The Telegraph, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2011).

This speech served to repeat much of what had been previously said and was expanded upon in what became referred to as the 'fightback' speech on August 15<sup>th</sup> in which he outlined the various ways in which this problem ought to be tackled:

It is time for our country to take stock. Last week we saw some of the most sickening acts on our streets. I'll never forget talking to Maurice Reeves, whose family had run the Reeves furniture store in Croydon for generations. This was an 80-year-old man who had seen the business he had loved, that his family had built up for generations, simply destroyed. A hundred years of hard work, burned to the ground in a few hours. But now that the fires have been put out and the smoke has cleared, the question hangs in the air: 'Why? How could this happen on our streets and in our country?'

We see a familiar anecdotal approach that had been widely adopted during the 2010 electoral campaign and which was often used to allow the politicians to seem to relate in a human way to the struggles of victims of crime. Cameron then addresses the broader causality at play while sticking rigidly to his rhetoric of individualistic, rational criminality as the core motivation:

But what we know for sure is that in large parts of the country this was just pure criminality.

So as we begin the necessary processes of inquiry, investigation, listening and learning: let's be clear.

These riots were not about race: the perpetrators and the victims were white, black and Asian. These riots were not about government cuts: they were directed at high street stores, not Parliament. And these riots were not about

poverty: that insults the millions of people who, whatever the hardship, would never dream of making others suffer like this.

No, this was about behaviour...

...people showing indifference to right and wrong...

...people with a twisted moral code...

...people with a complete absence of self-restraint.

We see that eventually there has been a breakdown of the simple criminality rhetoric and Cameron has been forced to address these arguments and does so by answering them with a reaffirmation of this ethos. There is some reference to the bad example set by elites:

But politicians shying away from speaking the truth about behaviour, about morality...

...this has actually helped to cause the social problems we see around us.

We have been too unwilling for too long to talk about what is right and what is wrong.

We see the Prime Minister still aim to reaffirm his original 'criminality pure and simple' rhetoric, but that his ability to do so with traditional, uninterrupted vigour has been stymied by the development of the popular narrative, that there has been some level of support for nuance infused into the debate.

I have argued since the outset of this project that following the development of crime narratives with an enhanced awareness of the public voice is a way by which we might better understand criminal justice decision-making in the public realm. I would suggest that this example, of the development of crime narratives in the riots can tell us a great deal about the sometimes contradictory stances taken by politicians on law and order. For instance, following the various political speeches I have discussed, one of the most prominent political 'communications' of crime that followed was the article written by Justice Secretary Ken Clarke in the Guardian on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 2011, which famously categorized rioters as a "feral underclass, cut off from the mainstream in everything but materialism" (Clarke 2011, 'Punish

the feral rioters, but address our social deficit too', *The Guardian*, 5<sup>th</sup> September). This is political rhetoric at its most contradictory. Firstly, Clarke employs forceful language of denigration:

The riots in August shocked me to the core. What I found most disturbing was the sense that the hardcore of rioters came from a feral underclass, cut off from the mainstream in everything but its materialism. Equally worrying was the instinctive criminal behaviour of apparently random passers-by.

We see the 'second-order consensus' still in operation here, where even in a relatively liberal setting, in a comment page in *The Guardian*, he still feels the need not to give the sense that he isn't shocked and appalled by the 'criminal' acts. He uses evocative words like 'disturbing' and 'worrying' to give a sense that he is in touch with the public sense of fear.

What are the lessons for the justice system?

The first is that disorder on our streets must be met with a firm, fast and sustained response.

The 'second-order consensus' continues to remain prominent here, with the firm, fast response to criminal activity the priority. This is a particular trend of law and order politics in recent years and throughout this case study; that before any allusion to approaches such as rehabilitation can be made, a token statement is made which both relates to the emotions possibly felt by the public and taking swift action to stay on top of any unfolding situation. This is a new certainty of the second-order consensus.

The second lesson of the riots is that they reaffirm the central point of any sane criminal justice policy: where crimes have been committed, offenders must be properly punished and pay back to the communities they have

damaged. The scale of the violence and looting was new, but crimes like arson and burglary are not – and our courts do deal severe punishments to serious offenders.

Here we see Clarke develop this ‘on the side of the public’ narrative, alluding to ‘sane’ criminal justice policy as proper punishment. Again, the use of ‘sane’ in his language here frames punitiveness as the natural approach, the least that can be done.

Needless to say, sentences have been variously attacked as too soft and too tough. I could draw the conclusion that in the main, the judges have probably been getting it about right – but, of course, only those in court know the full facts of each case. The judiciary in this country is independent and we should trust judges and magistrates to base decisions on individual circumstances. Injustices can occur in any system: but that's precisely why we enjoy the services of the court of appeal.

There is a standard defence of the judiciary here, an upholding of the legitimacy of the arms of the state, an approach also frequently favoured in discussions of the police in political statements. In the face of disproportionate sentencing, it would disturb the second order consensus, it would create panic to suggest any displeasure with the courts. Notably, we then see Clarke’s position shift slightly, having ensured sufficient coverage of all of the requisite elements of an acceptable law and order statement, he moves on to address some of the underlying causes attributed to the criminal activity:

It’s not yet been widely recognised, but the hardcore of the rioters were, in fact, known criminals. Close to three-quarters of those aged 18 or over charged with riot offences already had a prior conviction. That is the legacy of a broken penal system – one whose record in preventing reoffending has been straightforwardly dreadful.

This framing of the penal system as anything but the absolute answer to criminality represents a significant shift in penal rhetoric. It is clear that these are the views held by the Justice Secretary and that he has seized the opportunity of crisis, of the calls for nuance motivated by the chaotic public voice to shift the political approach to law and order. As I have discussed throughout this project, speaking in favour of rehabilitation or against prisons is an unprecedented move, one which further undermines deterministic Neoliberal accounts and the intrinsic link of ‘Penal Populism’. Clarke continues:

I am introducing radical changes to focus our penal system relentlessly on proper, robust punishment and the reduction of reoffending. This means making our jails places of productive hard work, addressing the scandal of drugs being readily available in many of our prisons and toughening community sentences so that they command public respect. And underpinning it all, the most radical step of all: paying those who rehabilitate offenders, including the private and voluntary sectors, by the results they achieve, not (as too often in the past) for processes and box-ticking.

‘Radical changes’ are once again not what we would expect to hear in this time of crisis. It is worth noting that Clarke did not remain as Justice Secretary for long and by no means was any kind of rehabilitation revolution prioritized. However, what has clearly shifted here is the ability to move discussion in this direction. Throughout the unfolding of the riots we saw politicians attempt in vain to regain control and legitimacy by standing by a ‘criminality pure and simple’ approach, one which emphasized ‘simple’ as a means of saying that this was not the time to discuss underlying causes or rehabilitative approaches. As we saw, the vociferousness of the public voice saw this approach meet a hostile, chaotic environment, keen for answers which were not only more nuanced but also related better to those who found themselves in the midst of the chaos, those who did not see punitiveness and rioters defined as criminals as the sole answer. Clarke continues even further:

However, reform can't stop at our penal system alone. The general recipe for a productive member of society is no secret. It has not changed since I was inner cities minister 25 years ago. It's about having a job, a strong family, a decent education and, beneath it all, an attitude that shares in the values of mainstream society

Addressing unemployment means making progress on the economy by getting the deficit under control and pressing ahead with welfare reform and work programmes. Building stronger families means gripping the 120,000 most problematic ones and really addressing their problems, not leaving them in touch with, but untouched by, dozens of different agencies. A decent education means liberalising our schools system so that more students can benefit from high standards and discipline.

The coalition has a renewed mission: tackling the financial deficit, for certain. But also, importantly, addressing the appalling social deficit that the riots have highlighted.

This final piece of political communication is noteworthy and represents an apt moment to conclude this project. My aim from the outset has been to move criminological accounts of the crime communication landscape away from dystopias and towards a sense of optimism. I will discuss in detail the implications that these case study findings have when considered together and within the context of this project. Here, I would note that it might have seemed previously unthinkable for a Conservative Justice Minister to argue in favour of 'addressing the appalling social deficit' within a criminal justice context. This shift has been enabled by an enlivened and mobilised public voice, one which clearly has the capacity to derail established narratives and to infuse a move towards optimism into the construction of crime. Most prominently, as we see the inevitability of 'Penal Populism' fade, moves towards new perspectives and less punitive approaches are facilitated by the 'second-order consensus'. We have seen that to cover oneself is still a necessity in law and



order politics, but one which is comforting and which once fulfilled, can shepherd in a new range of approaches to criminal justice.

### Example: Primary Empirical Material and Discourse Analysis

#### FIELD NOTES

9<sup>th</sup> August 2011

David Cameron 'UK riots are sickening' speech outside 10 Downing Street  
DC emerges from 10 Downing Street, walks over to a podium in front of press, a policeman stands behind him in shot, very authoritative imagery.

- Has come straight from COBRA
- Discussing action to help police deal with disorder
- Met with MET commissioner and home Sec
- People should be in no doubt
- Everything necessary to restor order
- Safe for law abiding
- Completely condemn the scenes on TV screens / communities
- Sickening scenes
- Looting
- Vandalising
- Thieving
- Robbing
- Attacking poice officers and fire crews
- Criminality pure and simple
- Confronted and defeated
- Huge sympathy for families and businesses
- We all live in fear
- People should be in no doubt, we are on the side of law abiding
- Police officers shown bravery

- Confronting thugs
- More robust police action
- Discussing in COBRA
- 6,000 last night 16000 police tonight
- all leave cancelled
- aid from forces across country
- strengthen and assist
- 450 arrests already
- court procedures will be speeded up
- more arrests in days to come
- justice will be done
- consequences of actions
- clear message
- you will feel the full force of the law
- wrecking your own life too
- parliament recalled for a day for a statement and debate
- stand together in condemnation and determination

NOTE added later, find at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UohyrhMKou0>

Notes for discourse analysis...

#### 1: DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

- Identifiable social relationship here is the statement, Prime Ministerial
- Lexical references indicate firm condemnation, strong language used throughout, strong tone, steady

#### 2: DISCOURSES

- Discourse follows the pattern of the speech in a formulaic way, this is well executed

### 3: ACTION ORIENTATION

- Prime Minister directed first at the public and then at the rioters
- Safety
- Then assurances of punishment
- The firm tone of voice frames the action

### 4: POSITIONINGS

- Positioned as Prime Minister very obviously through visual imagery of policeman in background, door of 10 Downing Street, podium.
- Set up has constructed authority
- David Cameron speaks with authoritative tone here also

### 5: PRACTICE

- Not much extra to observe in this instance, body language is quite authoritative, quite steady

### 6: SUBJECTIVITY

- In this moment of panic it is crucial that this speech do the job of assuring members of the public that they are safe
- This reinforces the legitimacy of government and of DC and the Conservatives; criminality is sickening.
- No discussion of causes, just simply that punishment will be swift and forceful
- Policing will be increased. This is all about sending the message that the government are absolutely in control
- This is projected by the firmness of the speech, no questions no wavering, short, sharp, unequivocal statements. No aim to understand why the rioting happened. Immediate and harsh punishment is clearer.

## CONCLUSION

'The Political Communication of Crime' as a subject of analysis has posed certain immediate questions, while at the same time prompting the exploration of unexpected structural and conceptual shifts. Throughout this research I have adopted an approach that has forcefully prioritized fluidity with the aim of capturing this evolving realm. I have argued from the outset that a logical requirement in pursuit of the meaning of crime in society and of criminal justice outcomes is an enhanced understanding of the construction of crime narratives in the political realm. We have seen on innumerable occasions that the public and political use of crime is in stark opposition to accepted criminological understanding; we have grown accustomed to criminal justice policy that can be arbitrary, that can override developed bodies of work and irrefutable research findings. Similarly, we remain in consternation of reports of ever-increasing levels of fear of crime that seem to present no correlation with the statistical picture of criminal acts. Unquestionably there is a process taking place in today's society in which the meaning of crime is transformed, where its force, its symbolic weight is appropriated, in which this distorted use of 'crime' overrides our focus on the objective reality of the criminal act. This has typically been viewed as a troubling mishandling of the crime problem, a damaging distraction from the project of crime reduction. Furthermore, the treatment of crime in politics, in the media, in the public has been characterized as ill-informed, as reactionary, at its worst the great, unconquerable villain of rational approaches to criminal justice. The findings of this project suggest instead that a more detailed, fluid understanding of this realm gives us significant cause for optimism. While previous approaches decry a perceived culture of cynicism, this research aims to move beyond perceptions and generalizations. Rather, this research finds that an appreciation of this fluctuating relationship reveals a politics that is shiftable and a public that is democratically engaged, that is empowered beyond brash overreaction and intolerance.

While this project has focused on a subject matter that could be considered unwieldy and intangible, the research approach was designed with this task in mind and has generated a rich body of compelling, modern data with findings that speak to

both the enduring question of how important political communication is in the construction of crime, as well as evolving issues around the breadth of today's media and the enhanced voice of the public. Although I initially employed the case study approach to capture the wealth of expressive crime communication in the 2010 UK general election, this established a research ethos of flexibility and provided a framework for capturing the unpredictable events of the Phone Hacking Scandal and the Riots of July and August 2011. As a result, this approach facilitated a focus on new media technologies as they became prominent in political communication and meant that the research could push considerations in this area beyond a gap in the literature, towards a genuine evolution in the field.

The prominent questions posed by criminological literature in this area remain and I have aimed to use this project to challenge these overly deterministic criminal justice dystopias. Indeed, the case studies in this project were aimed specifically at capturing political communication in its most potent forms, in order to test these assertions within criminological literature; that the power of Neoliberalism had solidified the links between populist criminal justice narratives and electoral success and that this immovable connection had and would continue to define 'crime' in service of this destructive relationship. At the heart of this inquiry was a challenge to the notion that this cynical political task, this manipulation of law and order in ruthless pursuit of success had been reinforced or even driven by a shadowy co-conspirator, the profit-driven tabloid press. Initially, the suggested single-mindedness required for this narrative seemed logically problematic, conspiratorial almost. If electoral success and financial gain were indeed the absolute aims of Westminster politics and UK tabloid media then can we say with any certainty that crime issues will always be cynically constructed and utilised in this pursuit and furthermore, would these behemoths continue interlocked in their mutual goal of punitiveness? This literature is grounded in the outlook of its time, of hopelessness, of long-standing entrenchment in this cycle and so a certain amount of dissatisfaction with these accounts today comes from the privilege of perspective. For instance, the argument of 'Penal Populism' and of accounts focused on Neoliberalism was that populist assertions of law and order would henceforth be an immovable feature of criminal justice due to the resonance of such approaches and the continued successes

enjoyed by those who would wield them. We have seen that this resonance, this connection has shifted which has served to undermine these arguments. Furthermore, suggestions that the media as mouthpiece and co-conspirator in ‘Penal Populism’ will always have the capacity to control the debate seemed to relinquish too much power to the notion of the singular tabloid narrative. We have seen that certain broad-ranging structural shifts in this realm have resulted in an unquestionable weakening of the potential to construct and control, yet even during the time in which the UK press was portrayed as a cartoonish oligarchy, accounts of the media communicating a singular voice are reductive.

I would argue that functionalist accounts which aim to speak generally about an overarching quality or trend of a number of years are particularly ill-suited to the study of UK politics or the functioning of the media. We have seen that this realm is fickle in its inherent drive for success and prone to total transformation at the whim of economic forces or technological development. These are the absolutes of criminal justice politics and media; that politicians must be re-elected and that the media must be able to financially support their existence. From this basis, we can better understand the construction of crime in this realm by further examining the structures within which narratives are formed and by assessing how the inherent power of ‘crime’ might unfold within them. As a result, I have aimed to view this realm using a lens which moves away from macrosociology towards microsociology. It is with this approach that I have attempted to refocus our analysis of this area on to the public consumption and regeneration of crime, to examine what is the enduring force of crime in today’s society that feeds into this fickle realm. Ultimately this is a project that argues for greater emphasis on the blurring of boundaries between reception and generation of information and in doing so, the aim is to present an account that can capture the nature of this realm.

While these initial, inherent questions around understanding the political communication of crime formed the basis of my project and remained a focus throughout, the unignorable shifts in the media also demanded a complete reevaluation of its role in the construction of crime. We have seen that today’s hypertechnological media sphere, far from projecting a singular voice is endlessly pluralistic and has dispersed control to a multiplicity of public-driven formats. I have

discussed the immediacy of today's news creation and consumption, in which a hyperactive deviancy amplification can occur, in which there exists a vast amount of choice available to empowered media consumers who can control the narratives that they regularly receive. I have detailed the symbolic force required by news to gain attention, to stake their place in the news landscape and the developed interactivity which has infused a democratic voice into the newsroom and empowered the public as newsmakers. I have aimed to incorporate these shifts into a microsociological account of the public and the construction of crime knowledge today and crucially, have adopted a model that can understand the public modes of creating meaning within these technology-enhanced shifts.

Before I outline my key findings, I would note that several of the original contributions of this project can be located in its design. This project aims to further research in this area by challenging dystopian trends in the literature on politics and crime, by updating accounts on the media and its interaction with crime and by adapting a particular theoretical model, a microsociological approach integrating Durkheim's account of symbolic power and Goffman's view of 'the self' and 'negotiated meaning', namely Randall Collins' *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2005) in order to better understand the blurring of boundaries between reception and generation of information in the construction of crime narratives. This project uses a case study method in order to capture a rich body of data on the political communication of crime, one which prioritizes a view of the construction of narratives in action, at the extremes, during moments of heightened emotion and activity. The subject matter of 'communication' has always been viewed here as more than political speeches or perspectives on Westminster culture. As a result, the research design was constructed to complement the aims of the project, that in order to view intangible relationships, power structures and the evolution of a sphere in the process of transformation that flexibility and adaptability was required. I would argue that case study research and discourse analysis have provided the best possible framework for capturing this subject matter and as we have seen, have allowed for crucial but completely unexpected events to be fully integrated into my research.

Having conducted these case studies, I would argue that this approach is particularly well suited to the analysis of media today. A reflection on my project

aims and the rapidly evolving subject matter suggested that I could not utilise traditional approaches to media research to fully capture a sense of this vast realm in its present condition. Tellingly, the researchers tasked with analyzing media coverage in the Guardian/ LSE riots study also suggested that any consideration of this realm requires an entirely new methodological approach. While in *Reading the Riots* (2011), key researchers Procter, Vis and Voss (2013) set about designing a new quantitative methodological approach that would facilitate the analysis of social media forums such as Twitter, I adapted by taking a broader view of the shift in power in the media. I found that with evolving structures rapidly dispersing power that a newsroom ethnography or newspaper content analysis for instance could not provide a picture of the source of power in the same way that it could have in the past. Similarly, there was no particular interview or series of interviews that would have given sufficient insight into what is now such a forcefully public realm. A key argument of this project is that the power at the heart of political communication is no longer in the hands of a particular group and as such a research approach with a broad view was necessary. The focus of this study is political communication as a contested act, in which input is key and in which messages are delivered but are regenerated in a vibrant, empowered realm and this project has been designed specifically to capture this fluid dispersal of power.

## Case Study Findings

The 2010 election provided an undeniable contradiction to literature that would suggest that the power of crime to deliver electoral success must place it consistently at the heart of electoral politics, making it vulnerable to reactionary views, to cynical, emotionally charged rhetoric. The notable lack of prominence of law and order politics in this election is a significant challenge to the certainty of ‘Penal Populism’ and suggests that there is no insurmountable link between reactionary law and order politics and electoral success. Furthermore, in this case study we saw new media in action, the force of technological advancements having reshaped the political communication landscape. I have argued that the public voice began to have an



impact on derailing entrenched narratives in this election. Indeed, events like the Gillian Duffy scandal and even ‘Cleggmania’ prompted a consideration of new media forums that takes seriously their impact and ability to dominate control of electoral politics and which challenges accounts that view these forums as faddish or limited to certain demographics. We saw that despite these objections, the impact of these new structures and the diminished presence of ‘crime’ in the election supported the mobilization of non-elite narratives, presenting the public voice as a new force in the construction of crime.

The second case study on the Phone Hacking Scandal of July 2011 presented a unique opportunity to develop these findings in that the events provided unparalleled access to information on the power structures at the heart of traditional tabloid forces. Furthermore, we saw distinctive data on their impact on the construction of crime and their sometimes direct influence on the formation of criminal justice policy. This scandal also represented a swelling of public outrage through the new media structures observed in the 2010 election and so presented an opportunity to consider their impact in this setting. I have argued that this unveiling of power at the heart of previously populist crime narratives coincided with a disabling of these traditional monolithic forces; that while new media enabled the dispersal of power in communication it also played a crucial role in breaking down the singular tabloid narrative, the strength of the Murdoch-led voice. Indeed, we saw a demonstration of the potential strength of public expression through new media outlets to derail destructive, manipulative, dystopian narratives and to allow public outrage to have a significant impact on previously unfettered power relationships. The Phone Hacking Scandal both confirmed the new power of the public and signified an end to arguments that viewed the tabloid narrative as wholly influential, as the bearer of an effective and destructive power.

The empowerment of the public voice was conspicuous in the riots of the following month. We saw widespread consternation over the specific source or cause of rioting, that there seemed to be an indefinable nature to the acts of looting and public gatherings. These riots were motivated by disparate aims, from outrage at the shooting of Mark Duggan to a more nebulous sense of despair at the actions of elites, at society more generally. We saw that in some cases, it had been arguable that

looting was motivated not by any kind of outrage but indeed by simple opportunism. What seemed to figuratively connect these rioters was the enhanced ability to protest and be heard, to utilise these new forces for communication to express something, anything in opposition of the established narrative.

Symbolically, the riots represent the violent upsurge of the public voice, now forcefully empowered to be heard in its multiplicity. There may not have been a unified intent, but in many ways this absolutely reinforces a key argument here; that the evolution in media structures has forced a plurality of views back into political debate on crime. In criminal justice issues this is most prominent, in which the political construction of crime had previously been controlled with an iron grip, had been wielded as a tool in building legitimacy. However, with the destabilization of this control and the potent nature of ‘crime’ in society, we have seen a shift in which the wild, divergent public voice is now apparent. It is significant that forms of social media in the riots were used both to organize violence and looting and to organize local clean-up efforts. Where once ‘the public’ was viewed as being unified in fear and in relative silence, accepting populist narratives with the aim of sating rabid ontological insecurity, now we see a public that is acting out, that is derailing efforts to subsume their plurality. As we have seen, this new order was played out not only in the media but in the destabilization of political efforts to define the acts as ‘criminality pure and simple’, in which the impact of traditional cynical politicking petered out while nuance was forced back into the debate.

The case studies when viewed as a progression over time cumulatively paint a picture of significant evolution in both contemporary media-scapes and the political communication of crime. In terms of media, the three case studies taken together demonstrate ‘the huge uptake and substantial power of new media frameworks [which] confirmed a blurring in the reception and generation of information’. Beginning in the 2010 election, the case study begins among the traditional election landscape and follows the derailing and energizing of the campaign by the intrusion of the public voice through new media on numerous occasions. The success of the Leaders’ Debate, the accidental capturing of audio, the online campaign highlighting vandalized posters, beyond just social media, we see real mobilization through new media here, which is built upon as the second case

study demonstrates. The data captured in the phone hacking scandal tells us the story of the power of the public, lashing out with this now amplified voice and shutting down major traditional media institutions. Along with the wave of public power in the new media-scape, comes a destabilization of traditional media which had begun to erode in 2010, this is a crucial moment observed in case study 2 and together, these two studies provide more than similarities, the second case study shows us the next stage in the trajectory. Finally, the case study data of the riots develops this further by presenting the media as now unruly in the hands of the public, now easily mobilized around the commission of crime. Taken together these three bodies of data form the beginning of a new realm and an opportunity to see it be mobilized both in support of victims and in increasing victimization. This body of research can neither be viewed as objectively similar or opposing, they neither entirely support nor disprove a given finding. Instead, they tell us a story about how both the media-scape and following this, the political communication of crime, are developing new roles.

### **The Role of Politics in the Communication of Crime**

Simply put, the events observed as part of this research suggest a shift in the political capacity to control crime narratives. The findings of the project suggest both that this was previously overstated and that structural shifts have eroded any capability for such forceful, knowing construction that may have existed. We have seen that a realm which had been portrayed as inextricably bound by a potent “sense of insecurity, of insubstantiality, and or uncertainty, a whiff of chaos and a fear of falling” (Young 2007: 12), to allow “the electoral advantage of a policy to take precedence over its penal effectiveness” (Roberts et al 2003: 5), now exhibits behaviour which significantly undermines this link. The ‘Penal Populism’ argument is weakened by the notable lack of law and order featured in the 2010 election and so too is any argument that asserts an intrinsic truth about the enduring nature of ‘crime’ in politics. Undeniably, when the meaning of crime is constructed in such a fickle, fluctuating realm, we can only aim to understand its construction by better appreciating these structures and their tendency towards fluctuation.

On the meaning of crime in politics at this time, we have seen that these variations in prominence do not necessarily produce a change in emphasis. Indeed, we saw in the 2010 election that while law and order was not at the forefront of political debate, that there was still a similar tone to criminal justice narratives, one which reverted to what could more convincingly be portrayed as the ‘second order consensus’ (Downes and Morgan 2002: 317). Furthermore, each of the Party Leaders spoke of criminal justice issues in emotive terms, utilizing relatable storytelling approaches. The tone of much of the law and order rhetoric was not evocative punitiveness, it was rather a covering of all bases; there were allusions to the plight of the victim, there was an economically-guarded hesitant discussion around policing figures. We have witnessed the crystallization of ‘victimhood’ as a must in criminal justice politics, but a reversion from overt punitiveness. There was a sense in the 2010 election that as the ‘second order consensus’ dictates, the parties engaged in a strategic ticking of boxes, in which aiming not to cede the ground on issues like sympathy towards victims is the main aim, rather than any overt, aggressive control of the crime narrative. In this climate, we don’t quite see the emergence of anti-populist values, nor do we see a resurgence in liberal criminal justice ideals or even in research-grounded approaches. Overt cynicism is no longer inevitable, but nor is optimism. Instead, in a time of political uncertainty, in which the public voice and evolving media structures erode the power to manipulate, certainty is found only in aiming not to slip up or offend.

We saw these themes develop in the riots, in which the chaos of these events prompted politicians to attempt to revert to previous overt, bold punitiveness and in which their ability to deliver such narratives was largely undermined. The shift in media structures, away from a powerful, singular tabloid voice and towards vast pluralism meant that simplistic, punitive narratives fell flat, met with challenge and found little support in the broader public sphere. The image of Boris Johnson taking to the streets of London to deliver a government-mandated message of ‘criminality pure and simple’ and being forcefully challenged, shouted down by outraged members of the public is a memorable, potent representation of this shift in power. Today, the public have a voice and it is chaotic and confusing and it is often wildly articulated, but it is one which inadvertently serves to completely undermine political

efforts at cynical punitiveness. The role of politics in the construction of crime, therefore, is one which is no longer sure-footed, in which familiar themes are merely reverted to in order to avoid that most damaging label, the ‘soft on crime’ party and in which its efforts to engender legitimacy through punitiveness are ultimately impotent.

## **The Role of the Media in the Communication of Crime**

It would be reprehensibly simplistic to suggest that the rise of social media alone has acted as a check against punitiveness. This is emphatically not the argument of this project and imbues too much legitimacy to what is ultimately a wildly chaotic, indefinable realm in which a tapestry of reactionary, uncensored bile and meaningless chatter is freely published. But white noise is still noise and the upsurge in social media is instead symptomatic of a broader shift that this research suggests is well worth noticing. The findings of this project indicate that the recent undermining of populist punitiveness has occurred due to wide-scale evolutions in the media from capital-driven mouthpiece and beneficiary of populism, to technology-driven democratic outlet. What is most significant about this upsurge in new media (which as I have described spans well beyond social media), is that it has coincided with a groundbreaking destabilization of traditional tabloid forces.

In a project which focuses on the communication of crime, this development is crucial. The 2010 election was a demonstration of force for this new order, with 24 hour news, social media and televised events reframing the landscape in a manner which left politicians breathless, confused, unable to take back control. Already at this point the tabloid narrative was a background player, being forced to take on a diminished role in which new media reported news faster and television media played a more prominent role in creating the news. However, in the Phone Hacking Scandal we were able to observe the relics of the past described in new detail, as well as a brutal reminder of their weakened position through the force employed by public outrage, delivered through anti-tabloid forces, broadsheets and new media. Again, this is certainly not an argument that proffers the demise of tabloid journalism, this

would also serve as a naïve oversimplification in the face of continuing Murdoch influence through the rebranded *News of the World*, the *Sun on Sunday*, his influential reach through television networks like *Fox News*, or the new model of online tabloid success enjoyed by the *Daily Mail*. Instead, what the 2010 election and the Phone Hacking Scandal together demonstrate is the impact of the strengthening of democratic media outlets, that while they may be prone to hyperactive deviancy amplification, emitting bursts of outrage that can peter out quickly, that the force of these eruptions put not only politicians but also tabloid journalists on the back foot. This wave of chaotic new activity has dramatically altered the way in which former powerhouses in narrative construction can conduct themselves. The Culture, Media & Sport Committee and the Leveson Inquiry were revelatory in that they outlined explicitly the ways in which high ranking media figures once had the capacity to take a stance on an issue and forcefully pursue it, ensuring that policy and the tabloid narrative were one in a barrage of undemocratic, often punitive ideals. This data did provide the detail required to understand the mechanisms behind ‘Penal Populism’ and yet at the same time the Phone Hacking Scandal demonstrated how this power could be utterly disabled, in creating a stir that could shut down the *News of the World*. I have previously noted that many commentators at the time of the scandal suggested that the demise of the *News of the World* could be attributed to cynical business practices, a savvy attempt to improve the NewsCorp bid for BSkyB. Nonetheless, the motivations behind the scenes do not alter the fact that without the mobilized public outrage there could not have been such a thorough unearthing of malpractice, of criminality. While *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* conducted investigations into these widespread abuses, the public response and vocalization of outrage was essentially what drove Rupert Murdoch to apologise to the family of Milly Dowler.

The formidable reshaping of the media at this point came not from the end of the *News of the World* but from the assertion of the force of new media, a bold declaration of its vast capabilities, confirmed wholeheartedly by the events of the riots. The riots potently demonstrated the surprising ease and comfort with which the public adopted new media technologies and demonstrated a willingness to communicate beyond just competency. While youths around London used BBM to

connect with large groups, to innovate and gather to express themselves, politicians and the police responded in a bumbling, confused fashion, calling for other networks to be shut down and largely failing to grasp the nature of this communication. Similarly, concerned citizens took to Twitter to organize clean ups and construct a narrative of community pride based on genuine shared emotions rather than the manipulative, faux-nostalgia of ‘community’ rhetoric in recent years. Finally, we saw that when punitiveness was employed, where in a more tabloid-dominant media realm this approach may have held strong, in this instance nuance was forced back into the debate, undermining attempts to hammer home ‘criminality pure and simple’. This account doesn’t aim to portray a vocal left-wing as suddenly empowered, although voices which would aim to counter those of reactionary tabloid values certainly do now have a more potent outlet than the comments pages of *The Guardian*. These alterations have instead moved the potential construction of narratives away from a simple duality of left versus right wing or tabloid versus broadsheet. We now consume and communicate a vast plurality of views, the effect of which is a crude, chaotic, powerful form of democracy. Those who view new media as ‘just white noise’ fail to see the impact that this noise can have on a conversation that was previously so controlled.

### **The Role of the Public in the Communication of Crime**

Having paid particular attention to developments in political rhetoric-building and the evolving media sphere, these alterations naturally raise questions around the developing role of the public in the construction of narratives. For instance, we might question how a crime issue can become the particular focus of public ire in this realm of vast information exchange. This is a crucial aim of this project, in which I have attempted to not only develop our understanding of functioning narrative structures today, but also to enhance our account of the public relationship with crime and how this manifests itself through today’s media. So far we have seen the public as adaptive, expressive, violent at times, we have seen the impact of their voice and

some evidence of the kind of issue that can provoke uproar, in particular that the theme of the 'Ideal Victim' is still provocative in the public imagination.

However, distinguishing this account from those which have preceded it is the view of the public as more than just receptive. I have argued throughout this project that a key aim here is to emphasize the blurring of boundaries between reception and generation of information and it is in the public realm that we see this alteration most prominently. I have discussed the *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2005) model as enhancing our view of the public connection with crime issues and when applied to the case study research conducted, this approach renders the account of the public in crime communication greater explanatory force. We have seen the public employ their collective, chaotic voice, the case studies here also display the variety of issues that can prompt this vocalization. Perceived injustice in relation to an 'ideal victim', the political expression of shifting preferences, the provocation of community tensions around police practices, these disparate, unpredictable criminal justice issues have all risen to the top of the agenda on a wave of emotive, intense expressions of opinion. In light of these developments, Collins' model provides a sufficiently fluid account which can explain this process and fits particularly well with the conditions outlined in this project.

As we have seen, the focus of *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2005) is the microsociological process observed in the natural escalation from small scale interaction to broader righteous anger. Within this escalation, Collins defines the conditions in which an initial IRC can take place; that co-presence, a group defining barrier, a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood combine to set in motion this natural progression. In the case of the Leaders' Debate, for instance, we saw that the common focus was constructed by the heightened anticipation stoked by its status as a unique televised event. Collins' definition, that "people focus their attention upon a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other become mutually aware of each other's focus of attention" (Collins 2005: 48) also seems to fit well with the interactivity afforded by today's evolved media structures, that the communication on Facebook through status updates, through Twitter using hashtags, through the posting of articles to walls and all of the public processes of sharing information that are available today and often occur in real time, allows us to



develop a sense of mutual focus of attention, an awareness of which issue is important in society at that specific moment in time.

I have previously noted that Collins' model specifically called for physical co-presence, although I would argue that the findings of the case studies in this project make a case for an extension into the non-physical realm, as facilitated by new media. The role of physical co-presence in Collins' model is derived from Goffman's assertion that we construct our sense of self through the physical reaction of others and that the emotional impact of interacting physically is crucial in opinion-making. I have already argued that on this basis we can certainly extend the model to the virtual realm, we need only apply the tenets of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) to new media. I have argued that a theatrical posturing as described by Goffman now operates in the virtual realm, in which a hypertechnological construction of self is finely honed, indeed the formats provided by Facebook and Twitter allow for an even more empowered Goffman-esque presentation of an ideal self. There is an argument for physical co-presence when we consider how much more can be derived from body language and from the gauged reaction of another member of our community. There are certainly functions by which we may react in new media but they do not extend far enough to fully adapt Goffman's theory; there is still a unique value in physical co-presence at the heart of this discussion. However, within the context of the construction of crime narratives, I would argue that Collins' model ought to be extended to include the non-physical.

We saw in the 2010 election that the mutual focus of attention on the Leaders' Debates was accompanied by a new form of communal discussion and shared emotion through social media and undoubtedly this series of *Interaction Ritual Chains* had an impact on stoking public reaction, enabling the development from small scale interaction to a broader feeling, not of anger, but certainly of revolt against the established narrative. I would argue that while these forms of *Interaction Ritual Chain* are missing the element of gauging reaction and redefining your self according to cues picked up from physical co-presence, that there is a unique quality to new media which replaces this element. Indeed, the awareness of new media outlets as visible forums in which we share our lives, in which we communicate within various communities and in which issues are discussed infuses them with a

sense of performance that is in keeping with Goffman's original work. It is more than likely that those who discussed the 2010 Leaders' Debate publicly on Twitter did so in a highly produced way, through a theatrical construction of words and images to maintain a sense of self as informed.

Furthermore, I would argue that the evidence of the case studies here suggests that new media has been integrated into our daily lives in such a meaningful way that it ought to be considered almost as significant as physical co-presence to its users. As we have seen from the election, from the scandal and the riots, a great many members of our society take to social media and online news media long before they will come into contact physically with another member of their community. Indeed, the infrequency of physical co-presence arguably relegates it to the status of the print press, a last minute voice on an issue in which views are already crystallised. While this does not negate physical co-presence and the impact that an influential member of the community and their physical reaction can have on the swaying of opinion, it seems reasonable to argue that new media can be considered an important realm within which ideas are formed. The argument here is that the extension of physical co-presence is still in keeping with the Goffman-esque *Presentation of Self* argument and furthermore, it has a meaningful role to play both in our everyday *Interaction Ritual Chains* and the construction of crime narratives.

## The Political Communication of Crime

To summarise, the key findings of this thesis begin with an argument for moving criminological accounts away from criminal justice dystopias which have been overstated and undermined by their determinism. Furthermore, this research suggests that structural shifts have enabled a redistribution of power in the construction of narratives, in which political attempts at punitiveness have been overwhelmed and have prompted a reversion to the 'second order consensus'. Undeniably the developments in new media have featured heavily in this research and together with an undermining of the singular tabloid narrative they have empowered the public

voice and have infused political debate with a forceful, chaotic plurality of views. The symbolic weight of crime issues remains prominent in this landscape and I have utilised Collins' framework to demonstrate how a small scale narrative can escalate to broad righteous anger in today's communicative sphere. I have argued that these case studies present a compelling argument to extend the *Interaction Ritual Chains* approach beyond physical co-presence, that to take into account the legitimacy of virtual communication unlocks an appreciation of meaningful debate in today's public realm. Ultimately, I have proposed that this is a fluid and modern depiction of our narrative landscape and that it is an inherently optimistic one.

An alternative approach to a project entitled 'The Political Communication of Crime' might have focused narrowly on the political culture surrounding criminal justice communications and how exactly they are formed by today's political elites. However, to take this approach here would have understated what has become one of the most prominent sources of power in this realm, namely the ability for the media-enabled public to overwhelm political efforts. As we have seen, the augmented 'noise' facilitated by the evolution of media structures has infused a sense of chaos back into the construction of narratives, enough to override political attempts at control. It is the assertion of this project that 'The Political Communication of Crime' ought to be viewed as a conversation. A detailed understanding of political speech writing and high-level criminal justice decision-making can only divulge one side of this conversation, because as we have seen, the untethered force of the public voice now determines the development of the criminal justice narrative as much as any polished party rhetoric could.

This account aims to move away from criminal justice dystopias and instead to highlight significant cause for optimism. As I have explained, the argument here is not that the boom in social media heralds the rise of a new rationality to counteract punitiveness. I have outlined that shifts in the media have been wide-ranging and have scope beyond just new media although in essence, we have not quite arrived at the Habermasian ideal of "active citizenship that can not only articulate its political will but also work to ensure that it is implemented by the government" (Habermas 1984: 86). I have already argued that while cynicism is not inevitable, neither is optimism in criminal justice narratives. Indeed, we are far from the rational-minded

research-based ideal that would serve as a staunch opposition to destructive punitiveness, this has not enabled an opposing influence. Yet there is certainly optimism to be found in the shift towards a vibrant plurality of chaotic voices, specifically when we consider the impact of structural shifts, which reveal such significant long-term implications that they indicate the potential for a move towards rationality in criminal justice in the future. As such, the narrative landscape that I have portrayed is one in which the certainty of punitiveness, indeed the certainty of an ability to control crime narratives is no longer assured and in which the chaotic public voice brings with it untold potential.

The mapping of this narrative landscape has optimistic implications both for criminal justice policy research and for the more general criminological project of the production of knowledge. There are countless bodies of criminological research dedicated to applying the accumulation of groundbreaking research to refining our treatment of the criminal act, whether in prisons, in policing, in rehabilitative approaches or some other arm of the state. Those researchers interested enough in social justice to dedicate themselves to this work may better communicate their findings, may better usher their research towards implementation with a more optimistic view of the narrative landscape. Indeed, this depiction of today's realm of political communication is one in which the plurality of voices can counteract arbitrary criminal justice decision-making and can provide a more empowered space for alternative perspectives. It might be overly optimistic to suggest that research-based knowledge could capture the public imagination, but what this does suggest is a move away from a stagnant situation in which cynical politicking and destructive tabloid narratives are the dominant force and in which the measured approach to criminal justice must fight against these unreceptive singular narratives.

An optimistic approach to the narrative landscape, however, means embracing the notion of academia as part of the vocal public, rather than as a silent elite. One of the key findings of this research has been to emphasize the significance of the empowered public voice. This is an account which actively contradicts previous perspectives of the public as reactionary, as complicit in the creation of punitive criminal justice policies, by emphasizing the value of the intuitiveness and adaptability of the public. As we saw in the case study on the riots, the younger

demographic of the rioting population demonstrated their comfort with new technology and their ability to organise chaos and derail established norms with striking ease. Similarly, some of the most unexpected developments in the past year have focused around the use of technology in the unraveling of established economic and social forces. Most notably we have witnessed the high profile release of details of classified US government surveillance programmes by Edward Snowden, as well as the forceful and continuous release of classified information through Wikileaks. These innovative, challenging movements based on an 'open source' ethos provide examples of the increasing control over the narrative landscape that is being claimed by skilled non-elite individuals. It is salient to observe that many of these groundbreaking efforts by hackers and open source activists have undertaken anti-elite acts with the aim of breaking down destructive, controlling narratives and enhancing the accessibility of knowledge.

The impact of these shifts have enormous implications for the future of the creation of knowledge in criminology. The case of Aaron Swartz demonstrates this quite poignantly, in which a 26 year old computer programmer and developer of the innovative social news site Reddit, was arrested for sharing academic journal articles from JSTOR and charged with violations which would have carried a sentence of \$1 million in fines, 35 years in prison, asset forfeiture, restitution and supervised release (US Attorney's Office District of Massachusetts 19<sup>th</sup> July 2011), an excessive, disproportionately punitive sentence that resulted in Swartz's suicide. In the context of this project, the case of Aaron Swartz reveals a great deal about the future of crime and criminology in the narrative landscape. This case demonstrates the capacity for a radical democratization of knowledge that is threatening to an academia which is so economically-motivated that it would stringently maintain barriers to the research it creates. This case provides an example of punitiveness as an enemy of the public voice, as a method of oppression which demonstrates a deep fearfulness towards the potentially liberating chaos hinted at by this 'crime'. Indeed, as the competence with which public activists can undermine these barriers increases, the legitimacy of these barriers will be subverted in much the same way as has occurred in the film and television industry. The unraveling of economic barriers to access through technological innovation in this industry provides a notable

example of the force of the empowered public and their capacity to derail established norms which have been economically motivated or constructed in pursuit of political success. ‘The Political Communication of Crime’, then, is ultimately a realm in chaos, but in which the public voice is empowered by shifting media structures to infuse a sense of optimism into this conversation.

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