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'Squashing the Beef': Combatting Gang Violence and Reforming Masculinity in East London

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ABSTRACT

The article draws on the findings of two years' ethnographic fieldwork in exploring how gang activity in Newham, East London is combatted by faith-based organisation, Targeted Against Gangs (TAG). More specifically, the authors examine how TAG seeks to reform the identities of young male gang members according to the principles of what we have called 'Pentecostal realist masculinity'. The characteristics of this reformed masculinity include an awareness of the racial (and racist) dynamics of criminal and wider society, a focus on individuals thriving within fraternal networks, and the desire to channel creative energies into legitimate entrepreneurial activities. Though this strategy did not mount a direct challenge to the racist societal structures it identified, it was effective in reducing levels of gang violence in East London.

Introduction

Street gangs in London represent a serious problem for both the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and governmental institutions at national and local levels.[1] In 2007, youth gangs became the focus of a Home Office specialist subgroup, the *Tackling Gangs Action Programme*, while in the aftermath of 'riots' in summer 2011, incumbent London Major, Boris Johnson, vowed to tackle 'gang violence' through Operation Shield, a scheme modelled on policies pioneered in the USA and centring on community mobilisation and harsh punishments for recalcitrant gang members. In Newham, East London, MPS officers facing some of the capital's most notorious 'gang nominals' – those suspected by police of gang involvement – have turned to faith-based intervention in attempting to make the streets safer for the borough's residents and visitors. The work of the organisation it turned to, Targeted Against Gangs (TAG), is the focus of this paper. More specifically, we examine how its attempts at intervention and rehabilitation involve the cultivation of 'Pentecostal realist masculinity'.[2]

We begin by surveying the literature on youth street gangs and masculinity, before evaluating faith-inspired interventions designed to rehabilitate young men embroiled in gang activity. We then use the findings of two years' ethnographic fieldwork to explore

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how TAG both diagnoses and attempts to reform the masculine identities of gang members. The desired outcome, what we have called Pentecostal realist masculinity, retains but redirects the emphasis on individualism and fraternity in the direction of legal and potentially lucrative niches in a racist society. In doing so, it does not mount any fundamental challenge to racist and racialised social structures, but is undoubtedly effective in reducing levels of Serious Youth Violence (SYV).

Gang membership: a crisis of masculinity?

Notions of masculinity have been central to attempts to frame and make sense of gang activity in theoretical terms. The oldest theory of gang membership, social disorganisation theory (Thrasher, 1927), posits that young men are driven onto the street by a breakdown of traditional societal institutions such as the school, church and family. Shaw and McKay (1931, 1942) sought to develop Thrasher's theoretical model, arguing that levels of disorganisation were highest in urban neighbourhoods where parents lacked any firm 'functional authority' over their children, and particularly their sons. This sees the emergence of criminal traditions which are transmitted from generation to generation via processes of socialisation, often involving role models.

In studying the youth gangs of late Victorian Manchester, Davies (1998) notes how for working-class young men the link between violence and masculinity was drawn and cemented by observing the actions of role models. These (not mutually exclusive) figures included the breadwinner, whose status accrued from providing economically for their family, and the 'hard' man or 'man's' man whose actions were defined by toughness; he possessed a heroic capacity for both demanding physical labour and the consumption of alcohol (often a precursor to, or accompanied by, fighting). The status of breadwinner was unattainable for many young men in Victorian Manchester; they played second-fiddle to their fathers in terms of both income and, relatedly, household authority. The role of hard man was, therefore, the only masculine ideal available to them. Similarly, Miller (1958, p. 9) places great emphasis on the link between toughness and masculinity in his exploration of the relationship between gang delinquency and 'lower class culture'. Indeed, masculinity is one of the 'qualities or states' that define the 'toughness' so valorised by 'lower class' groups: '"masculinity," symbolised by a distinctive complex of acts and avoidance (bodily tattooing; absence of sentimentality; nonconcern with "art," "literature," conceptualization of women as conquest objects, etc.)'.

As the reader will notice, many of these studies follow the basic arc of Merton's (1938) analysis, namely that it is the 'strain' between a universally accepted set of goals and differential access to the resources needed to realise such goals that leads to the formation of delinquent subcultures. Realising that they are unable to pursue such objectives through officially, socially sanctioned channels, young men express their 'status frustration' by 'striking out' against middle-class value systems, entering collectives where violence, destruction and instant gratification are endorsed. A similar approach, the theory of differential opportunity (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960), sees gang members 'waging war' on a system they blame for their own social failure through outbursts of anger, bravado and the cultivation of fearsome reputations.

More recent research has questioned whether the vocabulary of strain, opportunity, etc. is fit for the post-industrial conditions today's gang collectives respond to and forge an

existence within. Hobbs' (2013) work in the East London borough of 'Dogtown' stresses the area's fragmented, diverse, post-industrial character in modifying and recoding older scripts of masculinity. As Fraser (2015) points out, processes of globalisation have led to these characteristics being reproduced in urban settings around the world. Though, at bottom, young men's recruitment by gangs is an expression of 'defiant individualism' (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991) involving cultures of machismo, physical strength (Young, 1999) and an expression of marginalised masculinity (Horowitz, 1983; Majors & Billson, 1992; Rios, 2011; Vigil, 2007), other features relate more closely to specific local conditions.

Fraser (2015, p. 51) describes this process in the case of Glasgow, where deindustrialisation has meant that older, 'industrial masculinities no longer tallied with the economic realities of the new service economy'. This leads to a negotiation between old and new – in the worst case prompting the emergence of a 'tormented habitus' – with neoliberal motifs like the individual being pitted against working-class communities which until recently had been so clearly defined. Elsewhere this confrontation between old values and new circumstances has led to the former being recast and redeployed. In the north-east of England, for example, young men reimagine 'grafting' as a criminal apprenticeship while still cleaving to traditional notions of respect (Nayak, 2006).

Combatting gang masculinities through faith: deflecting the crisis?

In the United States and Latin America, faith-inspired intervention programmes have addressed a clutch of 'gang-related' issues including drug and alcohol addiction (Brennerman, 2011; Leon, 1998; Sanchez-Walsh, 2003; Wolseth, 2008). These are designed to combat criminal behaviours through a combination of religious practice, prescribed patterns of scripture-inspired interaction and techniques of self-monitoring. The 12-step model of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) – beginning with the admission of addiction and culminating with the assistance of fellow group members – directly informs the work of organisations such as Criminal and Gang Members Anonymous. The model is premised on the drawing out of latent religiosity in offenders as well as explicit negotiations of (hyper)masculinity (Flores & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013, p. 4). According to their proponents, programmes incorporating the 12 steps have enjoyed considerable success (Toft, 2000).

Flores (2014) has documented the work of faith-based intervention programmes, both Jesuit and Pentecostal, in the context of Chicano gang membership in Los Angeles. Though denominational differences are important in directing the path to 'recovery', the result – ideally – is the same: a 'reformed barrio masculinity'. Integral to the development of the latter is an unashamed acknowledgement that young men come from a 'street background' but reorient 'masculine expressions away from the street and toward conventional social spheres, such as the church, household, and workplace' (2015, p. 13). Faith-based programmes facilitate this process of reformation by occupying a third space between gangs and mainstream society.

However, such interventions have also been subject to criticism. It has been claimed that they serve to reinforce neoliberal policies at state and federal level (which champion 'entrepreneurial values' and 'individual responsibility') by forcing subjects to accept fault and accountability (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). Others have argued that such methods disempower adherents by forcing them to follow a linear narrative of recovery

from a regrettable past, to existential crisis, to clean future (Carr, 2010; Flores & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013), thereby extending and reinforcing state power.

Aside from pointing to the basic contradiction between its rhetoric of 'freedom' and its ascetic codes (O'Neill, 2011; Pine, 2008), commentators have noted Pentecostalism's perpetuation of patriarchal ideals. In the majority of Pentecostal churches in the United States, leadership positions can only be occupied by men. It might be argued, therefore, that the church's appeals to recovering gang members are predicated on trading one male code of honour for another (Leon, 1998; Sanchez-Walsh, 2003). These young men may be encouraged to forgo extreme acts of machismo (such as street violence), but do so in exchange for the less exaggerated masculine dominance of the household – or, in other words, the privileges of so-called soft patriarchy (Wilcox, 2007). Interestingly, some researchers have praised this adaptation of masculinity because of its facilitation of upward social mobility through the deflection of resources from the street to the domestic family unit (Brusco, 1995).

As already alluded to, Pentecostalism's persistent focus on the individual has led to claims that it chimes with, and possibly even vindicates, the neoliberal paradigms of governance and security which so many have blamed for widening inequality and deepening injustice. Indeed, it is easy to see the parallels between Pentecostal efforts to convert individuals rather than tackle wider societal ills (Lancaster, 1988) and neoliberal security regimes which promote qualities such as 'choice', 'character' and 'self-discipline' (O'Neill & Thomas, 2011). This is ironic given the reality that neoliberal policies – including the curtailment or elimination of social services, suppression of wages and funding cuts in areas such as state education and healthcare – result not just in the suffering of individuals but in the atrophying of the 'social body' (O'Neill, 2013). Structural conditions most notably evident in economic policies can see public spaces become unsafe and levels of civic participation (particularly among young people) drop accordingly. In fact, it is this retreat from public space which has arguably strengthened the appeal of 'privatised' Pentecostal fraternities as well as the 'private' street gangs that cause such consternation (Montenegro, 2001; O'Neill, 2011).

Settings and method

The research described here took place between 2011 and 2013 in the east London Borough of Newham (LBN). In the contemporary Newham setting, gangs are one of the main concerns of those tasked with policing, community relations and all manner of related public-spirited interventions (see Armstrong, Giulianotti, & Hobbs, 2016). Situated north of the River Thames, around five miles from the City of London, Newham is one of the poorest boroughs in the UK. It is also the second most diverse in terms of the ethnicity of its residents. According to the results of 2011 Census, 29.0% of Newham's estimated 307,000 population is White (16.7% White British, 0.7% White Irish, 0.2% Gypsy or Irish Traveller, 11.4% Other White), 4.6% of mixed race (1.3% White and Black Caribbean, 1.1% White and Black African, 0.9% White and Asian, 1.3% Other Mixed), 43.5% Asian (13.8% Indian, 12.21% Bangladeshi, 9.8% Pakistani, 1.3% Chinese, 6.5% Other Asian), 19.6% Black (12.3% African, 4.9% Caribbean, 2.4% Other Black), 1.1% Arab and 2.3% of other ethnic heritage.

An ethnographic approach was adopted, with observation, participant observation and in-depth interviews used in combination (O'Reilly, 2011; Venkatesh, 2008). The fieldwork

was carried out within three institutions, all of which had a stake in combatting gang-related activity in Newham: the local council, MPS and TAG. The nature of the problem was defined in different ways by different organisations, and it is the approach and methods of TAG that receive attention here.

Knocking on heaven's door: TAG

Beginning life in 2007, the 'Gangsline', a 24-hour helpline for youth 'gang' members or those fearful about the involvement of friends or family members in youth gang-related activity, evolved over the following two years into TAG. TAG sought to reach youths involved in a life of drugs, guns and knife crime through messages of hope derived from Pentecostal Christianity. This faith was most evident in the phone and face-to-face conversations of its founder, former gang member Sheldon Thomas (ST), which were smattered with words such as 'bred' (short for brethren) and 'bless' (the sign-off: God bless). The organisation thus grew from an information/advice service – primarily a phone-line which also produced leaflets distributed in fast-food outlets and wherever its outreach workers could find groups of young people 'hanging out' – to an intervention-based organisation that was both reactive (with a specialist Outreach Response Team) and proactive in utilising its knowledge and expertise.

From its inception, TAG sought to address the root causes of gang membership, a task which ST believed required an understanding of psychosocial issues including family breakdown, anger problems, the consequences of rejection, emotional hurt, unresolved conflict, a (missing) sense of belonging and the despair of struggling parents. In founding Gangsline/TAG, ST was seeking to offer credible support through programmes and workshops that focused on developing the unrealised talents of gang members. The interventions were structured according to curricula and programmes based in conflict resolution and counselling delivered over a 12-week period. All aimed to equip individuals with the necessary tools to bring about responses to emotional, physical, financial and spiritual factors which – ideally – would allow an individual to break free from distorted thinking and destructive life cycles.

The TAG mission was underpinned by a faith-based framework that focused on notions of personal responsibility, morality, positive thinking and self-esteem. Its training programmes did not follow a set format and its curriculum was delivered in diverse settings to individuals or groups. Sessions were adapted in order to meet the needs of young people – predominantly young men – at times too frightened or lacking the confidence to leave their known and 'safe' environment. ST led the sessions and utilised his major strengths of articulacy and charisma. It was speeches delivered by ST at conferences addressing youth offending in London that had seen him approached and contracted by both local government officials and MPS personnel over the years 2008–2011 to conduct various forms of interventionist work with young offenders.

ST's diagnosis of the gang problem emphasised the role of institutional failure in the kind of social disorganisation which drove young men into the clutches of gangs. The institution he singled out for most blame was the family. As he stated in conversation with one of the authors after an intervention session, with his audience having dispersed:

> I would put family breakdown as a major cause. It's not parenting *per se*, some of their homes are nice and some have a good family network, but it's too female-centred for many of these

boys. There's a common denominator in many of these boys' lives, and that is the absence of a father. A good father would make all the difference and go a long way to stopping all this.

It was the absence of bonds in the familial sphere, particularly between boys and their fathers, which made young men amenable to gang membership. It was not that a masculine ideal embodied by a father was somehow unattainable (Davies, 1998), the problem was rather the lack of any stable and positive male presence. Another commonality ST identified was domestic violence, with boys having been party to such violence as both witness and victim. As he commented during a training session with police, youth workers and youth offending teams:

> It's not just absent fathers, it's worse. It's a carousel of abusive men. They're seeing Mum, a man living with her for a few months, knocking her and probably the boy about. Then he's gone. After a while another one comes along – same thing, same pattern. This is experienced as normal for these young men … Now are you beginning to see where the anger, depression, trauma, et cetera is coming from? These boys are ripe for recruitment by local gangs. They suddenly feel they're protected and that they belong. … The bravado covers up lots of serious trauma.

This deficit in terms of family structure related to one element of Pentecostal realist masculinity. The Pentecostal church could provide surrogate social bonds which previously would have been proffered – at a considerable cost – by gang membership. Like Pentecostal-based interventions elsewhere, a 'doctrine of separation from community life' was at work here (Wolseth, 2008). Indeed, it was TAG's intermediate position between gangs and wider society which proved so propitious. Interestingly, however, for many of those TAG reached out to, rehabilitation involved a return to, rather than discovery of, the religious life. Most young men ST dealt with had attended church regularly as youngsters, so involving themselves in religious life represented a gathering up of slackened spiritual reins, as opposed to being something wholly new. Entering the function room of a Methodist church in Newham which he used to stage intervention sessions, ST explained how many of the teenage boys TAG worked with in this area knew the location well: 'They once came here as little kids on Sunday mornings, dragged by their Mums.'

Membership of an alternative group offered more effective insulation from the inequities of a heavily racialised and racist society. Indeed, another characteristic of Pentecostal realist masculinity was a sense of fraternity which was cognisant of wider racial and racist societal dynamics. For ST, talking about gangs meant talking about 'race', and any reformed or reoriented masculinity would be a racialised one. Just as gangs provided refuge and solidarity amid a racist society (Flores, 2014), having exited gang life one must forge a sense of manhood which took account of racial dynamics. As he commented after a meeting with a group of gang nominals:

> Forget the 'Big Man' gangster stuff around here, because once you have a gun, you are your own man and no one gives you orders. Guns come from all over down this end: Bosnians, Lithuanians, white criminal networks. Black guys don't have structures like them. Neither do they have the markets for the straps (guns) so they have to buy second-hand. A 9 mm cost £300, a Glock £450, a MAC 10 £800, an Eagle Eye £600. The ammo (ammunition) comes with the guns. The thing is, there's no target practice or training … that's the reason why these black youths can't really shoot straight; they buy a piece (gun), and use it the next day but can't control it and that's how innocents get killed or maimed. These black kids

need telling they are not 'gangsters', because unlike their white counterparts, they don't make money. White gangs don't live with their Mums. White gangsters don't live in blocks with piss-filled lifts and their children don't go to no-hope comprehensive schools …

The disorder wrought upon black communities by economic and social dislocation was reflected in the structure – or, more specifically, the lack of structure – of their gang collectives. These collectives were predominantly male, with the lack of positive role models for young men being a large factor in the lives of gang members. Leaving gang life behind meant no longer being a dupe within criminal networks that ultimately served to enrich other people. Pentecostal realist masculinity recognised the importance of being a breadwinner, but also the futility of seeking an income through gang membership. Part of the appeal of gang life was a vague, superficial and ironic notion of 'fighting back' against racial others who, in reality, exploited gang collectives. Moving beyond this mentality involved realising the hopeless position of black street gangs and identifying niches of legitimate opportunity within societal structures, niches insulated by Pentecostal fraternities.

In pursuing this line of reasoning, ST's appeals to young people shared the characteristics of other Pentecostal-inspired interventions. They sought to reorient masculine identities by harnessing existing propensities to individualism, entrepreneurship and notions of manhood. Indeed, two of ST's most compelling appeals centred on the possibility of making money through legal channels, and parlaying masculine capital amassed in gang life within the sphere of the wider community. In this way, the fraternal networks of Pentecostalism could facilitate the forging and sharpening of individual identity in extending legitimate and potentially lucrative opportunities. So in leaving behind the 'ghetto mentality', young men could transpose rather than relinquish certain strains of their masculinity. Being part of a religious community did not mean setting aside one's individual (and largely acquisitive) objectives, and ST often underscored this fact by pointing to the futility and inefficiency of gang members' current schemes. The street-corner drug market required some twelve hours on duty each day, he explained to those gathered before him, which entailed making oneself available until the early hours. The business also called for constant vigilance; rival dealers would 'rob' their adversaries of drug monies at knife- or gunpoint, well aware that no complaint to police would ensue. The ideal response to such an affront was violence, but not all possessed the resources, capability or desire needed for summary retribution. The young men, usually by now chastened into admitting that they had earned only a few hundred pounds in recent months, were told that this amounted to perhaps half the national minimum wage, before occasional taxation rates of 100% were factored in. If this was a business model, it had no future. There had to be a better way.

ST took the opportunity of a gathering of young men at the Methodist church to explain the wider context and implications of gang membership. Six young black men sat around a table in the meeting room of the church complex with ST. Hailing from three different areas of the borough and representing three named 'gangs', they had all participated in the sale of drugs on the street and in altercations with one another's peer groups wherein weapons were used. Two had stabbed rivals; two had suffered stab wounds in similar circumstances. The meeting place carried no territorial threat or controversy. Like faith-inspired attempts to rehabilitate gang members in Los Angeles

(Flores, 2014), the choice of venue and status of ST as former gang member (of considerable clout) positioned TAG advantageously between gangs and wider society.

To help matters ST had met all concerned on streets in the vicinity and walked with them to the venue. Once in the room they were soon at ease with ST who had spoken with them personally over the previous six months during street-based 'outreach' work which saw him drive around various neighbourhoods and alight to talk with groups of teenage boys and young men stationed on street corners. Obtaining the mobile phone numbers of certain key players, in the weeks ahead he was able to get those now gathered to attend the meeting at the appointed time and place. Now they had arrived, ST began by asking all present for a basic level of respect, which required them to turn their mobile phones to silent and avoid answering any calls for the duration of the meeting. Then, after thanking them for attending, ST launched into a narrative as to his 'ting' (purpose). 'This may sound superficial, but in truth why I'm here is as much about stopping innocent people getting killed as about youse.' This led to him probing what they consider to be future ambitions. The issue of respect was raised with a new dimension offered. ST explained: 'What you call "respect" is actually not about fighting … the respect a man gets in life … is based in how you can help people. You've got to put down noise (fracas between members of rival groups) and guns and get off the road. In a few years, you'll be lucky to have wives and kids (one individual in the room has a child – he is aged 17). Who's gonna' pay for your kids food and school? Are you going to settle down with a girl with that life? Are you gonna' be 29-years-old sticking up people (robbing people at knife- or gunpoint), thinking you're bad? (All nod approvingly.) And that's why I'm here; squashing the beef' (reducing the sources of conflict).

The enormity of the task was brought home as Asa, a member of a gang called the Beckton Boys, explained that the problem was their Woodgrange equivalents.[3] According to Asa, who was the victim of a recent beating at the hands of youths from the Woodgrange district, they must strike up the first apology to end matters: 'They rushed (collectively attacked) me first – they have to say sorry.' The ensuing silence was again broken by ST, who asked, looking around the room: 'How do we stop all this?' One youth ventures the following argument, stating: 'If we (Beckton) come off, the rest have to do the same. Trust is needed. We need to know we're all on the same ting'. Another youth, hitherto silent, chipped in: 'There's six groups (named "gang" entities) on Newham – so which crew do we start with? I agree, I don't want my kids going down this road, and I don't want my daughter taking a bullet from a stray shot.'

The youngsters around him were implored to divert their resources into family life. Their current endeavours, he explained, were destined to flounder or fail; legitimate revenue streams would be more lucrative. They already possessed the means to be successful. What was required was a reappraisal of methods and priorities. Having been deflected into alternative social spheres, masculine energies could be directed towards profitable, and importantly legal, notions of manhood. Conscientiousness would secure such an elevated status and, consequently, material betterment. Aware of Asa's skills in penning lyrics for YouTube rapping clips, ST outlined a business model whereby Asa's undoubted ability as a 'lyricist' could be promoted by those in rival areas of the borough who had other skills and the collective product transported by those from yet another area – in a sense, a collaborative business model where everybody involved wins, i.e. makes money from the enterprise. This was a familiar enough strategy but one inflected by the post-industrial

conditions of contemporary East London and the platforms available to young people via internet-enabled devices. That said, it was the more tangible networks represented by religious groups which could give youngsters the edge and keep things on a virtuous footing.

Before the group departed, ST asked them to come again, to bring their friends, but warned that if anyone in the interim 'beefs' (continues gang-based vendettas) they were not to come back. The words seemed to register and the departing Asa stated aloud: 'I'm squashing the beef'. A couple of others nodded slowly in approval but said nothing. All present were asked to clasp their hands together in prayer and close their eyes while ST asked for God's blessing on all in the room and all the things they held sacred. His closing word of 'Amen' was repeated by all eight of his listeners. These young men then went their separate ways.

In watching ST stage interventions, the central elements of Pentecostal realist masculinity were possible to discern. As we have seen, a number of existing predispositions were retained but redirected. An acquisitive streak was not discouraged. It could be harnessed along with the forging and sharpening of individual identity within fraternal Pentecostal networks, with a young man's creativity now channelled into legitimate expressive activities. These networks replaced the gang and compensated for a deficit in terms of family structures. Pentecostal realist masculinity also represented a more mature approach to the racial and racist dynamics of wider society. The notion that gang membership struck a blow against exploitative racial others was hopelessly naïve. Indeed, black street gangs were often the unwitting dupes of criminal networks headed up by these 'others'.

Conclusion

To outsiders, the recruitment of ST and TAG by Newham Council and the MPS may seem to represent a desperate plea for divine intervention; one might reason that the shortcomings of 'official' approaches to gangs were made plain in the shift towards a faith-based scheme. However, understanding this as a move from rational to irrational approaches would be wide of the mark. TAG's Pentecostal realism was effective because of the position it carved out between gangs and wider society, together with the fact it could accommodate a modified masculinity and an entrepreneurial spirit.

When framed in terms of the short-term objectives of TAG, local police and Newham Council, the cultivation of Pentecostal realist masculinity undoubtedly worked. TAG's work with the borough's street gangs saw offenses classed as SYV decrease by more than 25%. The borough commander was open in attributing this significant reduction to TAG and, more specifically, ST. Criticisms of other faith-based gang intervention and rehabilitation programmes, that they tend to work with the grain of neoliberal tenets (Lancaster, 1988), largely hold for TAG's work. It promised converts a greater appreciation of society's power dynamics and how these were spun around fundamentally racist social structures. The challenge it posed to these structures was indirect, recognising the almost irresistible pull of individualist identities and reorienting them towards legal and potentially lucrative societal niches. However, the most important thing for ST and TAG was that fewer young men were dying on the streets of East London. And, when dealing in matters of life and death, one works with short time horizons. What mattered was that which could be achieved in the here and now. Finding God could work in the rehabilitation of gang members, but only if the search had a certain worldly resonance.

Notes

1. The constant – and unresolved – issue in all multi-agency approaches to the issue of SYV/gangs was agreeing on what constituted a 'gang'. There were academic and police attempts at definition but none that were universally accepted nationally or specifically in the Newham context. For TAG, it was less important whether a group self-identified as a 'gang' than if its affiliates engaged consistently in SYV.
2. The man credited with organising the first institutionalised practice of Pentecostalism, William Seymour, the son of former slaves, learned the doctrine that glossolalia (or speaking in tongues) was evidence of a Christian being infused with the Holy Spirit from white preacher Charles Parnham. Seymour was given permission to listen to Parnham's lectures, but only through an open door while sat in the corridor of a Bible School in Houston, Texas. Though Parnham was initially supportive of Seymour's attempts to spread the word of Pentecostalism, as a sympathiser of the Ku Klux Klan he disapproved of the co-presence of whites and blacks at religious gatherings, and the two became dissociated, forming the (black) Church of God in Christ and the (white) Assemblies of God, respectively.
3. Taking their name from a district of Newham, in 2012 the 25 young men who gathered under the banner of 'Woodgrange' attained London-wide notoriety via a YouTube video titled 'Who's That Click'. The five-minute clip showed the gang rapping and subtly insulting neighbouring groups. The video had been viewed more than 250,000 times. It was eventually taken down from the website following an appeal to YouTube by Newham Police in conjunction with Newham Council.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

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