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## The London Clearances: Race, Housing and Policing

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# The London Clearances: Race, Housing and Policing

By Jessica Perera

The riots of 2011 didn't emerge from within terraced streets or low-rise apartment buildings. As spatial analysis of the riots has shown, the rioters came overwhelmingly from these post-war estates ... Sink estates – and frankly, the people who lived in them – have been seen as something simply to be managed. It's time to be more ambitious on every level. The mission here is nothing short of a social turnaround, and with massive estate regeneration, tenants protected, and land unlocked for new housing all over Britain, I believe we can tear down anything that stands in our way.

***Prime Minister David Cameron, 2016***

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# PREFACE

Professor Lee Bridges, IRR Council Member

Writing in two special issues of *Race & Class* in the early 1980s,<sup>1</sup> I began exploring the linkages between developments in urban policing in Britain following outbreaks of civil disorder and a range of social policies. Even then, it was evident that there were parallels between measures being meted out to Britain's Asian communities under increasingly repressive immigration legislation<sup>2</sup> and the policing of inner-city black communities through the use of a combination of increased police powers and the implication of the police into various programmes of social provision, the better to improve intelligence on and target particular individuals, groups and areas. Similarly, cutbacks in public expenditure imposed initially in the late 1970s by the International Monetary Fund foreshadowed future 'austerity' measures and the onset of 'managed decline' and the ultimate devastation of public provision of social housing.

In this background report, Jessica Perera does much more than simply update this earlier analysis. Rather, she demonstrates how, under policies largely developed since the financial crisis of 2008 and the urban riots of 2011, a dangerous symbiosis has been forged between housing policies directed toward 'regeneration' of London's council housing estates, on the one hand, and new forms of policing under which the administrative powers of a range of state institutions (local authorities, housing associations, social services and schools) are being aligned with more traditional criminal law sanctions, on the other. The latter forms of policing result in a much more powerful set of punishments which can result in

individual, familial and cultural forms of banishment and exclusion, whereas estate 'regeneration' appears to be directed at the wholesale physical dispossession of BAME and working-class residents from council and other forms of public housing. This perfect storm of mutually-reinforcing policies is now being brought to bear on a new generation of young black people.

# INTRODUCTION

Liz Fekete, IRR Director

After the 2011 ‘riots’ in England and Wales, prime minister David Cameron, London mayor Boris Johnson and Department, Works and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith laid the blame squarely on ‘gangs’, described as a ‘major criminal disease that has infected streets and estates’ and an obstacle to ‘neighbourhood rejuvenation, community action and business development’. An existing discussion about what was to be done about London’s so-called ‘sink estates’ was transformed overnight into a ‘race’ debate, underpinned as it was by a highly racialised alarmist language about ‘gangs’ and ‘gang nominals’ (today’s equivalent of yesterday’s muggers). A stigma began to be attached to black and multicultural neighbourhoods and council estates, linked now to dangerous black youth subcultures like Grime and Drill. All this happened at around the same time that the Home Office was introducing its Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) strategy, which provides local authorities financial incentives to gather data on young people in gangs or at risk of gang involvement. The Conservative government’s existing Estate Regeneration Programme was also accelerated; involving the selling off of local authority-owned housing estates to private partnerships and the decanting of social housing tenants outside the capital in a process that has been described by Simon Elmer and Geraldine Denning as the ‘London Clearances’.<sup>3</sup>

Politicians could have looked to the real causes of the riots, such as social pressures due to austerity-induced welfare benefit cuts, the closing of youth clubs, aggressive police operations and ill-thought out

policies like the ending of the Educational Maintenance Allowance. Housing experts had long warned that the gradual social cleansing of London was eroding community bonds, leading to young people being dispossessed of family, community and social identity. Community workers like Stafford Scott and criminologists like Patrick Williams and Becky Clarke were charting the links between the criminalisation of young working-class BAME people in London and Manchester due to the joint enterprise doctrine, the Gangs Matrices and the moral panic around ‘gangs’. Urbanisation scholars and housing activists were linking the social cleansing of the capital with the benefits accruing to another cohort of young people, this time middle-class gentrifiers.

In *The London Clearances: race, housing and policing* the IRR seeks to build on the existing research in ways that foreground more emphatically the connections between urban policy, housing and policing. Our aim is to link knowledge which focuses on institutional racism in policing policy with that which focuses on housing dispossession, regeneration, inequality and exclusion. The purpose is not only to explore the connective tissue between housing and policing, but to develop a much-needed race and class perspective on these issues. After all, London has the largest BAME population in the country with that population predominantly concentrated in social housing. If we are to provide a wider evidence base for NGOs and community campaigns combating institutional racism in policing and/or resisting housing injustice and the race/class social cleansing of the capital, it is

vital that we examine issues of race and class simultaneously.

Some background to the report, its author and how it came to be written may be necessary. In June 2018, the IRR, concerned that the government's regeneration plans for specific council estates in London mirrored areas about which BAME communities had long since complained of over-policing, decided to investigate further. Fortuitously, at exactly that time, Goldsmiths postcolonial studies and global policy MA student Jessica Perera contacted IRR, offering her services as a volunteer. Jessica quickly emerged as the ideal person to work with the IRR on the project. She was asked to carry out a literature review of central, local government and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) documents, as well as build up case files on issues related to the government's Estate Regeneration Programme, anti-social behaviour orders, gang injunctions, Gangs Matrices, dispersal orders, public space protection orders and specialist police operations such as Operation Sceptre and Operation Shield. Fascinated by what she was discovering about location-specific policing and local authority redevelopment plans, Jessica then decided to change the topic of her MA dissertation so she could further explore the issues she was already researching at the IRR as well as gain better theoretical underpinnings for her research.<sup>4</sup>

The report is divided into four sections. Having set out the neoliberal context for the housing crisis in Section I, in Section II, 'Social housing, gentrification and estate regeneration' Perera then goes on to describe four decades of housing policy and legislative change. It starts with Margaret Thatcher's 1979 raiding of the social housing stock and the infamous Right-to-buy policy, proceeds through New Labour's urban renaissance strategy ('positive gentrification') and ends with the current Conservative government's Estates Regeneration scheme, under which at

least 170 London council estates either are undergoing or are subject to consultations over demolition.

It is these policies, Perera argues, that have led to such dramatic reductions in the social housing stock at the same time as dispossessing once vibrant inner-city black and multicultural working-class neighbourhoods of their old community networks. In "'Sink estates" and "Managed Decline"', the author looks more closely at the way the terminology of 'sink estates' has gradually embedded itself in the housing debate, most notably since 2005 when New Labour introduced its 'positive gentrification' policies. As already indicated, the tenor was to become more racialised after the 'riots' of 2011, with the state ignoring the structural causes of the 'riots' in favour of a narrative that focused on gangs and ghettos, and a supposed socially deviant underclass emanating from some of England's worst council estates whose residents had an alleged propensity for anti-social behaviour and criminality.

Finally, having laid out the framework of housing and urban policy, in 'Localised hostile environments and policing inequality', the links between housing and policing policies in poor BAME working-class neighbourhoods can be explored. The hostile environment is a term usually associated with the government's immigration policies where it denotes Home Office administrative and legislative measures designed to make stay in the United Kingdom as difficult as possible for those without leave to remain. Perera's innovation is to develop it further as a description of the location-specific policing that has intensified since the 2011 riots in direct relation to the Home Office spearheaded multi-agency EGYV strategy, as well as the government's gentrification policies and bid to demolish council estates, largely in areas where the disturbances took place.



When I first came to work at the Institute of Race Relations in 1981, much like Jessica Perera, as a student, I was employed to monitor policing in the capital, first collating a newsletter called *Policing London* and then working on an update to the IRR's 1979 evidence to the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure. Subsequently published in 1987 as *Policing Against Black People*, the report drew together hundreds of case studies involving police and black and Asian communities, mostly in the Metropolitan area. There is a clear link between the policing of black subcultures today and the public order policing policies charted in *Policing Against Black People*. After the urban disturbances of 1981 and 1985, a new Metropolitan Police chief, Sir Kenneth Newman who had from 1976–1980 served as chief constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in Northern Ireland, was appointed. Newman introduced a policy of targeting 'symbolic locations', clubs, meeting places and cultural venues of particular significance to the black community. Targeting has evolved since then, as has policing culture, under the impact of New Labour's anti-social behaviour (ASBO) culture.

What is different today is the creation of an expanded criminal justice system that blurs the line between criminal, civil and administrative law powers, epitomised by the Anti-social Behaviour, Policing and Crime Act 2014, leading to sanctions being used against young people, particularly young black men. Hence, in Section IV, Jessica Perera also describes some of the novel ways in which the ASB frameworks interact with local authority policies aimed at meeting the needs

of businesses and gentrifiers, marginalising young black people and their class-based cultural rights as well as BAME communities as a whole. The section ends by discussing the targeting of black subcultures, where Perera describes that experience using her term 'vernacular landscape' to signify all the urban spaces and places where young black people either live or frequent, including council estates, youth clubs, chicken shops and 'the streets', now being targeted by police and local authorities alike.

Since 1987 and the writing of *Policing Against Black People* we have come full circle with the state (central government, local government and the Metropolitan Police) threatening all the things that make the lives of young black people bearable, the 'life-style, the dignity', to quote Sivanandan, 'which they have carved out from the stone of their lives'. What is important to remember though, is that gentrification destabilises community organising, mobilisation and action against police brutality and other forms of structural racism. While twenty or thirty years ago, communities could draw inspiration and strength from established black community and neighbourhood campaigns, today's targeting of BAME populations comes at a time when they are being dispossessed of community networks and decanted from the capital.

*The London Clearances: race, housing and policing* is the fruit of a creative relationship between Jessica Perera and IRR, which we hope to develop into a more concentrated research study of the issues raised in this report.



# USE OF TERMS

**Accumulation by dispossession** – a phrase used by David Harvey to describe how, since the emergence of neoliberalism, capital accumulation has been largely through dispossessing the poor of public (state-owned) assets, land and wealth which are sold off to private ownership.

**'Affordable Housing'** – the official definition is of housing provided at less than market prices/rents within a local area, so as to cost no more than 80 per cent of average local market rents. Affordable housing for sale is to be provided at a level at which mortgage payments are more than that which would be paid in rent on council housing, but below market levels.

**Austerity** – politically motivated economic policies that aim to cut government spending on public services (including welfare services) in order to reduce the overall government budget deficit.

**Brownfield land** – any land that has been previously developed, but currently not in use; frequently land that has been contaminated with industrial waste, causing pollution and contamination.

**Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)** – a defined geographical area where businesses are required to pay additional taxes to fund a variety of public services, such as street cleaning, security, policing and aesthetic improvements.

**The commons** – land, resources or assets owned by everyone.

**Deregulation** – the removal or reduction of government regulations and restrictions in a particular industry; usually to increase competition for capital growth.

**Dispersal Powers** – under the Anti-social Behaviour, Policing and Crime Act (2014), dispersal zones were renamed 'dispersal powers', giving the police power to exclude individuals from demarcated areas for up to 48 hours for alleged anti-social behaviour.

**Educational Maintenance Allowance** – provided financial support in England, as well as Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, to young people aged 16-19, from poor backgrounds, who were either fulltime students or undertaking unpaid work-based learning.

**Gangs Matrix** – is a database of suspected gang members in London. Similar matrices are in operation in other UK cities.

**Gentrification** – the material process of renovating and improving deprived economic areas so as to attract wealthier residents.

**Financialisation** – the growth and power of the financial sector in its operations and influence on society, particularly on not-for-profit sectors (i.e. housing) which turns them into commodities.

**Localised hostile environments** – a term, specific to this work, to capture a diverse set of punitive and disciplinary measures, including, inter alia, racial profiling and policing, territory-targeted stop-and-searches and residential evictions.

**Managed decline** – the deliberate neglect of buildings (i.e. housing) that renders them unsafe and uninhabitable.

**Met Patrol Plus** – a scheme which allows businesses in London to ‘buy-in’ additional police officers from the Metropolitan Police Service.

**Neoliberalism** – an economic theory that advocates freedom of the market and market-processes; its three prominent characteristics being: privatisation, deregulation and austerity measures.

**Positive gentrification** – refers to any social policies that aim to diversify working-class neighbourhoods by introducing wealthier residents, and thereby supposedly improving the material and social quality of life for poorer people.

**Privatisation** – the selling-off of state-owned (or publically owned) assets and resources to private companies.

**Private Finance Initiative** – the funding of public infrastructure and services such as hospitals and schools through capital raised from private sources, frequently involving long-term contractual commitments on public bodies to pay rental and service charges for their use of the facilities.

**Regeneration** – urban planning term to describe large-scale redevelopment projects intended to improve the utility and physical design of buildings and/or areas and, hence, the local economy.

**Registered Social Landlords** – RSLs, usually housing associations, are private, non-profit-making organisations that provide low-cost social housing.

**Social cleansing** – the largescale removal of the ‘lower classes’ from an area where they are seen as undesirable and as having no financial value.

**Vernacular landscape** – term used here to describe the features of young, working-class people’s material environment that shape their urban experience.

# I. LONDON'S HOUSING CRISIS IN A NEOLIBERAL CONTEXT

No Londoner can remain unaware of the acute shortage of social and actual affordable housing in the capital. As land in London is scarce and in demand, the land that local authority estates sit on has become increasingly valuable to central government which has identified this terrain as a potential space for new housing that will fix London's 'housing crisis'. But despite the government's promise that this 'valuable land' would be used to build more 'affordable housing', the reality is that the few dozen or so estates that have to date been demolished and regenerated have not been developed in a way that either re-houses all prior existing residents or houses the hundreds of thousands of people waiting on council housing registers. Instead, this land is being used to create profitable housing developments and luxury residential apartments owned by private companies and used to accommodate wealthy and middle-class 'gentrifiers'.

In the United States there are many academic studies (as well as grassroots initiatives) that suggest a link between state housing policies and policing strategies in poor, urban black communities. Mustafa Dikeç's case study of policing in Cincinnati, for instance, links policing strategies with expanding, and increasingly financialised city centres, confining the poor to the suburbs.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, in the UK, the discussion, to date,

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*"In the UK, the discussion, to date, has tended to treat as completely separate the issues of housing, policing and racism."*

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has tended to treat as completely separate the issues of housing, policing and racism. Urbanisation academics in the UK have been critical of government regeneration

policies for accelerating processes of 'social cleansing', which is defined as the large-scale removal of the lower classes from an area where they are seen as undesirable and without financial value in society. Current literature on the subject indicates this is a *class* issue.<sup>6</sup> Yet the kind of racialised language to describe London's post-war housing estates in the aftermath of the 2011 riots, would strongly suggest that it is also a *race* issue. Exploring issues of race and class simultaneously is made more difficult by the fact that there currently exists no complete demographic analysis of the residents that have been evicted from council housing as a result of estate regeneration. Furthermore, little research has looked into the ways in which regeneration is shaping policing. In fact, as this background paper demonstrates, housing regeneration and area gentrification are concomitant with the targeted policing operations deployed not only by the Metropolitan Police but also local authorities and other social agencies, thereby erasing the boundaries between the police and other public services.

## The centrality of neoliberalism

What follows is an expansive investigation into a London-wide phenomenon, but it is one that cannot be understood outside the neoliberal economic framework and related-austerity measures that shape London's approach to housing. Neoliberalism is both a theory and project that conceives 'the best of all possible worlds' as realisable when the market and market-processes are

left unregulated by the state. This suggests that markets have a teleological tendency to self-correct and that the role of the state, therefore, should be to provide an environment for neoliberalism to thrive without political interference. According to David Harvey, 'the ground-rules for market competition must be properly observed

(by the state)' and 'in situations where such rules are not clearly laid out, the state must use its power to impose or invent market systems'.<sup>7</sup> At least since the 1980s, these ground-rules in

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*"Neoliberalisation of state and society has been dispossessing the poor of public services."*

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the UK (and elsewhere in the Global North) have included two main features. These are: first, deregulation policies that remove or reduce governmental regulations in the economic and social sectors, and second, the privatisation or the sell-off of public assets, services and state companies to private corporate investors. More recently, these neoliberal ground rules have been linked to austerity measures. While it is a moot point as to when austerity actually began (reductions in public spending on housing date back to the 1970s<sup>8</sup>) austerity is linked, in the public mind at least, to a series of measures introduced from 2010 onwards, first under the Conservative-Liberal coalition government and now the current Conservative government. Since 2009, fiscal policy is openly aligned with austerity measures aimed at reducing government expenditure in public services and on public sector wages, in the context of dismantling the welfare state. Not surprisingly, the end result of the neoliberalisation of state and society

has been dispossessing of the poor of public services.

David Harvey analyses this by utilising the concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' which he argues has always been central to the economics of capitalism, but today is accelerated by the neoliberal logic of deregulation and privatisation. For Harvey, the tendency of the capitalist system to 'overaccumulate' surplus capital is largely overcome through state seizures and investment in (potentially profitable) assets, such as land and housing.<sup>9</sup> But when such assets are unavailable, 'then capitalism must somehow produce them'.<sup>10</sup> Crucial to the process of producing new terrains for accumulating surplus capital, has been though *privatising* state-owned assets. This has involved continuously opening up 'the commons' – both natural and cultural resources available to everyone, i.e. water supplies, healthcare and education – to capital investment, which has across the Global North resulted in the ruthless expansion of capitalism into largely egalitarian sectors of the economy and society. One of the ways over the past forty years the British state has been able to accumulate by dispossessing has been through the appropriation of public housing. Privatisation and financialisation have been the main mechanisms through which the working classes have been dispossessed of social housing. And simultaneously policing is looked to, not to counter crime and protect communities, but, rather, to police inequality when austerity has destroyed community bonds and to preserve an unfettered space for the market.

## II. SOCIAL HOUSING, GENTRIFICATION AND ESTATE REGENERATION

Since 1979, successive governments, across the political spectrum, have systematically reduced social housing stock in London through the processes of privatisation and financialisation. These neoliberal policies have transformed the housing sector. Once seen in the post-war era as a social good, housing is now treated as a commodity. Longstanding social networks in BAME and multicultural working-class areas of London have been slowly eroded, dispossessing entire neighbourhoods of community and culture.

First, in 1979, under a Conservative government, Margaret Thatcher introduced the 'Right-to-Buy' scheme and initiated the transfer (privatisation) of local authority housing stock to housing associations and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). Second, from 1997 onwards, under the New Labour government's urban renaissance strategy, private housing developments with mixed tenures were fostered to bring about 'positive gentrification'. Third, housing policy under the Conservative-Liberal coalition government of 2010-2016 was, in turn, marked by the growing influence of

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the financial sector in public housing, while the current Conservative government has launched its Estates Regeneration Programme which involves the selling off of local authority-owned

housing estates to private companies and the decanting of social housing tenants outside the capital. This four-decade long policy and legislative change that has led to London's 'housing crisis', characterised by a chronic

lack of new affordable homes,<sup>11</sup> an acute lack of social rented housing, and rising homelessness, with a 50 per cent increase in the number of homeless households being moved out of London by councils in the first six months of 2018 alone.<sup>12</sup> Below we outline some of the legislative milestones and policy developments that comprise the backdrop to what has been described as the 'London clearances', a term that resonates with the 'Highland clearances'<sup>13</sup> and has come to be read as synonymous with social cleansing.<sup>14</sup>

### Privatisation, financialisation, dispossession

Privatisation involves the selling off of public assets to private ownership and has been a central component of neoliberal policies that place a premium on the market and market processes to regulate the economy. Following her election in 1979, Thatcher sought to shrink the role of the state and open up state-owned industries, such as gas, electricity and water to the private sector where they could be treated as businesses for investment, speculation and profit. For David Harvey, 'it is the corporatization, commodification, and privatization of hitherto public assets that have been signal features of the neoliberal project. Its primary aim has been to open up new fields for capital accumulation in domains formerly regarded off-limits to the calculus of profitability.'<sup>15</sup>

It was in the Housing Act 1989 that 'Right-to-Buy' legislation was first introduced. Although it was presented as a social

mobility opportunity for council tenants, to be able to buy their own home at significantly discounted prices, the policy actually had the effect of minimising housing opportunities for working-class and low-income households. The real aim was to transform council housing from a source of social good to a private enterprise, while also providing the cash-strapped Treasury with money from the sale of state assets. The overall impact was to increase rents and diminish housing opportunities for working-class and low-income families in particular, as little or no funding was made available to build new council housing for rent.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, under the Housing Acts of 1985 and 1988, local authority housing stock was transferred (privatised) to RSLs. The 1988 Act, in particular, which redefined housing associations as non-public bodies, has had an enduring impact on subsequent housing policy as it effectively granted access to private finance, which local authorities regarded as an opportunity to carry out long-neglected housing repairs and improvement works.<sup>17</sup> (Such repairs and renovations were often poorly and cheaply done, as exemplified by Grenfell.) As a result, central government funding for building new local authority housing was reduced as housing associations and RSLs acquired funding direct from private investors. In this way, by the end of the 1980s, low-income families had again been significantly disadvantaged by the depletion of local authority housing stock.<sup>18</sup>

***“London’s poor communities have increasingly been marginalised through state-led gentrification projects.”***

Although it was the Conservatives who provided the legal framework for selling off state-owned council housing, it was under successive New Labour administrations between 1997 and 2010, that the deeper erosion of working-class council estates and communities took place. Stuart Hodkinson and Chris Essen have argued, while ‘capital accumulation was boosted through

unlocking state housing, finance and land to private and commercial interests, neither the Right-to-Buy nor the transfer of council-owned housing to housing associations usually entailed losing one’s home.’<sup>19</sup> Rather, it was the New Labour government’s privatisation of council housing which was instrumental in displacing individuals from their families and communities.

In 1999, New Labour implemented its ‘urban renaissance’ strategy, proposing to regenerate and repopulate many British cities, including London. The initiative highlighted the need to tackle ‘sinking’ estates by ‘creating neighbourhoods with a mix of tenures and incomes’.<sup>20</sup> As human geographer Loretta Lees explained at the time, the term ‘urban renaissance’ was a code-word for gentrification.<sup>21</sup> In fact, New Labour explicitly acknowledged this through the use of the term ‘positive gentrification’. The idea behind it was that the working classes could be re-socialised through contact with gentrifiers with more social capital. However, this was idealistic, as London’s poor communities have increasingly been marginalised through state-led gentrification projects. As Hodkinson and Essen, point out, urban renaissance ‘was predicated on exploiting large rent gaps in urban areas’,<sup>22</sup> which could be taken advantage of by the middle classes who were to be lured back to the city by the potential rising value of properties created through gentrification.

New Labour was also instrumental in accelerating ‘public-private partnerships’ such as the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). In the main, PFI was used by New Labour governments to address ‘longstanding underinvestment in state infrastructure without officially increasing public sector borrowing and debt’, including addressing a backlog of housing repairs that was a part of New Labour’s Decent Homes Standard. However, between 1998 and 2010, PFI was also made available to a



number of local authorities to complete large-scale regeneration projects including the demolition of particular housing estates.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, first privatisation and then financialisation, have been the main mechanisms through which working-class communities have been dispossessed of the right to housing and community.

The gentrification of inner-city areas of London also coincided with New Labour's electoral promise to put 'anti-social behaviour' at the top of its policy agenda, with specific measures criminalising such behaviour. Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, behaviour which had previously been seen as a social problem was criminalised. It should not be forgotten that New Labour was the architect of 'ASBO [anti-social behaviour order] Britain', a top-down process without national oversight which allowed for the penalisation of various forms of 'undesirable' (read working-class) activities, such as adolescent street loitering, and the criminalisation of anyone over the age of 14 who failed to adhere to this new punitive regime. This Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) framework, which contributed to the expansion of the youth justice system under New Labour, was to be completely overhauled by the Conservative-led coalition government which 'created new mechanisms for the – potentially much more extensive – use of ASB responses by councils, housing providers and the police.'<sup>24</sup> This will be discussed further in section IV.

With the election of the coalition government in 2010, Britain's working-class communities witnessed yet another variant of housing dispossession, this time, arguably the most virulent. After the 2008 global financial crisis, Britain's housing market was the only sector left unaffected, which added to its appeal as a global financial centre for capital investment. In particular, as Danny Dorling has shown, the London property market was seen as a safe financial

investment for international and domestic capital accumulation.<sup>25</sup> Due to the central importance of the property market for the British economy, London's social housing estates were now exposed to increasing financialisation through private investment and capital speculation, a process that has intensified under the Conservative government elected in 2015. The Conservatives' highly permissive attitude to housing and planning regulation has further encouraged capital speculation. In 2016 it was reported that land for over 600,000 homes was being 'banked' by the nine largest house builders in the UK.<sup>26</sup> (Land banking refers to the practice of aggregating sectors of land for future sale or development.)

Michael Edwards has argued that financialisation is also transforming the way that non-financial sectors operate.<sup>27</sup> In particular, the influence of neoliberalism on local authorities and RSLs is noteworthy, with both now encouraged to re-imagine publicly owned land – and therefore social housing – not according to its human use value, but its capital potential generated from partnerships with private investors who in turn, are able to dictate 'the rent policies and the allocation of tenancies to meet the imperatives of securing (future) finance'. Today, hard-pressed or even bankrupt councils – made financially vulnerable by central government austerity measures – are increasingly capitulating to private companies as the land and housing estates they own become ever more valuable, and the prospect of attracting middle-class residents with higher incomes, notionally expands the council tax base and reduces charges on services. It is this political terrain that has allowed private investors, with an interest in maximising profits and not in providing homes for the poor, to determine London housing policy. This is a development made easier by changes to welfare and housing legislation which enable London councils to decant social housing tenants residing on the land they want to redevelop.



Under the Housing and Planning Act 2016, secure and assured tenancies for new social housing tenants have been abolished, making it easier for local authorities to evict individuals and families from properties after two or three years. Between 2012 and 2015 over 50,000 families – that is upwards of 150,000 people – have been evicted from London boroughs<sup>28</sup> and these figures are set to rise. A recent FOI request made to the Ministry of Justice found that in just three months, between January and March 2018, social landlords in London made the highest number of both possession claims and landlord reposessions.<sup>29</sup> This has partly been achieved by social security reforms that have reduced housing benefit payments made to councils (and the private rented sector) for social housing tenants.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has drawn attention to the highly racialised impact of welfare reforms, with the reduction in housing benefit for social housing tenants with 'spare' bedrooms, known as the 'bedroom tax' and the 'two-child limit' for housing benefit recipients, implemented in 2012 and 2017 respectively, having a 'particularly large impact for Black and Asian households'. And the government's most recent overhaul of state welfare, known as Universal Credit, has also had a disproportionate effect on BAME households.<sup>30</sup> The fact that Universal Credit is paid a month in arrears, and housing rent is now paid a month in advance, has left London's social housing tenants at risk of eviction. Information obtained from a recent FOI request reveals an average of 73 per cent of council tenants in London on Universal Credit are in rent arrears. Currently, Universal Credit has only been piloted in eight of London's thirty-three boroughs, so this figure is set to rise.<sup>31</sup> Other measures that facilitate the privatisation and commodification of social housing include the extension of Right-to-Buy to include housing association properties. But the most telling of all, is the presumption in favour of granting planning permission to new

brownfield sites identified by local authorities. Putting it frankly, academic and housing expert Anna Minton has argued 'automatic planning permission for brown field sites, including housing estates, [is] paving the way for widespread demolitions'.<sup>32</sup>

## Manipulating concerns about affordable housing

What is the basis of the 'housing crisis' that London faces? For the Conservatives, London's housing crisis is seldom linked to a lack of genuinely affordable housing in line with low incomes, or the failure to build new council homes. Instead, the government claims that the real problem is the lack of land to build new housing on, hence its preoccupation with building on 'brownfield land', a term used in urban planning to describe any land where there has been previous development, but is currently not in use. Architects for Social Housing (ASH) has drawn attention to the government's discovery of so-called 'new land' on social housing estates, and its interest with estate regeneration initiatives as a means of manipulating the housing crisis.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the shortage of housing in London is being used by the Conservative government to justify a housing redevelopment model that benefits all those who have a vested interest in the financialisation of housing, whether it be businesses, private investors or the government itself. Currently, at least 170 estates in London are either undergoing or are subject to consultations over demolition, ASH have shown.<sup>34</sup> Virtuous arguments about creating 'affordable housing', it would seem, provide a useful means of obscuring what is really happening on the ground, i.e. the government is actively enabling the further transfer of public land (local authority-owned estates) into private ownership, therefore making it available for demolitions and redevelopment under the guise of 'regeneration'. London's housing crisis is being turned into 'London clearances'.<sup>35</sup>

### III. 'SINK ESTATES' AND 'MANAGED DECLINE'

Over the past forty years, successive governments from Thatcher to Blair to May, have re-packaged and sold estate regeneration as something that benefits the *whole* of society – a moral crusade, necessary for civic pride and the revitalisation of the urban landscape. Indeed, when the Housing and Planning Bill 2015-16 was introduced in October 2015, the government spoke in explicit terms of its 'crusade' to get more homes built.<sup>36</sup> The publication from the centre-left think-tank, the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR), *City Villages: More Homes, Better Communities*, which had been published several months earlier, in March 2015, should, as Elmer and Denning have pointed out, be seen as

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*"This form of regeneration is not an inclusive policy designed to provide housing for all. On the contrary, it is built on the dispossession of 'upwards of a million people' who would be displaced from their homes, families, friends and communities residing on social housing estates."*

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the blueprint for this piece of legislation.<sup>37</sup> The IPPR announced in the report its intention to 'rediscover' just half of inner-London's housing capacity for the next seventeen years, recommending that all existing council estates be re-categorised as brownfield land. For London's 'urban potential' to be realised, the

IPPR stated, 'brownfield land needs to be mobilised for housing far more ambitiously'. This would involve reframing public discourse about what is currently classed as suitable brownfield land and redefining the term to encompass the largest source of publicly owned land, council estates – 'some of the most valuable land in the world'.<sup>38</sup> The premise of the report is that

the number of people living in inner-London is 'insufficiently dense', as compared to the pre-war period when the population was at its peak.

What the report failed to mention was that this form of regeneration is not an inclusive policy designed to provide housing for all. On the contrary, it is built on the dispossession of 'upwards of a million people' who would be displaced from their homes, families, friends and communities residing on social housing estates. Instead, the IPPR report tells us that of the 'few dozen estate regeneration schemes' which have been initiated in recent years in London, they 'have focused particularly on notorious "sink" estates'. In 2016, there were, according to Anna Minton, around '3,500 estates in London', home to hundreds of thousands of people. At that point, very few, as the IPPR also recognise, had been earmarked for regeneration.

One must consider the political expediency involved in re-categorising brownfield land to include council estates. In urban planning, 'brownfield land' is a term used 'to describe former commercial or industrial land that has become contaminated by chemical and industrial waste', and requires 'cleaning up' before being redeveloped. The very fact that this term is now applied to London's council estates implies an intention to 'clear up' land that has been contaminated. Ben Campkin argues that the idea that council estates are filled with polluting people has been central to the 'symbolic and physical "sanitization" process associated with urban redevelopment and gentrification'.<sup>39</sup>

## From 'sink estates' to gangs and ghettos

There is a clear continuity between New Labour's 'urban renaissance' strategy and David Cameron's Estate Regeneration Programme, both of which deployed a highly stigmatising vocabulary about the quality of life on council estates. A racialised discourse has been adopted since the riots of August 2011, with terms like 'gangs', 'ghettos' and 'underclass' often used as a code for race. In 1998, Tony Blair launched his urban renaissance strategy on the Holly Street estate in Hackney, and declared in an interview with the *Express* shortly afterwards, that 'some housing estates were beyond rescue'; they were 'sinking ships'.<sup>40</sup> Almost twenty years later, David Cameron, writing in the *Sunday Times*, talked in quasi-missionary terms about the government's obligation to tackle London's 'sink estates'. Drawing on the recommendations set out in the IPPR report, he proposed to demolish 'sink estates' and thus increase the housing and population density of London:

*There is one issue that ... for me, epitomises both the scale of the challenge we face and the nature of the state failure over decades. It's our housing estates ... step outside in the worst estates, and you're confronted by concrete slabs dropped from on high, brutal high-rise towers and dark alleyways that are a gift to criminals and drug dealers. The police often talk about the importance of designing out crime, but these estates actually designed it in. Decades of neglect have led to gangs, ghettos and anti-social behaviour.*<sup>41</sup>

These so-called 'sink estates' are usually found within inner-city areas characterised by high levels of economic and social deprivation. 'The use of the word "sink" to describe an estate or an economically deprived area', argues Campkin, 'is a relatively recent etymological development', and one

that started under New Labour.<sup>42</sup> It is now firmly associated with the urban poor, often speciously referred to as an 'underclass' and perceived as socially deviant with a propensity for criminality. The choice of words like 'sinking' and 'sink' are indeed interesting. The verb, 'to sink', means 'to pass or fall into some lower state, as of fortune, estimation; degenerate'. While the noun 'sink' means 'a drain or sewer', 'any pond or pit of sewage or waste, as a cesspool or a pool for industrial wastes' and 'a place of vice and corruption'. All of these definitions evoke an imaginary of dirt, degeneration and deviance.

## The deliberate neglect of housing estates

What is largely left unexplored in academic critiques of urban regeneration is the way estates are actively made into sinks before they are redeveloped. Film director Paul Sng has captured this process, which he identified as the 'managed decline' or deliberate neglect of housing estates, where local authorities allow the exterior and interior of estate buildings to go into disrepair, often producing uninhabitable living conditions.<sup>43</sup> In an interview with the *Guardian*, a former resident on Haringey's Woodberry Down estate, Maxwell O'Hajah, describes how the estate was 'managed into dilapidation' by Hackney council. 'What they did', O'Hajah argues, 'was run down the estate so badly, rundown the facilities, close the facilities [and] allow the buildings to dilapidate to such a degree', that the council was able to adopt, what residents have called, a policy of 'constructive eviction'.<sup>44</sup> Thus we might say, the evolution of a sink(ing) estate is slow and delayed. It is, as academic Rob Nixon describes, 'destruction that is dispersed across time' an 'attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all'.<sup>45</sup> But it is a destruction that, I have argued here, should also be located in the slow violence of council negligence that does not 'erupt into instant

sensational visibility'. The exception to this is of course, Grenfell Tower, which Andrea Gibbons, drawing on Nixon's work, says, represents spectacular violence 'a flaming inferno brought about by this worldview with its austerity, deregulation and crisis'.<sup>46</sup>

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If Grenfell showed us anything, it was that the issues of social housing in London are deeply racialised as well as classed.<sup>47</sup> And yet, to date, we have seen nothing published that examines the impact that regeneration

and gentrification is having on working-class BAME communities. This is despite the fact that London, according to BMENational – a collective of over sixty BAME housing associations in England – has the largest overall BAME population (40.2 per cent) across

the UK; with 18.5 per cent of Asian origin; 13.3 per cent of Afro-Caribbean, 5 per cent of mixed ethnicity and 3.4 per cent 'minority ethnic'.<sup>48</sup> Adding to this, analysis undertaken by the University of Middlesex in 2013 shows BAME populations are predominantly concentrated in social housing in the capital, with almost half of all black households (47.6 per cent) living in social rented accommodation; those of mixed ethnicity comprising over a third (35.2 per cent); 'other ethnic groups' constituting 29.2 per cent, and Asian households making up 17.4 per cent.<sup>49</sup> Though this analysis was based on the 2011 UK census, a report released by the Ministry of Housing in 2018 has stated that black people continue to be 'over-represented in new social housing lettings' in the capital.<sup>50</sup>

With this in mind, we cannot continue talking about the regeneration of London's council estates as a colour-blind social cleansing project. The London clearances are as much about race as they are about class.

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*"We cannot continue talking about the regeneration of London's council estates as a colour-blind social cleansing project. The London clearances are as much about race as they are about class."*

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## IV. LOCALISED HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS AND POLICING INEQUALITY

Before the riots of August 2011, ‘sink estates’ were largely portrayed in the media in class terms, with no obvious attempts at racial stigmatisation. After the riots, however, this would all change. Initially, the Home Office commissioned a review into the ‘growing problem of gangs and gang violence’ and subsequently adopted policies based on Ending Gangs and Youth Violence (EGYV). And then, five years later in 2016, prime minister David Cameron writing in the *Sunday Times*, argued that the government had an obligation to demolish housing estates that had been associated with the uprisings. He said, the riots did not ‘emerge from within terraced streets or low-rise apartment buildings’ but from ‘post-war estates’ where three quarters of the convicted ‘rioters’ lived. Such ‘sink estates’ he claimed were the result of decades of neglect that, in turn, spawned ‘gangs, ghettos and anti-social behaviour’.<sup>51</sup> With sleight of hand, Cameron was able to fuse the issue of gangs with the issue of ‘sink estates’, rewriting the public narrative around estate regeneration that has become increasingly racialised.

In much more explicit terms, historian and TV pundit David Starkey commented about the lack of morality exhibited by the rioters when

interpretation, needless to say, ignored repressive police regimes and economic conditions that had led to youth discontent, like the impact of austerity-driven cuts to local authority youth budgets that had affected *all* young people. In addition, youth unemployment in the capital was high, but black youth unemployment was running at around 50 per cent, while the abolition of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), a financial scheme available to young people from low-income families in higher education, was to disproportionately affect BAME students. Nevertheless, the government did not pursue any meaningful enquiry into the uprisings. Instead, the riots were used by political elites to compound their positions on social disaffection and embolden the government’s response to the policing of inequality in London.

In a press conference shortly after the riots began, Cameron announced ‘a concerted all-out war on gangs and gang culture’, which he described as a ‘major criminal disease that has infected streets and estates’.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, would set the precedent for future slanderous comments made by US President Donald Trump, when he insisted that ‘gangs had created no-go areas’, which were preventing neighbourhood ‘rejuvenation’ and ‘business development’.<sup>53</sup> One must consider how reactionary statements like these, which verge on describing young people as contagions, have influenced the Home Office’s approach to its EGYV strategies. In particular, local authorities that could demonstrate the existence of ‘street gangs’ within London boroughs were ‘funded and commissioned to

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*“With sleight of hand, Cameron was able to fuse the issue of gangs with the issue of ‘sink estates’, rewriting the public narrative around estate regeneration that has become increasingly racialised.”*

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he claimed that society had been corrupted by a ‘gangster culture’, adding that ‘whites had become black’ and had been assimilated in a ‘Jamaican patois’ that had ‘intruded England’ making it feel as though England was an entirely ‘foreign’ country. Such an elitist and racist

undertake secondary data analysis' to provide a 'problem profile' of young people who had been convicted of a serious youth violence offence or who were identified as being at risk of gang involvement.<sup>54</sup>

By raising the spectre of violence (read gangs) and depravity (read 'sink estates') seeping into the public domain (read polite white society) and preventing 'progress' (read gentrification), successive governments have been able to advance the idea that there is a 'problem population' dwelling in 'gangs' on London's social housing estates. Is it any wonder then that 62 per cent of the British public in 2011 thought that those involved in the riots and who lived in council housing should be evicted from their homes?<sup>55</sup>

## Race, ghettos and gangs

When David Cameron incorporated the terms 'gangs' and 'ghettos' into his 2016 Estate Regeneration strategy, he was drawing on the findings of Space Syntax, a London-based private consultancy company with a vested interest in the (socio-)spatial reconstruction of London and a stated mission to 'enhance the social, economic and environmental performance of buildings and urban places'. In a project Space Syntax conducted in the aftermath of the 2011 riots, it found 84 per cent of 'verified incidents' of social disorder in north London and 96 per cent in south London took place within a five-minute walk of a large post-war housing estate. Founder of Space Syntax, Bill Hillier, remarked 'the spatial layout of these housing estates has an effect on social patterns, often leading to social malaise and anti-social behaviour'.<sup>56</sup>

Cameron, with his use of terms such as 'gangs' and 'ghettos', may have chosen a more explicit vocabulary than Space Syntax but essentially both were speaking to the same (white, middle-class) audience with the same set of fears. Given the long history of the racialisation of areas where BAME

communities live as lawless zones, terms like 'social malaise', 'anti-social behaviour', 'gangs' and 'ghettos' continue to conjure up images of dangerous council estates, over-run with young black men engaged in criminal activity. In the seminal text, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, Stuart Hall explained how the word 'ghetto' was imported from the US where it was used as a metonym for poor black communities. He went on to describe how the term was routinely deployed by the British media via the state, in ways that stigmatised black working-class neighbourhoods, laying the ground for the criminalisation of largely young black men.<sup>57</sup> The 'public image of the ghetto' that Hall was writing about in the late-1970s is being redeployed today and continues to be comprised of a nebulous 'cluster of impressions, themes and quasi-explanations [that are] gathered and fused together', creating an association between race, crime, poverty and housing, which in turn fosters a popular consensus around the need to demolish 'sink estates' where young black men, congregating in 'gangs' pose a threat to urban safety.<sup>58</sup> Despite the Metropolitan Police announcing in November 2018 that it was *considering* using armed police foot patrols in areas 'where gang activity was likely',<sup>59</sup> in reality, this was already happening. Video footage obtained by the BBC in July 2018 showed a group of young black teenagers, aged 16-19, being stopped and searched in Hackney, east London, by police officers holding machine guns. Their only crime: filming a Drill music video – no arrests were made.<sup>60</sup>

The reality in London today, according to Home Office figures, is that black people are over nine times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched; over three times more likely to be arrested, and, four times more likely to have force used against them by the police.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the use of force on young black men, in particular, is fast turning into a national scandal with



the *Guardian* analysis of police data revealing that the Metropolitan Police's use of force (handcuffing, stun guns, CS spray, batons and guns) has risen 79 per cent in the last year, with 39 per cent of the 41,329 incidents that occurred between April to August 2018 directed at black people.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, there has been a long history of the police adopting an intensive, more militaristic style of policing in black communities, often underpinned by questionable intelligence-gathering and intrusive surveillance. This history has been charted by IRR in its seminal accounts (1979 and 1987) of police-BAME relations, subsequently published as *Policing Against Black People*.<sup>63</sup> It is interesting to note that after the England riots of 1981, the result of inner-city deprivation and police brutality, a new policing model was introduced in London which focused on restoring law and order through 'targeting' populations thought to be 'at risk' of participating in future uprisings.<sup>64</sup> Targeting involved police resources – often in the form of specialist units – being

concentrated in 'high-crime' areas where BAME communities lived, such as Brixton, Notting Hill, Tottenham and Dalston in London.<sup>65</sup> The IRR wrote then:

*"Policing in London today is being organised around the project of regenerating London and in turn, gentrifying it."*

*Within these areas, police operations are supposedly sharply focused, through the use of increased surveillance and intelligence-gathering, on selected individuals and groups and on what are termed as 'symbolic locations' – particular estates, clubs and meeting places of special political and cultural significance to the community.*

If this targeting of 'symbolic locations' sounds familiar, it is not surprising. There is a clear continuum between the discriminatory policing tactics that emerged in the 1980s

and those introduced in the wake of the 2011 riots, both in terms of racial profiling and targeting symbolic locations. Having said that, it would be a mistake to suggest that everything is the same. It is not. Policing in London today is being organised around the project of regenerating London and in turn, gentrifying it. Policing twenty or thirty years ago sought, through 'community policing' initiatives, to enhance police intelligence-gathering and to expand their role from enforcing the criminal law to embrace wider political and social control of 'suspect communities' and what were perceived as problem populations. Policing today goes much further in seeking to co-opt or incorporate non-police institutions – local authorities, schools, housing associations and social services – directly in the 'fight against crime' through the use of their civil and administrative law powers as additional means of punishing individuals, their families and communities, as well as targeting symbolic locations and buildings earmarked for redevelopment.

## Location-specific targeting

Urban geographer Adam Elliot-Cooper has commented, 'for many young people', living in targeted areas, 'police searches and other misuses of power are considered a part of everyday life and the articulation of police violence is often location-specific'.<sup>66</sup> That location-specific experience of policing combines with the spatial-displacement of poor black populations through gentrification policies to create what I would describe as *localised hostile environments*. This policing outcome is the result of the wider government project to restructure the socio-spatial and topographic landscape of London's working-class neighbourhoods by introducing wealthier people (gentrifiers). The concept of the localised hostile environment seeks to capture a diverse set of punitive and disciplinary measures, including, inter alia, racial profiling and policing, territory-targeted stop and



searches and residential evictions. It refers to the places and spaces in which the state, via the police, councils and other agencies, discipline and displace populations deemed 'problematic'. Academics within the field of urbanisation studies view the advancement of aggressive policing tactics, both overt and covert, as an essential and active force in the gentrification of cities.<sup>67</sup>

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**"Location-specific policing combines with the spatial displacement of poor black populations through gentrification policies to create localised hostile environments."**

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It was the government that coined the term 'hostile environment' to describe a set of administrative and legislative measures, including aggressive immigration policing, designed to make staying in the United Kingdom

as difficult as possible for people without leave to remain in the hope that they would 'voluntarily leave'.<sup>68</sup> Even though the context here is different, I feel that the term *localised hostile environments* is appropriate, because of the clear similarities between the policing of BAME communities and migrants occurring at a micro level, to the government's macro level 'hostile environment' policies. The government's cruel approach to 'irregular migrants' was epitomised not only by Operation Vaken, which involved the Home Office hiring a billboard van to broadcast the message 'Go Home! Or face arrest' but by the 'Windrush scandal' which involved hundreds of Commonwealth citizens from the Caribbean being denied access to the welfare state, including urgent medical care, and in some cases wrongfully deported. These British citizens from the former Caribbean colonies are amongst thousands of people, who may not have been born in the country but have lived here from their formative years, who are now routinely treated as 'undeserving' and 'undesirable' people.

The kind of *localised hostile environments* we see developing in the context of this

study, occur implicitly or more insidiously and also treat BAME residents and others in specific neighbourhoods as 'undesirable' and encourages them to 'voluntarily' leave an area or withdraw from gentrified public spaces. There are already intimations of this happening, which I will briefly outline here. Regeneration projects that physically transform working-class neighbourhoods change the character of what Sharon Zukin calls the 'soul' of a place.<sup>69</sup> Richer newcomers want to enjoy the space's provincial history, which still exudes cosmopolitanism. But this then necessitate specific policing regimes aimed at regulating working-class life or behaviours, as they are deemed incongruent and intolerable among wealthier groups who uphold bourgeois lifestyles. In the *localised hostile environment*, the 'gang' trope serves as 'a resource to criminalise racialised groups'.<sup>70</sup> But this isn't the entire story. What the state is doing, via the police, local authorities and other social agencies, is using the idea of 'gangs', 'gang culture' and more generally 'anti-social' behaviour as vehicles to drive forward its agenda of regenerating, and in turn, repopulating the city with wealthier residents and consumers.

## Gentrification, ASB and managing urban marginality

The link between gentrification and social engineering is implicit in the IPPR's document analysed earlier. In *City Villages: More Homes, Better Communities* it argued that while 'city villages are about unlocking land and estates to help tackle London's housing crisis', they also deliver 'mixed communities' with 'new developments around shared amenities – open space, education, cultural and commercial facilities – and creating homes and neighbourhoods where aspiration and opportunity thrive'. The question is, who benefits from these new amenities, and who loses out? In terms of urban planning, what this policy-speak boils

down to is providing wealthier residents (gentrifiers) with high streets and designated spaces for unhindered consumerism, as gentrification denotes the material process of renovating and improving deprived

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*“The independent regulatory frameworks or boundaries between the police and other public services are increasingly erased, as new partnerships in the co-production of ‘urban safety’ are created in line with deregulation and privatisation, the hallmarks of any neoliberal government.”*

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economic areas, so they become more appealing to in-migrating wealthier residents.<sup>71</sup>

In fact, in order to appease the desires of wealthy homebuyers in the capital, private housing developers are often required to design separate entrances, known as ‘poor doors’, for social housing tenants.<sup>72</sup> Elmer and Denning in their critique of the gentrification of previously working-

class neighbourhoods have accused London councils of ‘doing the dirty work of Tory housing policy’ through policies that target the residents of urban spaces that the state would like to privatise and financialise.<sup>73</sup> For councils, under attack from a central government which is slashing their budgets, gentrification brings obvious benefits in the form of increased revenues from wealthier residents through council taxes. But the construction of urban spaces, as literal ‘playgrounds for the rich’, excludes the existing local community, while engendering a standardised, consumer-centred local culture, which necessitates the expulsion of the young whose ‘presence is undesirable and their doings intolerable’.<sup>74</sup>

The task of providing amenities for gentrifiers while regulating the activities and behaviour of poor young people in urban spaces, fuses the interests and resources of local authority and policing initiatives. Hence the independent regulatory frameworks or boundaries between the police and other public services are increasingly erased,

as new partnerships in the co-production of ‘urban safety’ are created in line with deregulation and privatisation, the hallmarks of any neoliberal government.<sup>75</sup> This results in the over-policing of poorer populations who are increasingly disenfranchised from these newly gentrified spaces and are actively displaced and dispossessed through a combination of police and other regulatory measures.

Although one might argue that this process has its geneses in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and later the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (CCJS) has recently argued the overhaul of anti-social frameworks under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 ‘created new mechanisms for the potentially much more *extensive* use of ASB responses by councils, housing providers and the police’.<sup>76</sup> What preceded these changes was not only Cameron’s promise to ‘get tough’ on delinquency after the riots, but also, the Government Response to the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel’s final report published in 2013. This stated that new provisions were to be made in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill including enabling ‘landlords to seek to evict tenants where they or members of their households are convicted of riot related offences committed anywhere in the UK’.<sup>77</sup> The new ASB Act replaced nineteen separate powers for tackling anti-social behaviour with six new ones, including:

- » Dispersal orders/powers;
- » Civil injunctions;
- » Community Protection Notices (CPNs);
- » Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs);
- » Closure orders;
- » Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs).

The CCJS has shown how three of these key anti-social behaviour order powers (Dispersal powers, CPNs and PSPOs) have led to increasing sanctions against young people, with housing associations and councils now

bestowed with the power to issue Community Protection Notices to individuals, businesses or organisations affecting a community's quality of life. But which 'community' is this legislation protecting?

Interestingly, CCJS have reported that in London, over 30 per cent of the young adults prosecuted for breach of a dispersal power were black in 2018, despite the fact that black people make up 9 per cent of the 18-25-year-old group living in the capital.<sup>78</sup> Dispersal powers are available to uniformed police officers and community police community support officers and are issued to individuals and groups engaging in ASB crime and disorder. They involve the creation of designated 'dispersal zones' (anything from a few named streets to a shopping centre to an entire London borough) where anyone aged over 10 years old can be excluded by the police, potentially on the instruction of a local authority, for up to 48 hours (though the power can be used in the same area repeatedly). Penalties for breach of a dispersal power range from a fine to a prison sentence. In 2016 around 13,350 dispersal zones were declared in England and Wales according to the annual report of the British police service, which also stated that London was amongst the three highest users of such zones.

Given such high numbers it would be interesting to see how many dispersal zones have been declared in 2017 and 2018. However, in just two two years, the Metropolitan Police Service appears to have abandoned its duty to hold a public record

on such important information about the spatial displacement of individuals and groups. This comes at a time when eighty-one youth centres have been closed across the capital since 2012 and at the same time as

a rapid increase in prosecutions of young people for 'street loitering' or 'congregating in large groups'. The question is, what is happening to our young people on the streets of London? Further, where exactly are they meant to go?

Another specialist anti-crime initiative that had the potential to collectively punish young people and limit their ability to assemble and move freely around London was Operation Shield, an anti-gang initiative, funded by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and trialled in three London boroughs (Haringey, Lambeth and Westminster) in 2015. This initiative, which is still operational in Westminster, was the brainchild of the then Conservative Mayor Boris Johnson who sought to bring the MOPAC, local authorities and government departments into a partnership to pursue communities 'at risk' of gang activity or association. This was to be done by utilising a variety of criminal, civil and administrative sanctions, including gang injunctions banning young people from parts of London, preventing suspected gang members from socialising with associates and even evicting the families of suspected gang members from social housing.<sup>79</sup> The residents of Haringey and Lambeth rejected Operation Shield on the grounds that it racially profiled young BAME people by attempting to predict their behaviours and activities and incapacitate them even before a crime was committed. While pre-empting the future criminality of people is problematic in itself, what interests us here, is first, the coming together of separate institutions – the Metropolitan Police, local authorities and government departments – to deliver a particular model of hybrid policing, and second, the types of penalties that can be imposed on young people based on this arrangement. This hybrid criminal justice system, which merges together civil and criminal law is an exceptional and expanded use of policing powers.

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***"This hybrid criminal justice system, which merges together civil and criminal law, is an exceptional and expanded use of policing powers."***

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## Pseudo-ASB initiatives, the Gangs Matrix and targeting black youth

Below we attempt to describe some of the other ways in which the government, local authorities and the police have created *pseudo*-ASB initiatives, and make the case that these are aimed at protecting the interests and meeting the needs of new businesses and new residents (gentrifiers).

First, we have Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) – a conceptual export from the US, where businesses are required to pay additional taxes in order to ‘improve services’ through ‘extra safety and cleaning’ in geographically designed areas. While spatial analysis provided by the Mayor’s Office suggests that BIDs are mainly concentrated in the City of London, over the past few years they have also been applied to typically non-business areas, with large working-class black populations.<sup>80</sup> For example, in south London there are the Clapham and Brixton BIDs, in north London the Haringey BID and in west London the Hammersmith BID, to name just a few newly gentrified areas. In fact, these are located within the very boroughs in which some of the most destructive 2011 rioting occurred, and in the case of Haringey, where the riots originated (in Tottenham). In addition, these are the *same* boroughs that the government’s ‘flagship’ regeneration sites (housing estates) are located. For instance, the Aylesbury and Heygate in south London and Northumberland Park and Broadwater Farm in north London – all of which have also been labelled ‘sink estates’, ‘ghettos’ and ‘gang territories’ by the government – are within the south London and north London BIDs.

Another scheme is Met Patrol Plus (MPP) under which new businesses, owned by gentrifiers and operating within the BID model, are able to dictate the number of police officers an area ostensibly requires,

via a request, presumably through the council, to the MPP scheme. Information on how the MPP scheme operates is hard to come by, with MOPAC redirecting a freedom of information request for ‘details for every single Met Patrol Plus contract the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime has set up since the scheme was created’, to the Metropolitan Police.<sup>81</sup> An article in *The Economist* in 2016 outlines the process, stating that ‘local authorities and business improvement districts pay for police officers and the Met then matches their funding, meaning areas get two cops for the price of one’.<sup>82</sup> As evidence to the wide permissiveness of the policy, in 2015 the Chair of Safer Neighbourhood Policing in Camden, north London, boasted of non-business affiliated residents being granted access to the ‘buy-one-get-one-free’ scheme by the Mayor’s Office, something it supposedly knows nothing about.<sup>83</sup>

## Policing black subcultures

The anti-social behaviour powers and policing initiatives currently operational in London not only serve the interests and desires of new businesses and gentrifiers by managing ‘problem populations’, but they also entrench inequality by marginalising young communities who have carved out distinct cultures amongst the ruins of economic impoverishment. Notwithstanding the barrage of cuts to public services, including education and youth services over the past ten years, young BAME communities in London have responded to this socio-economic exclusion from mainstream society by creating strong subcultures, which have provided meaning to their lives, and also firmly established their right to live in the city which they have helped, quite literally, to fashion. These young people are often associated with music genres Grime, Road Rap and Drill, which, though sonically distinct, have come to collectively encapsulate a way of life for disadvantaged young black people, trying

to navigate their way through intersecting forms of oppression, such as poverty, social exclusion and state racism.

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*“The vernacular landscape signifies all the urban spaces and places where young working-class Londoners either live or frequent, including council estates, youth clubs, chicken shops and ‘the streets’.”*

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In fact, let us consider the etymological origin of ‘Grime’ which is sometimes contested. The subculture’s genesis can be traced back to London’s inner-city council estates, an architectural landscape which would have been a significant factor in

naming the genre. The noun ‘grime’ means ‘dirt, soot, or other filthy matter, especially adhering to or embedded in a surface’. At the time of Grime’s birth, New Labour was rolling out its anti-social behaviour order policies and installing surveillance cameras across the city. Against this backdrop, Grime’s progenitors, young black boys, were seen as a nuisance to the state, which was intent on regulating working-class behaviour and gentrifying inner-city London. But Grime’s success was dependent on free movement, particularly to different pirate radios that were dotted across the city. Like grime, embedded in a surface and hard to remove, these young boys would have embedded themselves in the vernacular landscape in order to maintain the scene and their collective aspirations. I use the term *vernacular landscape* to signify all the urban spaces and places where young working-class Londoners either live or frequent, including, amongst others things, council estates, youth clubs, chicken shops and ‘the streets’. These communal spaces, I have argued elsewhere, help to develop ethics of trust, communication and cooperation among young black people, which, in turn, has led to the development of a sense of community, solidarity and collective resistance.

Almost all Grime music videos are filmed in council estates or ‘the ends’, and this

also applies to Drill and Road Rap videos. Visual depictions of ‘the ends’ portray profound feelings of struggle and survival – ‘the ends’ are a home, created even in the most difficult of circumstances. Black subcultures in London represent a distinctive generational identity of working-class youth, and the *vernacular landscape* is very much a part of their cultural identity. This is revealed in the many colloquialisms of the street, such as ‘the ends’, ‘the bits’ and ‘the hood’, but also the use of seemingly unusual urban spaces.

One of these places is the chicken shop; fast-food restaurants that serve inexpensive ‘chicken ‘n’ chips’ with late opening hours. Chicken shops are more than just places to eat, they are an iconic part of the *vernacular landscape* for young people forming spaces which symbolise your ends and your local community. These are the cultural forums where inner-city youths are able to congregate without harassment from the council, ‘sodcast’ (play music loudly from a phone) and cause a youthful ruckus over the trivialities of everyday life. Journalist Bridget Minamore has emphatically stated, ‘chicken shops are more than a part of London – they are London. Or at least, they’re London for the people who never have and never will identify with the glossy new-build flats and overpriced themed cafes that the city seems to be drowning in at the moment’.<sup>84</sup> Chicken shops are the places in which working-class adolescents, but especially young black men, are able to ‘take up public space and have fun’, where, along with their homes, they can find shelter from the arbiters of state violence: the police. In fact, since youth clubs have been closed down, Minamore alludes that chicken shops have increasingly been used as refuges for young people, who are often banned from public spaces. But these unlikely sanctuaries have recently caught the attention of the police.



## Surveillance of meeting places and social media

In 2017, MOPAC released its Knife Crime Strategy in which it stated that it was working closely with fast-food restaurants to ‘provide measures to control Wi-Fi and phone charging facilities’ and, in what can only be described as the most bourgeois policing tactic to date, to ‘play classical music to create a calming environment’ for adolescents.<sup>85</sup> While this might appear strange or even unbelievable that the police would infiltrate chicken shops as a way to monitor working-class youths, as explained earlier, we should think of policing regimes in urban neighbourhoods as part of a wider project to restructure the socio-spatial landscape and this is just another instance where the state seeks out innovative ways to co-produce urban safety.

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*“We should think of policing regimes in urban neighbourhoods as part of a wider project to restructure the socio-spatial landscape and this is just another instance where the state seeks out innovative ways to co-produce urban safety.”*

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Furthermore, there is an obvious argument to be made here that the playing of classical music in chicken shops is condescending, given that the majority of chicken shop diners are impoverished, working-class teenagers who have likely never listened to this genre of music

before. It is also interesting to observe the state’s general preoccupation with music, particularly at a time when it is criminalising young black men for listening to and performing various types of black music. Today, the earlier policing tactics based on the targeting of ‘symbolic locations’, such as clubs, estates and meeting-places, have been revived by the Metropolitan Police as they target the grandchildren of the Windrush generation, though now in chicken shops.

In their recent report on the Gangs Matrix (see below), Amnesty International (AI) highlighted the fact that both the

Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and local authorities routinely monitor the social media accounts of young black men who listen to Grime or appear in Grime music videos, as this is seen as an efficient way to identify potential ‘gang associated individuals’. As AI points out, ‘there are many young people who are not involved in criminal wrongdoing but are at risk of being profiled and monitored by the police simply because of the subculture to which they belong’.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, amongst the criteria for inclusion on the MPS Gangs Matrix (see below) is the monitoring of social media activity on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube videos, with gang names, certain colours, flags, signs and clothing used as potential signifiers for gang involvement. If that were not enough, the police have also made it a ‘legitimate business need’ to both overtly and covertly monitor various social media sites, often adopting fake online personas and befriending young people they suspect of gang activity. This all occurs in the absence of a warrant.

## Problem venues and Form 696

Since the inception of the Promotion Event Risk Assessment Form 696 in 2005 with the ostensible aim of minimising ‘any risks of most serious violent crime happening at the proposed event’, the police have made it difficult for black artists, such as MCs, rappers and the like, from performing in the capital by often arbitrarily cancelling events. According to cultural criminologist, Lambros Fatsis, while the original version of Form 696 contained leading questions about other black music forms, such as Bashment, RnB and Garage, it was Grime – though one might now argue this should also include Drill – that has been hardest hit.<sup>87</sup> This has had a particularly negative impact on both the financial incomes and creativity of black artists, as many have been forced to change

the type of music they make in order to avoid being discriminated against by venues vis-à-vis Form 696. Although the document was revised in 2008 and then officially scrapped in 2017, the BBC has reported that similar forms are still in use.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, it is very likely that these venues have already been classified by the MPS as so-called ‘problem venues’, which the 2017 Knife Crime Strategy (2017) suggests will be tackled ‘with licensing planning enforcement’, or in other words the continuation of a policy that involves the revocation of licenses to venues that put on events with DJs and MCs. When venues are discouraged from showcasing urban music, young people are actively dispossessed of spaces where their sense of community can be fostered. These policing strategies have the affect of depriving black, working-class populations of their creative social and cultural capital that they have ‘carved out from the stone of their lives’<sup>89</sup> not only to compensate for a lack of economic prosperity but to make city life a little more bearable and a lot more pleasurable.

In the documentary ‘The Police vs Grime Music’, Grime MC, JME, investigated the now defunct risk-assessment document, Form 696 and how it was being used by the MPS to target venues holding Grime events in the capital. Just some of the requirements on the form included: names, stage names, private addresses and phone numbers of all promoters and performers listed, as well as, a description of the style of music to be performed and the target audience including their ethnicity. Grime artist Jammer describes how ‘the image of black guys, in a dark place, shouting’ is seen by the police as ‘threatening’, but argues ‘I do strongly believe it’s [Form 696] racist’ as it discriminates against cultural events hosted by black men.<sup>90</sup> This echoes Stuart Hall’s argument that black youth are often viewed as ‘agents of trouble’ and carry with them the threat of ‘what could go wrong’, which often leads to social anxiety over the activities of young people.<sup>91</sup> For young people

today, this ‘moral panic’ is over ‘knife crime’, which is often seen as ‘gang-related behaviour’ that can happen anywhere, at any time of day, but is perceived more likely to occur at black music events in London. In fact, black subcultures are ‘frequently associated in the media as a cause of rising knife crime in the capital and other gang related behaviour (i.e. the informal drugs economy), within inner-city boroughs of London.’<sup>92</sup> Fatsis, looking into why Grime has been viewed by the MPS as a ‘criminal subculture’, has argued that black British culture is frequently seen as incompatible with ‘mainstream norms and values; often constructing the “black presence” as a “threat” to the “homogenous, white, national “we”’. This ‘cultural racism’ towards Grime ‘has its roots in the belief that Black cultural values should be suspected of promoting violent or criminal lifestyles, and should therefore be responded to by tactics that have been described as “policing against black people”’.<sup>93</sup>

## Topographic mapping and risk-assessment tools

Back in 1986, it was revealed that the MPS had drawn up a list of twenty housing estates in London, including Broadwater Farm (now subject to a regeneration plan) and the Ferry Lane Estate in Tottenham, the Clapton Park Estate in Hackney, and the East Dulwich Housing Estate in Southwark, classifying them as areas of ‘high’, ‘medium’ and ‘lower’ risk in terms of the potential for outbreaks of public disorder, with contingency plans for the police to take control of the estates in the case of any disturbances. Amongst the criteria employed by police planners in selecting these ‘target’ estates were: a high density of population of ethnic minorities; frequent trouble between gangs; hostility towards police as manifested by the incidence of complaints and difficulties in making arrests.<sup>94</sup>



Today, the police have far more sophisticated technology at their disposal with which to target problem housing estates and as part of this investigation I discovered the Metropolitan Police have been cataloguing space in London as 'gang territories' through topographic mapping.<sup>95</sup>

There is reason to be concerned with the MPS's mapping of London's 'gang territories' as this type of surveillance is built on the assumption that cities can be understood as systems, where neighbourhoods and lives 'can be managed and transformed through scientific methods of data analysis'.<sup>96</sup> This method is of course, inherently problematic, since it seeks to simplify the behaviours of people and places assembled to fit within a pre-determined grid. Urban studies scholars, Seth Schindler and Simon Marvin, have warned that the rise of the 'science of cities' amounts to a

*regime of urban control that rests on an epistemology that understands cities as a multitude of people and things with comprehensible and instrumental relationships that can be known and mapped. Once a city's complexity is simplified and its constituent components are rendered legible, abnormal and deviant relationships among people and things can be identified.*<sup>97</sup>

In the context of this research, we find that mapping 'gang territories' on council estates, considerably bolsters the MPS's capacity to target young black men. It appears the police are able to disguise what is essentially racial profiling by instead policing specific locations, otherwise known as 'hotspots' – small, 'crime-ridden' urban areas.<sup>98</sup> But as Amnesty International has shown, young people are frequently misrepresented by the police as being involved in gangs for simply living in a certain area or hanging around with certain friends.

## The Gangs Matrix

Under the leadership of the Home Office, various government departments, such as the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department of Work and Pensions, are implementing the EYGV strategy, a core strand of which is improving methods of information sharing. As the Monitoring Group points out, every government department is 'now involved in the sharing of personal and detailed information, despite the restrictions placed upon them by the Data Protection Act 1998 and Article 8 of the Human Rights Act'.<sup>99</sup> Another multi-agency data mining tool is the MPS Trident Gang Matrix. Established in 2012 after the riots, the Gangs Matrix is a London-wide police intelligence system and database that operates on a multi-agency basis to share data across a range of local authority and other agencies about individuals considered linked to gangs. Its stated purpose is to assess and rank London's suspected gang members according to their 'propensity for violence'. Criteria for inclusion is ostensibly based on violent offending and violence related intelligence, with each individual ('gang nominal') listed, assigned a colour coded category (red, amber, green) based on propensity to violence.

In 2014, a response by the police to an FoI request established that 87 per cent of those on the Gangs Matrix were black, Asian or minority ethnic. Professor Bridges concluded:

*The ethnic composition of the Gangs Matrix and similar databases is not simply an issue of bias in the way such instruments are compiled. As the police themselves turn increasingly to so-called 'intelligence-led' operations at a time of reduced manpower and resources, these databases feed directly into the ways that policing policies and priorities are being targeted on particular groups. In other words, the racial bias in the databases becomes institutionalised in police practice.*<sup>100</sup>

Amnesty International (AI), has managed to break down this 87 per cent figure still further, establishing that 78 per cent are black, and 80 per cent between the ages of 12 and 24. Fifteen per cent are minors, the youngest being just 12 years old.

The Gangs Matrix should be seen in the context of police operational powers to conduct so-called 'intelligence-led' stop and searches on council estates that the police identify as gang territories. For Stafford Scott, this is a Catch 22 situation; if 'you're black and born on an estate, nowadays the system automatically sees you as being in a gang'.<sup>101</sup> AI's 2018 report highlighted the fact that out of the 3,806 people registered on the Gangs Matrix, 78 per cent were black, and yet only 27 per cent of serious youth violence in London is committed by black people.<sup>102</sup> In his analysis of the Haringey Gangs Matrix, Scott established that 99 of the 100 young people on it are black. Of these, thirty-five are listed under the Green category score with a zero score, meaning that that individual has never been convicted of a violent offence. He concludes that these young people are merely 'the peers of those on the Gang Matrix who are in the RED & AMBER categories. They live on the same estates or went to the same schools or youth clubs together'.<sup>103</sup>

In terms of the IRR's research on the links between housing dispossession and policing, what is telling is that non-police agencies are able to contribute 'intelligence' on suspected gang members, and are permitted access to its data. AI points out that each of the thirty-two London boroughs, holds a regular 'Gangs Multi Agency Partnership' (GMAP) meeting, which 'brings together the police and partners from the council, social workers, representatives from housing and other agencies'. It further argues that information-sharing between the police and housing representatives has a detrimental effect on young black men's access to social housing

and retaining tenancies. Williams and Clarke carried out FoI requests that revealed that Job Centres across London have registered almost 4,000 of their clients with a 'gang' flag, as being either in a gang or at risk of gang involvement.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, anecdotal evidence provided by AI suggests that landlords actively discriminate against tenants that are registered on the Gangs Matrix, and, even more worryingly, that the police issue housing eviction threats to the families of 'gang members'. This anecdotal evidence was supported in June 2018, when Home Office minister Victoria Atkins proclaimed, families of gang members who are living in council housing should have their homes taken away from them.<sup>105</sup> Atkins' policy is currently being piloted in an undisclosed north London borough and could soon be ratified by an amendment to the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and rolled out across other social housing estates in London. If this comes as a surprise, it should not. After all it was David Cameron who first thought up the idea as a response to the 2011 riots, when he proclaimed in Parliament that, 'part of solving the problem is saying to people in social housing: if you misbehave, you can be thrown out of your house', adding, 'I think there may be opportunities, possibly through the new criminal justice and sentencing legislation, to make sure we are better at confiscating things from people when they commit crimes'.<sup>106</sup>

As the IRR pointed out in May 2018:

*at every stage – from the use of secret algorithms to calculate risk, to the disproportionate and discriminatory inclusion of so many young black men and boys on the Gang Matrix, to the absence of any clear protocol for the review or removal of the names of those listed – processes of demonisation (of black urban youth culture) and racial stigmatisation (of*

*specific estates) affect not just individuals, but whole communities. This racialised labelling creates 'suspect communities' and leaves many young black people dispossessed, ostracised, and excluded from society as the stigma of being a 'gang nominal' is reflected back at him as he goes about his daily life and tries to access services. Most telling is the unthinking ease with which a multitude of agencies – from the probation service to youth offending teams, from job centres to housing associations, from local authority to voluntary sector partner agencies, appear to have colluded in the racialised logic that underpins the Gangs Matrix.<sup>107</sup>*

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The Home Office's EGYV policy is based on financial incentives for local authorities to accumulate data on young people in gangs or at risk of gang involvement. But postcode mapping revealed that the 'communities with higher concentrations of BAME people were more likely to be the areas identified by the police and criminal justice partners as having a "gang problem"'. What the IRR has sought to identify in this research is a further, hitherto unexplored, pattern that suggests a connection between urban policy and policing, with locations targeted by the police as 'gang infested', being precisely the areas targeted for regeneration, leading to the race and class-based social cleansing of the capital.

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