

Editorial

# Introducing the Special Issue on the Experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Children and Families in the Welfare Context

John Wainwright 

School of Social Work, Care and Community, University of Central Lancashire, Preston PR1 2HE, UK; [jpwainwright@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:jpwainwright@uclan.ac.uk)

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## 1. Introduction

This Special Issue explores papers on the experiences of children, young people and families of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) heritage who come into contact with the criminal (youth) justice systems in the UK. BAME children and young people continually struggle against a racism that oppresses, discriminates and excludes them from wider socio-economic, political and cultural participation in society (Harries 2014). This Special Issue looks at building on the existing literature (for example, Kundnani 2012; Lentin 2014) to explore what this means and how it is manifested in the experience of the criminal (youth) justice systems for BAME children, young people and their families in all their heterogeneous, diverse make up. This may be as a consequence of racism, poverty and socio-economic factors, or through entering the criminal justice system because of their experiences of being in care (foster or residential) as a child or young person, or of the mental health system (Mullen et al. 2014; Lammy 2017; Fitzpatrick and Williams 2017). It has been suggested that to enable desistance from offending behaviour, race is but one category that should be considered, and the interaction between intersectional identities, including gender, masculinity, poverty and social disorganization, needs to be understood, along with the impact of power and privilege in societies (Calverley 2013; Glynn 2016). Importantly, in some of the articles in this Special Issue, the evidence of the resilience of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic families' genealogy over generations is explored in the face racism and various institutional responses of the criminal justice system.

It is acknowledged that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) is a much contested term/explanation of individuals and communities of colour, as are corollary explanations that inadequately represent the differing experiences and shifting and fluid identities of peoples of racialized difference around the world. Indeed, in many parts of the world, a much more spatially and culturally specific term/identity is used. However, the single unifying factor that families of BAME genealogical heritage experience is the struggle and challenge against and of racism within their local spatial, political and cultural context (McKeown and Dropkin 2021). This Special Issue aims to include analysis, discussion and debate of these stories and experiences within the context of the criminal (youth) justice system.

Through a multi and interdisciplinary lens, this Special Issue provides an opportunity to explore how the discourse and experience of race is enacted in criminal (youth) justice systems. Children, young people and their families of BAME genealogical heritage have been on the margins of society, excluded from participation and power. This Special Issue encourages contributions to explore how BAME children, young people and their families, depicted as outsiders with inherently different heritages to majority white communities, negotiate this experience of exclusion and alienation through the criminal justice systems



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(Wainwright and Larkins 2020). Thus, the overarching purpose of this Special Issue is to encourage insights and development in genealogical studies through work discussing BAME children, young people, their families and the criminal (youth) justice system and genealogical methods to understand race through this prism.

This Special Issue commences with an enquiring optimism and a critical lens concerning the experiences of Black, Brown and children of colour and their families in criminal justice systems around the world (Goldson and Chigwada-Bailey 1999; Liberman and Fontaine 2015). In particular, there is a concern that, in many parts of the world, children are not treated as such in the criminal justice systems, because they may have been, for instance, traumatised, and thus are punished and incarcerated for offences in the same way as adults (Case and Haines 2015; Bryan 2020). Moreover, a moral and political panic regarding knife and gun crime amongst and within the experiences of Black children and young men and their communities has compelled policy thinking and politicking (Williams and Clarke 2016). Fundamentally, there was an imperative to focus upon the disproportionate numbers of children of colour who are unnecessarily pulled into the criminal justice system, and consequently experience a profound limiting of their opportunities, hopes, and life chances before they have even reached adulthood (Lammy 2017; Ministry of Justice 2020). These broadly based social welfare systems exemplify some common and important themes, such as institutionalised racism and the complexities of responding to racial disadvantage (Lammy 2017; Ministry of Justice 2020).

## 2. Racism and Othering

Focussing on the lived experiences of Black and Brown children, their families and communities in a welfare context has provided a range of contributions that are apposite in their timing, coinciding with the Black Lives Movement in the US and UK, encouraging a focus on issues of racism in social welfare (Bunson and Stewart 2021). Qasim et al. explore the experiences of BAME survivors of the mental health system and how art, drama and humour provide a space to express the pain and joy of mental distress. Critically engaging audiences in conversation and fresh thinking, Qasim and colleagues work with an artist who uses her creativity to open up dialogue about the stigma of post-traumatic stress disorder and being of colour, posing key questions about societal understandings of mental distress and racial intersections in a context of mad politics. Further critical insights into mental health are taken up in another paper, highlighting themes of psychiatrisation and incarceration: the pain of betrayal and the physical, psychological and brutal denial of liberty are discussed in harrowing detail by a survivor of the mental health system in India. Breckenridge takes the reader on an autoethnographic journey through compelled treatment and containment encompassing daily denials of basic rights by mental health carers and the demonising and indifference of her family within the local mental health system. This intensely personal account reminds the reader that commonality in ethnicity, heritage, culture and nationality are no panacea for eradicating discrimination, oppression and Othering of an individual, in this case because of them experiencing mental distress. However, as this Special Issue demonstrates, the attendant failure of recognition and invalidation of individuals and communities, whether of shared or subjugated ethnic heritage, culture and nationality, resonate across psychiatric, criminal justice, immigration and care systems and at their intersections. As Breckenridge and Begum et al. inform us, this most distressingly and, perhaps, counterintuitively occurs within and from an individual's own family. Begum and colleagues inform us that the 'bleak picture' of domestic abuse is not limited to certain cultures, as they discuss the experiences of 'honour' based abuse for women of South Asian and Arabic heritage. They argue that fifteen years on from the brutal 'honour'-based killing of Banaz Mahmod, support services often still have no real understanding of Black, Asian and Minority communities and women's experiences of domestic abuse. Just as with the experiences of Breckenridge and others, the commonality of heritage, ethnicity and so-called culture does little to alleviate and stop the brutal oppression experienced inside the family, or the wider community, based on other

intersectional identities; in this instance, gender. As Breckenridge's contribution in India and Begum and colleagues suggest, welfare agencies in the UK need to be more 'culturally competent' with regard to the people and communities that they purport to serve.

### 3. Children of Migrants

Much of the focus of this Special Issue is on children, and Du and Field discuss the anxiety and trauma that migrant children experience when separated from their place of birth and their own culture. Although the effect of separation and anxiety was moderated within the children's own migrant group, there is still work to do to support migrant children in their various transitions. Karolia and Wainwright, as birth children of migrants, also talk about similar themes of identity and (not) belonging after being separated from their birth parents, albeit for different reasons. They explore through their different biographies, yet partly similar racialised experiences, being in the same physical place as others in their children's home or adoptive family, but in parallel and alienated spaces. Karolia and Wainwright reflect on their sense of not belonging, of being Othered, of being outside the outsiders and a far distance from anything like being insiders (Merton 1973). They suggest a shared identity with those who are alienated and outcast socially in different ways; for instance, the substance user, the child or adult in custody, the migrants who struggle to escape from gang brutality, torture and terror, those whose lives hang by a gossamer thread as they bob precariously on over-crowded dinghies crossing the English Channel or the Mediterranean or, indeed, the many who tragically do not complete this journey, arriving lifeless on the shoreline.

For the many generations of African and Caribbean migrants in England and Wales, it is knife and serious violent crime that is often pathologically associated with children and young people of colour. Robertson and Wainwright provide a comprehensive literature review to explore the evidence concerning such young persons' experiences in the criminal justice system. Along with the demonisation and discrimination towards those of Black, Muslim and dual heritage children in their everyday experiences and the lack of belonging this evokes in them, Robertson and Wainwright also articulate how the systems and processes of the criminal justice system (in)directly discriminate against them, in contrast to their white counterparts, from initial arrest to sentencing and treatment in custody. They call for an intersectional approach to working with BAME children before they enter the criminal justice system and throughout their experience within it. Likewise, Wainwright et al. explore the particularities of young Black men in Liverpool, the oldest Black community in the UK, their experiences of the criminal justice system and their relationships with their family, local communities and their youth justice workers. These young men articulate the pain that they had experienced in their families, their rejection and exclusion from school and the contested spaces (sometimes through gangs) that were delineated through geography and racism on the streets of Liverpool. Whilst they admitted responsibility for their offending, they suggested that their relationships with their youth justice workers and the interventions that encouraged and supported hobbies and/or routes into employment were seen as particularly beneficial. Identity was important, although some of dual heritage (African/Caribbean and white) acknowledged that whilst being Black was central to a sense of self, acting a source of pride and resistance to individual and institutional acts of racism, they also had white (grand)mothers and friends as well. For them, an identity with their particular area within the city, the tensions with the police and their (lack of) socioeconomic opportunities were equally important in their everyday experiences. This Special Issue discusses the common experiences of people of colour, of being Black and Brown. However, the specificity of experience, of Othering and dehumanisation across various welfare systems suggest the heterogeneity in the lives of Black and Brown children and communities, in contrast with the commonality of experience that binds them together. Yet, the racism, disadvantages and challenges Black, Brown and white children, families and communities face in deprived areas and from institutional responses will continue to be the spur of a rising tide of protest against

injustice. As Black and Brown children, adults, communities, people of colour, are all, ultimately, in many ways, migrants in a foreign land challenging the ‘racism that kills’ and that ‘which discriminates’ (Sivanandan 1994, p. 64), the many forms of racism that differentiate and discriminate, that isolate, alienate and ultimately destroy lives and kill, persist across generations. The main motivation of most migrants is to find a place to belong, be acknowledged, and contribute. Many migrants have fled the terror of war, torture, economic deprivation and incarceration. This Special Issue provides a window, a scholarly lens, on the lives of some of the children of migrants, and urges consideration of how the journey for Black, Brown and children of colour may be made that little bit better for future generations.

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