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Back to the Future

Organised crime is part of everyday life in many of Scotland's communities (Fraser et al., 2018), but Glasgow's criminal landscape has changed considerably in the decade or so since The Street Boys were ascendant. This is not surprising—the landscape has been evolving ever since the early razor gangs of the 1930s ruled the streets (Davies, 2013). For example, territoriality originally played no part in Glasgow gangs beyond being shorthand for whether a population was Catholic or Protestant. Still, the razor gangs were highly localised outfits. While they engaged in religion-fuelled gang fights, they also engaged in organised crime. To help assist in gang battles they developed junior outfits, like the little Bridgeton Derry, which were essentially fighting outfits of teenagers and young men who aspired to razor gang membership.

The demise of the razor gangs coincided with the rise of post-war estates on the outer areas of Glasgow and it was here where the junior outfits became embedded in the fabric of the city. They did not bother so much with religious divisions given that Catholics and Protestants both fought side-by-side during World War II and the staunchly religious slums were pulled down and reintegrated into the housing estates

of Easterhouse, Drumchapel, Pollok, and Castlemilk, as well as newer extensions like Maryhill and Springburn.

The junior outfits had absorbed much of the razor gang rhetoric of community control of neighbourhoods, and in retaining the same or derivative names, such as Shamrock, Gito, Posse, Crew, and Derry, they became the Young Teams of the 1960s and 1970s. At this time, young groups of men from territorially divided areas would battle it out for no other purpose than to display and gain masculine distinction (Patrick, 1973). Organised Crime Groups (OCG) on the other hand were already pivoting to focus on monetary gains. New schemes lacked goods and services, so OCGs seized the opportunity to provide them. An example is the “ice cream wars” of the 1980s in Glasgow (McDougall & Robertson, 2004), whereby organised criminals used ice-cream sales as fronts to service local communities with drugs and stolen goods. Van operators were involved in frequent violence and intimidation tactics and on one occasion, six members of one crime family were burned alive in a house during a direct arson attack from a rival outfit (McDougall & Robertson, 2004). Events such as this created a clear separation between Young Teams and OCGs in terms of their “violence capital” (Gambetta, 2009).

An influx of illicit drugs in the 1980s only accelerated the profit-orientation of OCGs, but this had the unintended consequence of giving the Young Teams something to aspire to “when work disappears” (Wilson, 1996). As OCGs got more territorial and territorial Young Teams got more entrepreneurial, boundaries between the two groups started to blur. Gang fighting for both gang types became more frequent and deadly. The media and public focused on the Young Teams because they were children and out in the open, whereas OCGs were out of sight and out of mind. Somehow no one realised that the Young Teams were the training and breeding grounds for the OCGs and that many Young Team members, like Leo, Raph, and others, made the transition to organised crime by virtue of kinship and criminal capital. Notorious gangsters like Jimmy Boyle (1977), Paul Ferris (Ferris & McKay, 2001), and Tam McGrew (Leslie, 2005), the latter of whom was once one of the wealthiest businessmen in Glasgow, all describe such transitions in their memoirs, but yet the academy and policymakers long treated Young Teams and OCGs as separate, unrelated entities.

McLean (2018) first demonstrated this natural progression from Young Team to OCG in Scotland, but the landscape has not stood still and continues to evolve. Young Team members first got younger, with 10 or 12 year olds fighting for status and respect, before they got older, and now Young Team membership has precipitously declined. As discussed in the introductory chapter, much of this had to do with interventions such as the VRU and CIRV (Deuchar, 2013; Williams et al., 2014), although in reality a number of community organisations and initiatives like *No More Knives, Better Lives* doing outreach and street work helped de-escalate gang violence. Collectively, these programs have challenged the normalisation of violence in Glasgow, something that Raph memorably reflected on during the initial fieldwork:

I have been in jail most my [adult] life... In [HMYOI] Polmont, Glasgow lads were mostly in for fighting, knifing boys, drugs... the boys from [outside Glasgow] were always jailed for pure daft shit. One boy from [a northern Scottish village] was in for two years for only punching a boy... a guy from [the borders] got a couple of years for hitting his bird and battering some boy that was involved.... Here I am, in six months for almost killing a guy... [then back] inside for three months for having a blade and leathering a boy.... My brother got off wi' community service for stabbing [a male]... Judges are defo stricter outside Glagsow... [they're] just too use[d] to the fighting and get numb to it.—Raph

Raph suggests the criminal justice system in Glasgow and West Scotland was so accustomed to heightened levels of violence that it had become somewhat desensitised to it. However, the new focused deterrence rubric of the VRU (Deuchar, 2013) has sharpened the woolly 'welfarist' response of the Scottish criminal justice system (Martin & Murray, 1982), such as the Children's Hearing System following the Kilbrandon report (Scottish Home and Health Department, 1964), creating greater accountability for youth offenders.

Still, official data confirm the deleterious effects of gang crime on past generations of Glaswegians (Fraser et al., 2010, 2018), with as many as one in five adult males in some communities still living with some sort of criminal conviction. In past decades, young men in and around the

city had their whole lives shaped by issues of territoriality and hyper-masculinity that were symptoms of deprivation and poverty. What was most striking to us in writing this book was just how embedded knife crime was. Glasgow was once dubbed the knife capital of Europe based on official, prosecuted, crime figures (Adam, 2018). As we see from the stories presented here, many slashings and stabbings go unreported. So we must ask ourselves, what do our data say about the true scale of knife crime in Scotland?

Other issues in wider society are responsible for recent reductions in knife crime and gang violence, including a more consumer-based globalised society. Television usually depicts and indeed can also influence changes in society, and shows like *Geordie Shore*, *Jersey Shore*, *Made in Chelsea*, and *Love Island*, all demonstrate a perma-tan and gleaming white teeth form masculinity that appeals to the younger generation in Scotland and is the anthesis of Young Team life.

Glasgow and West Scotland have also changed considerably in recent years. Many of the old schemes where Young Teams thrived have undergone significant regeneration and gentrification. The old slum housing has been pulled down and replaced by newer middle-class housing. New tenants have moved into new-build housing through a series of initiatives designed to encourage home ownership, and they are less likely to tolerate gang crime, even vandalism, in their own private spaces.

Smart phones and social media have also changed how young people spend their time, with implications for gang life (Densley, 2020). Rather than congregating on the streets, they now socialise indoors—and that was even before the COVID-19 pandemic and global lockdown. Youth used to go to pubs and nightclubs to meet people, which became hubs for drug sales and fights to occur; but thanks to dating apps and the modern ‘Netflix and chill’ home culture, this has all changed. Scotland is a country known for its inclement weather, so being able to communicate without having to congregate on streets in the soaking rain plays a part in eroding the influence of traditional gang structures.

Social media and gangs is an area ripe for research. The British government’s newly adopted Serious Violence Strategy explicitly singles out social media for glamorising gang life, escalating gang tensions, and normalising weapon carrying (HM Government, 2018). Research in

London, England, suggests gang members use social media to achieve expressive goals such as identity, friendship, and revenge, but also instrumental goals like group discipline and drug sales (Storrod & Densley, 2017; Whittaker, Densley & Moser, 2020). Future research is needed to see if this holds in Scotland. As the real world and virtual world become increasingly intertwined (Lane, 2018), do social media increase exposure to online-only gang associations? Do they increase the frequency, duration, intensity, and priority of face-to-face gang communications? Do they create new incentives to “perform” gang membership (e.g. Lauger & Densley, 2018)? Alternatively, do social media incapacitate gang youth by keeping them online instead of on the street where actions are real? Do social media act as a release valve to de-escalate real world tensions?

While the above processes have contributed in part to the demise of Young Teams, at the same time OCGs have been ascendant. OCGs have always been present in Scotland but opportunities and preferences for lucrative, market-based crimes have only increased in recent years, primarily via the illegal drugs trade (Densley et al., 2018). The long-running feud between the Lyons and the Daniels crime families, “which has seen fatal and non-fatal shootings, knifings, vehicle hit and run, firebomb attacks, police corruption, witness intimidation – and drugs, shedloads of drugs” (McKay, 2017), perhaps best illustrates the evolution of organised crime in Scotland.

In the early 2000s, the Daniels family ruled arguably the toughest area in the country in Possil Park. As their power extended out of the local scheme and across Glasgow and West Scotland, so did their numbers in order to maintain control and governance. That was until the Lyons family, comprised of several young men from the local Milton Street gang that neighboured Possil Park,¹ grew to challenge the Daniels supremacy. The street gang would hang out at a local community hall, which was run by the father of several gang members as a front for his drug business. Eddie Lyons was able to secure funding through the community centre to fund drug operations that the gang were involved in. As the Lyons gang

¹Milton is unofficially divided into the Top End and the Bottom End thus signifying two street gangs on the estate.

grew in power, they inevitably clashed with the Daniels family. Eventually the Lyons allied themselves with a notorious OCG from Paisley, which already had battle hardened members who had survived a recent drugs war that had claimed many lives and saw five separate shootings in one week at its height.

The Lyons was now able to compete with the Daniels, more so following the assassination of their main enforcer and the death of their leader. Over time, the two gangs have moved away from being family-based OCGs and now have a whole range of criminal actors aligned to them. Media reporting suggests the Lyons and Daniels have a criminal network of over 300 people in one Glasgow scheme alone and are involved in a diverse range of illegal and legal businesses (Silvester & McKenzie, 2020). The two OCGs have become by far the most significant OCGs in the country, with almost all gangs across the central belt being aligned to one side or the other to varying degrees.

Over time, tension and refinement has meant that these two gangs are in many ways now established criminal cartels as they carve out the landscape. Yet this does not mean that independent suppliers do not exist, but where they do they usually act as one source of many incomes revenues for either side. The groups likewise operate their own importation and are involved in all aspects of legal and illegal businesses. The latest development, following the incarceration of a number of prominent figures in the feud, was a prison war, which resulted in the gangs being run from within the prison. Recent shootings and the fire-bombing of prison staff attest to this (Keyden, 2020). If left unresolved, the continual battle will inevitably result in one or both of the gangs obtaining some degree of political power, which in many cases they have already demonstrated in council and police corruption. As Campana and Varese (2018) argue, extralegal governance is contingent on three factors: (1) the ability to generate fear in a community; (2) the ability to coerce legal businesses; and (3) the ability to influence official figures. There is a risk that left unchecked, Glasgow's main OCGs will evolve further to resemble criminal cartels or Mafias.

The Street Boys were one of many gangs that rose and fell ever so briefly. A number of gangs operated in and around the same area at the time. They did before and continue to do so, although perhaps not to

the same extent. Indeed, The Street Boys was for many research participants, one of many gangs they associated with, often at the same time. By age 15, for example, Raph had connections with two street gangs and two organised crime groups. Likewise, participant Jay was a well-known “scheme hopper” and affiliated with half the gangs in the south side of the city. Even at the peak of territorial violence in the city, there was more than half a dozen gangs Jay affiliated with at any given time.

Gang embeddedness ebbs and flows dependent not only on what is beneficial at the time, but who one has befriended at the time. Gangs are social groups and social relationships are key to their evolution (Densley, 2014; McLean, 2018). Thus while gangs do exist with clear boundaries, they are in a constant state of flux wherein movement is facilitated throughout criminal networks. The relative strength of network ties and the complexity of the relationships within and between gangs is something not always well captured in the book owing to its scope, thus we ask ourselves have we truly captured the picture of the time at all? In the end, however, the gang exists in the eye of the beholder and, as we see here, the way in which it was explained, by the participants themselves, speaks to an evolutionary trajectory of simple to complex, which tracks over time.

The narratives in this book indicate a differential progression into organised crime. In other words, people progress to the next level in different ways and, in some cases, the next level is not always *up*. These different trajectories into organised crime were bounded by issues of time and age, experience and networks, opportunities and preferences. Many interviews described a *linear* progression or lateral movement from street gangs and neighbourhood crime into organised crime, characterised by the sense that a life of crime was inevitable because it was all anyone ever knew or had available to them. However, only some people became embedded in organised crime and got closer to its core and that was often predicated on their de facto embeddedness in existing criminal networks, which served as a transfer market of sorts. A minority leveraged existing “violence capital” to *go in hard*, becoming a sought after fixer or hired muscle as they got more skilled in violence, but they remained at the periphery of OC. Others followed the rabbit down the hole to *go in deep*, experiencing submersion, but not necessary success in OC. Still

others narrated an *elective* progression. They had “criminal capital” in the bank or instant trust credit owing to kinship ties and because of this they were able to be more selective about the type of crime they did and with whom they did it (Densley, 2012). Further, if they had skills to sell on the open market, adult criminals would cover their start-up costs, not unlike venture capital firms in the legitimate sphere.

Some early entrants into criminal gangs *go in wide* and participate in a range of different types of criminal activity. This can be seen as a rather desperate move to make money fast—a scattergun “try anything” kind of approach. However, after finding themselves spread too thin and out of their comfort zone, specialisation becomes a form of risk mitigation. Only if an organised crime group becomes fully established with viable networks of skilled participants does diversification work to sustain the business model. Then, diversification takes on a different meaning, and beyond criminal diversification it entails holding some legitimate business interests and washing money from illegal activity through legal books.

Illicit drug sales were found to be the primary *modus operandi* of more organised criminals, which is consistent with recent Scottish Government-funded research (Fraser et al., 2018). This was for a number of reasons, including an extension of early experience with social supply, the social aspects which accompany drug supply and use, and access to pre-existing crime networks. However, there is some selection bias here in the data, which is a limitation and means that more hidden crimes like human trafficking remain precisely that. Still, it is safe to conclude that organised crime has its roots in the group offending networks that engage in small scale (social) drug supply and, in some cases, acquisitive crimes such as robbery. Future studies thus are encouraged to take seriously such lower-level criminal activity because our research suggests it has implications for later criminal trajectories.

Embeddedness within criminal networks was also important for progression into crime beyond drug dealing, including armed robbery, fraud, and debt collection. Versatility in crime can be attributed to a combination of factors, including new associations, a growing criminal reputation, experimentation, boredom, and the fact that with physical

and intellectual maturity comes the ability to compete with and potentially displace already established adult criminals and criminal groupings. Yet while not all activities were financially profitable, such as those actions associated with hyper-masculine violence, these actions could actually prove to be profitable in terms of social and cultural capital acquired (e.g. Deuchar, 2009; Deuchar & Holligan, 2010). This capital in turn could enable continued criminal progression.

Such findings would suggest that regardless of the niche within the given market that organised criminals may operate, it is one in which they are often specialists, or where they exert an effort to be perceived as experts. The narratives indicate that the most serious or ‘successful’ organised criminals would eventually reject “cafeteria style” offending (Klein, 1995, p. 132), in particular crimes without financial rewards, and accept a life of *à la carte* crime. Versus more serious gangsters in other contexts, however, the data show that most violence in Scotland is still knife violence not gun violence.

Implications for Research and Practice

This brings us to some implications for research and practice. Having identified different routes into organised crime, further research is needed to understand who is more likely to enter in a given way and why. Are some routes into organised crime closed off for some people? What are the intervention points? Do we need different forms and types of enforcement and intervention for different types of progression? Which of these different routes is associated with the greatest risk of violent offending or victimisation? Is the repertoire of criminal activity that different types of organised criminals engage in, determined by these different types of progression and entry?

The Scottish Police Authority (SPA, 2013, p. 1) estimates organised crime costs the Scottish economy approximately £2 billion per annum, and has highlighted the need to identify specific “roles and responsibilities performed by selected individuals” so that tactics can be tailored to deliver the most ‘appropriate and proportionate policing response’. In its ten-year strategy, *Policing 2026*, Police Scotland (2016, p. 22) recognised

that the force faced considerable demand in the years ahead in respect of “investigations into serious crimes”, thus it needed to “scale and develop” (p. 25) its capabilities to meet new demands in this area. The Serious Organised Crime Taskforce (SOCT) is one component of this effort, focused on four distinct elements: *diverting* individuals (particularly young people) from engaging in OC; *detering* OC; *disrupting* their activities; and *detecting* their members by boosting policing capacity and improving coordination to give them “no place to hide” (SPA, 2013, p. 3).

The insights in this book could provide more depth to the existing knowledge-base of the SOCT and the ongoing strategic policy discussions by senior officers within Police Scotland, the SPA and wider partner agencies involved in tackling organised crime via the Scottish Crime Campus. The findings could hold the capacity to support Detectives and members of wider agencies with their ongoing vision to dismantle drug supply networks by providing them with a new evidence-base. This evidence-base suggests the need for a multi-pronged approach where organised criminals are targeted but where supportive, desistance-centred interventions are also focused on minor offenders within local communities which avoid the tendency for them to become criminalised.

By focusing on neighbourhoods with high numbers of reported incidents involving young men engaging in street-level group offending networks and focusing their energy on vandalism, anti-social behaviour, territorial violence, and/or acquisitive crime such as street robbery, mentoring interventions most likely need to become targeted on educating these individuals about the impact of violence and avaricious (albeit) low-level crime while also actively *diverting* them from the allure of the drug market as a by-product of gang evolution and criminal capital.

Conversely, in areas where offending behaviour have evolved into the social supply of drugs, Police Scotland’s focus may need to be more on the need to *deter* young men from becoming more deeply immersed in organised crime through working with local partners and preventing drug trading growing into enterprise and governance (Densley, 2014). Finally, where patterns of gang activity have evidently become more organised and there are increased incidents of drug dealing proper, this may indicate an increased presence of organised crime. Detectives will

thus clearly require an emphasis on the need to *deter* organised crime by supporting private, public, and third sector organisations to protect themselves and each other; to *detect* and prosecute those involved in organised crime; and make a concerted effort to *disrupt* organised crime.

It is also clear that further research is needed into the extent to and ways in which young people can be extracted from illegitimate opportunity structures that exist in disadvantaged neighbourhoods through interventions that may include psycho-social and also spiritual components, as a means of enabling law enforcement and wider practitioners to more effectively improve the safety and wellbeing of people, places, and communities in Scotland (Police Scotland, 2016). It is hoped that the research contained within this book will help to stimulate such research.

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