

**[Coretta Phillips](#)**

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## **Ethnicity, Identity and Community Cohesion in Prison**

**Coretta Phillips**

London School of Economics and Political Science

‘Community cohesion’ is now a professed policy objective of the New Labour government. The term was coined here in the aftermath of racialized confrontations between young Pakistani/Bangladeshi and white men, amidst serious clashes with the police, in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in Spring/Summer 2001.

These ‘riots’ propelled issues of ethnic identities, diversity, multiculturalism and integration to the top of the political agenda once again. Official reports into the disturbances argued the need to move beyond ethnic, religious and cultural divisions and conflict, to mutual understanding, common ground and a celebration of diversity, in order to create cohesive communities (Cantle, 2001). At its core, then, New Labour’s community cohesion agenda has the expressed need for Britain’s multi-ethnic and multi-faith communities to be integrated into British society through a common identity, sense of belonging, and the valuing of diversity which, it is argued, will engender shared participation in everyday life.

In its strategy on race equality and community cohesion, *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society*, this integrationist aim is intertwined with a reduction in social and economic inequality between ethnic groups, alongside the alleviation of social exclusion (Home Office, 2005a).<sup>1</sup> The relative emphasis given to these ideals in the government’s discourse on community cohesion has been the subject of vehement critique, as has the proposed means of achieving them (see Alexander, 2004; Amin, 2002; Kalra, 2002; McGhee, 2003; Phillips, 2005; Webster, 2002). These issues are addressed in more detail elsewhere in this volume.

This chapter takes as its focus the nature of order and community cohesion in the prison setting, and is similarly organized around the key themes of common identity and belonging, difference and diversity, and equal participation in social life. How do ideas of ‘community’ and ‘cohesion’ translate into the prison context, and what can be learned for policy development from a study of this one social institution? This chapter draws on thinking developed as part of an ethnographic investigation of ethnicity and identity in prisons.<sup>2</sup>

Sociological studies of the prison have conceptualized the prison as a social system with its own cultural mores, norms, and expectations – very much like society itself. The prison has been characterized as a microcosm of society, most obviously since it draws its members from the free community (Sykes, 1958; see also Wacquant, 2001,

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<sup>1</sup> This document appears to more equally balance the need for a common identity and sense of belonging with the eradication of social and economic inequality between ethnic groups, presumably taking on board the criticism of commentators such as Amin (2002) and McGhee (2003). However, see Phillips (2005) for a critical analysis of New Labour’s approach to reducing ethnic inequalities.

<sup>2</sup> Add footnote to identities website like the Simon Clarke reference.

for a more radical interpretation). At the same time, despite its physical boundaries, the prison is permeable to outside influences as many prisoners continue to have contact with their families and friends in their home communities during their incarceration. It is also the case that various forms of media, particularly in-cell television in the last decade, have penetrated the prison world (Jewkes, 2002). Thus, whilst prisons are often physically and symbolically isolated from wider society, they are deeply embedded within it.

Prisons, by and large, contain individuals who have experienced social and economic exclusion – prisoners are typically unemployed before imprisonment, are frequently without educational qualifications, and have poor numeracy and reading abilities (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Prisons are also ethnically diverse – in 2002, individuals from 155 countries were represented in prisons in England and Wales, and in February 2003, 12% of the male prison population and 21% of the female prison population was of foreign nationality (Home Office, 2003, 2005b). This should not obscure the consistent finding – the explanation for which has long preoccupied criminologists (see Phillips and Bowling, 2002) – that around 12% of British nationals in prison are black, which is considerably higher than their 2% representation in the general population (Home Office, 2005b). Prisons also exhibit some religious diversity, and whilst the most common faith practised in prison is Christianity, over two-thirds of Asian prisoners are Muslim (Councell, 2004). Thus, there are parallels between the prison world and some urban communities such as those in the Northern towns where racialized conflict erupted in 2001, or indeed those in the Lozells area of Birmingham in late 2005.

The potential for conflict between ethnically and religiously diverse groups within prison has similarly exercised government ministers, policy officials and prison practitioners. Current concerns have been framed by the racist murder of Asian prisoner, Zahid Mubarek, in Feltham Young Offenders Institution in March 2000. He was beaten to death by his white cellmate, Robert Stewart, who was subsequently convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. At the time of the conviction, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) announced a formal investigation into Her Majesty's Prison Service, amidst broader complaints of racist bullying and discrimination in two other prisons (HMP Parc and Brixton). The CRE (2003a, b) made 17 findings of unlawful racial discrimination which cumulatively concluded that the Prison Service had failed to deliver equal protection to all prisoners in its care or to deliver race equality in its employment of staff or treatment of prisoners. Thus, the prescribed elements of a cohesive community – a common identity and sense of belonging which is inclusive of those with diverse origins, and racial equality in access to services and facilities to enable shared participation – were clearly absent from the prison communities examined by the CRE.

In this chapter, I seek to look more broadly at the issue of order and cohesion in the prison community, beginning with the question of individual and collective prison identities and socialization into prison life. Next, the role of ethnic identities in race relations in prison is examined, before reviewing the empirical evidence on racial equality within the prison world. The last section of the chapter considers the construction and negotiation of other identity positions relating to masculinity, religion/faith, age, class, sexuality, nationality, regionality and locality, and how these

may contribute to our understanding of the nature of community cohesion in the prison context.

## Two Models of Identity and Community in Prisons

The idea of prisoners having a common identity<sup>3</sup> is one that has divided sociologists of the prison. For those such as Sykes (1958) the totality of the prison experience produces a unified body of prisoners who have a functional shared identity, group cohesion and solidarity against prison staff. This 'indigenous model' draws on Goffman's (1975: 236) analysis of total institutions where, on entry, prisoners experience a painful and systematic mortification of self, resulting from a series of ritualized degradations. According to Sykes (1958) the 'pains of imprisonment' – the deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy and security - all contribute to this mortification process. The dehumanizing aspects of prison socialization have the effect of disrupting the social roles prisoners adopted outside the prison and challenging individuals' self-concepts, leading to what Foucault (1979: 236) describes as 'a recoding of existence'.

Sykes and Messinger (1960) argued that prisoners develop an 'inmate code' of values which governs social relations within the prison. The code centres on:

- loyalty towards other prisoners (*don't interfere with inmates' legitimate or illegitimate interests, don't grass/rat on another prisoner*);
  - absence of arguments between prisoners (*play it cool, do your own time*);
  - avoidance of exploitation (*don't steal from cons, don't break your word, don't be a racketeer, be right*);
  - maintenance of self (*don't weaken, be tough, be a man*); and
  - distrust of prison staff (*don't be a sucker, be sharp*).
- (see also Irwin and Cressey, 1962)

According to the indigenous model of social relations, the prison world is characterized by community cohesion and solidarity among prisoners, enforced through the inmate code which operates above any other identity positions (such as ethnicity, religion, age, sexuality, and so on), as *prisoner identity* assumes the greatest significance.

In sharp contrast, the 'importation model' emphasized the influence of external statuses and behaviour patterns on prisoner subcultures. Jacobs's (1979: 8) review, for example, regarded racial and ethnic cleavages as defining features of US prisons, subsuming the common identity of prisoner, with white and black inmates instead living in 'separate conflict-ridden social worlds' (see also Jacobs, 1977). Race and ethnicity were seen as structuring social hierarchies, the informal economy, religious

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<sup>3</sup> A sense of belonging to the prison community cannot, of course, apply in the same way as in external communities given that prisons are places of suffering. As Goffman (1961) notes, inmates will frequently present a 'sad tale' or 'a line' to explain away their presence in prison; in essence, to state precisely why they *do not belong*. However, Goffman goes on to describe the colonization adaptation to prison life among some prisoners, which leads them to prefer incarceration to life outside the prison – thus belonging or 'having found a home' in the prison (Goffman, 1961: 59).

activities and prisoner relations, largely through the collective opposition of Black Muslim prisoners, who contributed to the 'balkanization of prisoner society' (see also Carroll, 1974). Prisoner norms and the inmate code itself were subject to variation depending on the race of the prisoner, with white prisoners experiencing imprisonment individually or in small cliques, whilst black prisoners did not *do their own time*, but instead worked for the collective good of all black prisoners. For Jacobs, moreover, the nature of prisoner subcultures could not be divorced from the predominant presence of white prison officers governing a numerical majority of black prisoners.

Such racial and ethnic divisions have persisted in US prisons, sometimes represented through gang or religious affiliations, with high levels of self-segregation, mistrust and hostility (Diaz-Cotto, 1996; Henderson et al., 2000). It has even been argued that the new 'master status trait' (Hughes, 1971) for prisoners is racial affiliation, with no space for inmate loyalty as a generic class. Instead of prisoner solidarity against prison officers, the racialized 'street code' epitomized by 'hypermasculinist' notions of honour, respect and toughness reigns, with a blurring of the boundaries between prison and ghetto (Wacquant, 2001).

### **British Prisons - Parallel Lives, Parallel Worlds?<sup>4</sup>**

#### *Power, ethnic identities, and diversity*

Despite a large body of empirical research in North America, few studies in the UK have examined 'race relations' *between prisoners*, instead focusing attention on relationships between *prisoners and staff*. The most comprehensive examination of race relations among prisoners was conducted over 15 years ago by Genders and Player (1989). Their research found pervasive racial prejudice among prisoners, which largely resulted in an avoidance of contact and verbal aggression rather than physical conflict (cf. Wood and Adler, 2001). Social groupings by ethnicity were noted by prisoners, but were seen as reflecting commonalities of experience rather than being conflictual (see also Grapendaal, 1990). Some evidence was found of black prisoners aggressively dominating prison facilities and activities at one institution, with 'white Gangsters' heading the social hierarchy in another prison. In the latter site, peaceful co-existence between the white elite and the less powerful black groups was the norm, although on occasion 'virtual racial warfare' erupted (Genders and Player, 1989: 103). Sometimes prisoner unity prevailed where prison staff were seen to restrict the activities of prisoners in some way. Thus, Genders and Player found support for both the importation and indigenous models. Crewe (2005a) too notes that prisons research has conclusively demonstrated the influence of both imported identities and institutional deprivations on prisoner relations, perhaps not least because the late modern British prison is not characterized by the same depth of privation that Sykes's (1958) *Society of Captives* exhibits. Physical improvements, a more liberal regime in operation by prison officers, and the introduction of the

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'parallel lives' was used in the Cattle Report (2001: 9) to refer to the residential, educational, employment, cultural, religious and linguistic polarization of white and Muslim communities in urban areas in Britain. 'Parallel Worlds' is the title of the recent report on race relations in prison, undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (2005). It describes the absence of a shared understanding of race issues in prison among staff and prisoners, who appear to inhabit parallel worlds.

Incentives and Earned Privileges system have all contributed to the wane of the inmate code and prisoner solidarity, although it remains unclear whether this varies by ethnicity.

Prisons in England and Wales are now even more ethnically diverse than they were at the time of the Genders and Player (1989) study. This is amidst a significant increase in the overall prison population which rose 36% for white prisoners between 1985 and 2002, but 170% for minority ethnic prisoners. In February 2003, the male prison population comprised 76% white prisoners, 16% black prisoners, 3% Asian prisoners, and 5% Chinese and other minority ethnic groups. For females, the population composition was: white (69%); black (25%); Chinese/Other (5%); and Asian (1%) (Home Office, 2005b). Prisons are therefore 'mixed spaces', yet, as Amin (2002) recognizes, colour composition tells us little of the nature of interactions within that space. After all, '[h]abitual contact in itself, is no guarantor of cultural exchange', possibly instead leading to established ethnic practices becoming embedded in social life (Amin, 2002: 969). Moreover, as Jacobs (1979: 23) observed, 'It is hard to imagine a setting which would be less conducive to accommodative race relations than the prison'.

Marked by mistrust, fear, high levels of verbal and physical victimization, physical and emotional deprivations, boredom, overcrowding and an intense lack of privacy, the prison setting presents particular obstacles to cohesive social relations. At the same time, unlike the lack of contact between diverse communities – seen to be a major cause of the disturbances in the northern towns in 2001 – one of the characteristic and oft deplored traits of prison life is its enforced close contact between prisoners (Goffman, 1961). Within the tense environment of the prison, then, it seems likely that ethnic, religious, national and cultural diversity could create the conditions for conflict and disorder. The empirical evidence on ethnic relations in British prisons presents a rather mixed picture.

Sparks et al.'s (1996) study at Albany and Long Lartin prisons in the early 1990s described cohesive race relations there. Exploring social order in prisons in the wake of the Strangeways siege, they concluded that ethnicity was not an organizing feature of prison life. Few black prisoners who were interviewed reported hostility or racism among prisoners, and there was the added security of a significant numerical presence of black prisoners, which provided mutual support and prevented widespread victimization. Where racial prejudice was encountered was among some older white prisoners who resented the protection given to black sexual offenders by black prisoners – an ethnicity-based allegiance similarly described by Jacobs (1979) in US prisons. This disrupted the inscribed power within the traditional prison hierarchy which is founded on notions of hegemonic masculinity (see Bosworth and Carrabine, 2001; Newton, 1994; Sim, 1994). It sets armed robbers and professional criminals at the top and 'nonces' or sexual offenders at the bottom, the latter of whom were freely victimized by other prisoners (cf. Crewe, 2005a).

More recently, a survey conducted by NACRO in 1998–9 in nine prisons found that 51% of prisoners considered relationships between prisoners of different ethnic groups to be okay, with 27% believing them to be good and 7% very good. Only 13% believed relationships to be poor or very poor, which is undoubtedly a positive finding. However, it was Asian prisoners who were more likely to report negative

relationships. Victimization on the grounds of race was also found to differ quite significantly among minority ethnic groups in the recent thematic inspection *Parallel Worlds* conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (2005). Across all prison types (juvenile, young offenders, women, adult men), Asian prisoners more frequently reported racist bullying; in women's prisons, 37% claimed to have been victimized in this way. This is likely to be linked to the perception of Asian prisoners as a less powerful grouping within the prison social system, perhaps because of stereotypes regarding their physical weakness and passivity (Crewe, 2005b; Sparks et al., 1996).

Other data from prisoner surveys indicate the relationships between prisoners may be marked by racist abuse – both verbal and physical. Ellis et al. (2004), for example, reported that slightly more than one-fifth reported racist physical abuse or being bullied or threatened by other prisoners at one adult male prison and in a young offenders' institution that they studied, and one-third claimed that racist verbal abuse occurred between prisoners. In a third institution, prisoner race relations were reported to be unproblematic. In HMIP's (2005) thematic inspection, racist bullying was as or less likely to be noted by young black prisoners compared with their white counterparts, which suggests that the social dynamics of juvenile and young offender institutions are distinctively different from those of adult institutions where black men reported higher levels of victimization. In all but young offender institutions, mixed-race prisoners had lower levels of racist victimization than black prisoners. Yet in Edgar et al.'s (2003) study of victimization and conflict in seven diverse prisons, racist abuse occurred only rarely, although violence was, on occasion, sparked by cultural misunderstandings. As insults, threats and intimidation are routinely experienced in prison life, it is to be expected that some conflicts will result from tensions between ethnic groups, fuelled by racial prejudice, ignorance and racism.

Existing evidence seems, therefore, to point to relatively harmonious ethnic relations within prison, but set against a backdrop of abuse and violence, which could be motivated by racism at times in certain institutions, and more particularly targeted at Asian prisoners. This is an area where greater insight is required, particularly in relation to the construction of Asian identities, as they find themselves consistently located among the lower echelons of the prisoner hierarchy. In the light of these findings, it is significant that the Home Office's Citizenship Survey (2004) similarly reported greater racial prejudice among the general population against those of Asian origin than other ethnic groups. Understanding more about the dynamics of inter-racial (white/black, white/Asian, black/Asian) and intra-racial (particularly cross-national) conflicts within prison should also reveal more about the role of ethnic identities in contributing to order and cohesion in the prison setting.

However, it is important to acknowledge that in the NACRO (2000) survey, 87% of *prisoners* reported relationships between ethnic groups to be okay, good or very good. This compares favourably with the 59% of the British *population* surveyed by MORI who believed race relations to be good, although this rose to 67% among minority ethnic respondents (CRE, 2002). This could reflect what Crewe (2005a) found in his study of male prisoners at Wellingborough. There, prisoners reported being more tolerant and respectful of others than they would in their home communities, in part because of the deprivations and constraints imposed by the prison regime. Whether the prison environment constitutes what Amin (2002: 969) refers to as 'everyday spaces that function as sites of unnoticeable cultural questioning or transgression', and

where accommodation prevails, should also be explored in future research. It is these sites, according to Amin, which offer the most promise for improved social interaction between ethnic groups.

For both policymakers and those working within prison establishments, it is also imperative that prisoner race relations receive attention in race relations policies, particularly given the provision within the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, that public authorities such as prisons must promote 'good relations between persons of different racial groups'. This needs to occur alongside the important focus on the role of staff in providing equal access, services and treatment to minority ethnic prisoners,<sup>5</sup> as discussed next.

#### *Racism, inequality, and participation*

For Jacobs (1979), writing about race relations in US prisons in the 1970s, prisoner social relations had to be understood within the context of a predominantly white prison officer structure governing a majority black prison population, amidst broader societal racism. Whilst such a situation has never existed in prisons in England and Wales, it is equally true that the prison social system cannot be understood without reference to institutional controls and the racial dynamics of the way prisoners are treated by staff (but see Cheliotis and Liebling, 2006).

The historical and contemporary criminological literature on prison race relations is replete with examples of racial discrimination against minority ethnic prisoners by prison officers (see Bowling and Phillips, 2002; Phillips and Bowling, 2002). From the Genders and Player (1989) study in the mid-1980s through to the CRE's (2003b) formal investigation into the Prison Service, there is clear and consistent evidence of direct and indirect forms of racial discrimination. Genders and Player's (1989) study of five prisons, for example, found that black prisoners were stereotyped as arrogant, lazy, noisy, hostile to authority, with values incompatible with British society, and as having 'a chip on their shoulder', leading them to often be allocated the least favoured prison jobs<sup>6</sup> (see Chigwada-Bailey, 2003, for similar findings in women's prisons).

The CRE (2003b) investigation, conducted more than 10 years later, reported that there were failures of prison establishments to: protect against the racist abuse and harassment of staff and prisoners; remove racist graffiti; take disciplinary action against racist perpetrators; provide equally appropriate food and faith services to Muslim and black prisoners; provide equitable access to work because of the negative

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<sup>5</sup> In the Action Plan on race equality developed by HM Prison Service and the CRE and the Prison Service's Race Equality Scheme, the vast majority of actions listed are concerned with services and facilities to prisoners, although one aim was to develop interventions to challenge racist attitudes and behaviour amongst prisoners (HM Prison Service/CRE, 2003). In the current Action Plan (2005–8), there is a reference to race relations training for prisoners and the possible use of mediation for prisoner complaints (HMPS, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> In 1988, the Court of Appeal awarded a black prisoner £500 for being racially discriminated against. It was shown that comments based on racial stereotypes in his assessment and induction reports at Parkhurst prison had led to him being denied a kitchen job. One section of the report read: '[h]e displays the usual traits associated with people of his ethnic background, being arrogant, suspicious of staff, anti-authority, devious and possessing a very large chip on his shoulder, which he will find very difficult to remove if he carries on the way he is doing'.



stereotyping of black prisoners which also resulted in their over-representation in formal disciplinary actions and drug-testing, and under-representation in the enhanced level of privileges; and to protect against the victimization of prisoners who made complaints of racism by prison officers.

Two recent studies have explored prisoners' perceptions of race relations, which are unsurprisingly more negative among minority ethnic prisoners. HMIP (2005) found that while 2% of white prisoners felt that they had been insulted or assaulted by prison officers because of their race, this increased to 17% for black prisoners, 12% for mixed-race prisoners, and 11% for Asian prisoners. It is significant that 27% of Asians in young offender institutions felt they had been racially victimized by staff, although Asian prisoners were overall more likely to feel unsafe from victimization from other prisoners (see above). Moreover, only 53% of young black prisoners in young offenders' institutions believed that most staff treated them with respect, compared with 61% of young Asian prisoners, 68% of mixed-race prisoners and 70% of young white prisoners. Minority ethnic prisoners also held more negative views about their treatment within the prison regime (in relation to categorization, work allocations, privileges, disciplinary systems, segregation and access to release schemes), and in their access to appropriate food and faith provision. These issues, exacerbated by language difficulties, may be particularly acute for foreign national prisoners (see Prison Reform Trust, 2004).

Cheliotis and Liebling's (2006) survey in 49 prisons found that minority ethnic membership (black, Asian, and Chinese/Other) was the most significant predictor of perceptions of poor race relations. Even 9% of white prisoners felt that black and Asian prisoners were treated unfairly compared to them. The proportion for minority ethnic prisoners was 42% for black prisoners, 41% for Asian prisoners and 30% for Chinese/Other prisoners. These negative beliefs were closely linked to prisoners' views about prison officers unfair exercise of their discretion in distributing privileges, controlling discipline, providing access to information, and responses to requests and applications. Their generally lower ratings on measures of dignity, trust, family contact and order, have significant implications for establishing penal legitimacy among minority ethnic prisoners.

Edgar and Martin's (2004) study of four local prisons led them to conclude that processes of 'informal partiality' may operate in prison whereby prisoners come to perceive racial discrimination in their treatment by prison officers, although this cannot usually be proven. Fifty-two percent of prisoners they surveyed claimed to have been racially discriminated against but only a minority of prison officers (21%) said they had observed a colleague acting in a racially discriminatory manner. The HMIP (2005) inspection too reported that staff had vastly different understandings of racism and race relations in prison than did prisoners. According to Edgar and Martin, this disparity of perspective resulted from routine interactions where black and Asian prisoners feel they are negatively stereotyped, are more disadvantaged by prison officers' use of discretion in receiving benefits or being disciplined, and this occurs in the context of a lack of oversight or monitoring of prison officers' actions.

We have as yet no understanding of whether minority ethnic prisoners' perspectives on their treatment by staff influences their interaction with white prisoners. It is also unclear how religious identities contribute to prisoner allegiances and cohesion, but

Spalek and Wilson's (2002) work has pointed to the academic and policy neglect of religious discrimination against Muslim prisoners.<sup>7</sup> With the increasing incarceration of Muslim prisoners for terrorist offences, this is likely to assume even greater political significance in the coming years.

### **Prison Identities and Community Cohesion**

In drawing together the evidence on the prerequisites which contribute to community cohesion according to current government thinking – a common identity, sense of belonging, the valuing of diversity, the absence of ethnic inequalities and social exclusion – prison communities are clearly lacking many of these key elements. At the same time the empirical findings reviewed in this chapter have indicated relatively positive social relations between some ethnic groups in prison, albeit within the context of some racist victimization, abuse and discrimination, both between prisoners and between prisoners and staff. However, our knowledge in this area would be considerably enriched by a more thorough understanding of inter-racial, intra-racial and cross-national interactions between prisoners at work, in classes, during association, on the wings and during exercise, and within different prison institutions. An insight into the circumstances in which ethnic identities are specifically articulated and salient (or not) in prison social relations is also required. We actually know very little about what Amin (2002: 959) refers to as ‘the daily negotiation of ethnic difference... the micropolitics of everyday social contact’ in the prison setting.

An appreciation of the role of ethnicity as a resource, upon which prisoners may draw, either to endure the pains of imprisonment, or to more directly resist institutional control, or to assist with their resettlement in their home communities post-imprisonment, is also necessary. Bosworth and Carrabine (2001) suggest, for example, that prisoners draw on their lived experiences and identities outside prison to negotiate within prison, with both other prisoners and staff. Their performances may involve meaningful challenges to prison authority and knowledge or be more overt in nature, but displays of power within the prison are inherently shaped by identity practices, which are themselves culturally and socio-economically constructed. Similarly, Wilson's (2003) study in a young offender institution described how young black men resisted the control imposed on them by prison ‘Govs’ by ‘keeping quiet’, occasionally ‘going nuts’, but above all, drawing on support and solace from other black prisoners.

The complexity of men's identities within prison must also be more fully comprehended. Little is known about masculinist identities among prisoners of minority ethnic and foreign national origin, for example, and how these may cut across the traditional crime-type hierarchy within prison subcultures. The influence of black diasporic cultural forms on language, music and fashion remind us of the complex ways in which black masculine identities have been popularized and appropriated by some young white men – albeit problematically (Back, 1996; Frosh et al., 2002) whilst being actively resisted by others (CRE, 1998; Nayak, 2003), but we do not know whether this has any impact on prison social relations. It seems likely,

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<sup>7</sup> Cheliotis and Liebling's (2006) survey reported that 62% of white prisoners and 60% of Asian prisoners felt that there was respect for all religious beliefs in prison. For black and Chinese/Other prisoners, 50% and 53% respectively felt this to be the case.

since the use of argot in prison and the display of branded fashion remain potent signifiers of status which can command respect within prisoner society as in outside communities (Jewkes, 2002).

Crewe's (2005b: 471) work too points to the changing position of some Asian prisoners within the prison hierarchy, whose status has been (perhaps) temporarily elevated by 'powder power' and their connection to heroin supply. Added to this, emerging accounts of young Asian men's assertive identities in local communities, experienced through the multiple lens of religion, 'race', ethnicity, culture, class, gender, masculinity, family, age/generation, nationality and locality, also highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of their place within prisoner subcultures (Alexander, 2000, 2004; Archer, 2001). Class-based, local, regional and national identities also feature prominently as the basis for prisoner allegiances and may at times transcend ethnic, cultural and religious identities, and thus determine the extent of cohesion within particular prisons (see Bosworth, 1999; Crewe, 2005a).

For these reasons, understanding the identity dynamics of the prison social system may enable a more grounded analysis of power relations and community cohesion, and, arguably, can suggest how community cohesion can occur in local communities where individuals are not constrained by the loss of liberty and other pains associated with imprisonment, but may similarly be marginalized by structural inequalities, deprivation and discrimination.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The study *Ethnicity, Identity and Social Relations in Prison*, represents an attempt to learn more about the social milieu of the prison in light of issues of identity [see <http://www.identities.org.uk/>].

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