Applied Social Science? Academic Contributions to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and Their Consequences

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Abstract

A decade on from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, this article examines the contributions of social scientists to the Inquiry on two key issues: the meaning of institutional racism and the police response to racial violence. These academic inputs are characterised as instrumental and reflexive forms of knowledge. While social science applied to social policy is most effective in instrumental mode, rather than reflexively, there are various factors – such as the interpretation of evidence, media debate and the role of prominent individuals – that are more significant in assessing its consequences. The impact of these factors mean that, although academic work on these issues has been influential, the outcome appears to be that institutional racism has run its course and been disowned or downgraded, while racial violence has become subsumed within the broader category of hate crime. It is argued that the relationship between academic knowledge and policy requires a better grasp of the complexities of applying social science, and that is what this article aims to make a contribution to.

Introduction

The year 2009 marked the tenth anniversary of the publication of *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* (Macpherson, 1999). This was an official inquiry into the shortcomings of almost every aspect of the investigation by London's Metropolitan Police into the murder of a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence. The passage of a full decade offers an opportunity to take stock of what is widely regarded as a landmark public inquiry, though a hotly debated one (see Catchcart, 1999). Several reviews, focusing mainly on policing, have already appeared (Rowe, 2007; Bennetto, 2009; Hall *et al.*, 2009; Home Affairs Committee, 2009; Runnymede Trust, 2009; Stone, 2009). This article has a different purpose to those contributions. It aims to use the Inquiry as a vehicle to explore the extent to which academic social science can inform and contribute to social and public policy, albeit via the medium of a public inquiry. Discussions about how social science can enlighten public debate and policy have a wide scope. Such engagements by academics are actively encouraged by research funding bodies

such as the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). It has emphasised the need for 'user engagement', 'knowledge transfer' and 'impact' summaries of research. So-called 'knowledge transfer partnerships' and programmes are now common in UK universities, although such initiatives to apply academic research are much broader than the social sciences. In focusing upon the inter-relationships between academic knowledge and social policy, I do not claim that there is a direct line to be drawn between them. Rather, I draw on Macpherson as a case study to indicate the reach and influence of applied social science, as well as some its problems.

Recent years have seen a range of calls for wider public engagement by social scientists. This is evident across several disciplines, most notably sociology (Burawoy, 2005), anthropology (Erikksen, 2006), criminology (Chancer and McLauglin, 2007) and social policy (*Critical Social Policy*, 2008), among others. Not all of these strands are identical. They differ significantly in their orientation to government specifically, or to engaging civil society more widely. But they do all point in the direction of a more 'outward facing' academy. For some, the viewpoint is that social scientists are needed as independent voices, acting as a kind of public conscience on major global issues; the revival of debates about 'public intellectuals' seems to reflect that (for example, see *Sociology*, 2007). Another strand centres on the long-standing debate about the usefulness of social research to the formation and evaluation of social policy (see *British Journal of Sociology*, 2004; *Critical Social Policy*, 2008). Lying somewhere in between these two are discussions of how theory can be and is applied to policy (Smith, 2007) and ways of engaging with governmental and policy complexity (Keith, 2008). The particular approach I draw upon is the distinction introduced by Burawoy (2005) between the *instrumental* knowledge of professional and policy social science, against the *reflexive* knowledge of critical and public social science. The difference between them is plainest in the question about what knowledge is for. Burawoy differentiates between knowledge as a technical means and knowledge for ultimate ends. While instrumental knowledge is concerned with puzzle- or problem-solving, reflexive knowledge adopts a questioning approach to the fundamental values of society (Burawoy, 2005). To illustrate why I think this approach is useful, consider a recent book on *Applied Criminology* (Stout *et al.*, 2008). The editors of that book make a case that applied criminology should not merely be an adjunct to, or a policy science for, the smooth functioning of the criminal justice system and government. Rather, they argue, it should have a 'critical edge' that does not just aim to solve problems but also raise them; and it should question the direction of policy. My point is not about the validity of these aims, but rather to indicate that they contain – but also collapse – instrumental and reflexive knowledge and purposes. The distinction between them may be fuzzy rather than firm, but it provides a useful starting point for pursuing the question of applying knowledge and practice.

This article draws on some of the debates indicated above. It looks at what went into the Inquiry, and some subsequent social research and public debate. It is based upon first-hand observation at some of the hearings of the public Inquiry and other public meetings, personal interviews with a number of key individuals and archival research. The two key issues in Macpherson on which I focus are the meaning of institutional racism and the police response to racial attacks in the UK. In practice, they are inter-linked, but I select them to make different points about instrumental and reflexive knowledge. Looking at where we are at now on these two issues a decade on, there are some similarities as well as rather different outcomes. These examples and their context raise a complex set of issues about the application of academic social science to the practical world of policing and, in particular, to significant political shifts that academic research finds it hard to keep 'in step' with in terms of the time lag between them. While such concerns touch on questions such as the capacity of the police to be a learning organisation, it is the content and form of academic engagements with the police and public more widely that I seek to foreground.

A 'simple, practical concept'? Instrumentalising institutional racism

The question of whether the police's failures in the case of Stephen Lawrence were a chapter of accidents or something deeper is one of the key issues that the public Inquiry confronted. Dr Richard Stone, one of the three panellists advising Sir William Macpherson, told me that they found 'failure after failure [and] we decided we had to put together all those failures to make them add up to something extra'.[1] The term that encapsulated that 'something extra' was institutional racism. The problem for the panel was how to make sense of it. It is evident that they grappled with its meaning and they received many submissions on it. While many of these argued that the term could and should be applied to the police in this case, not all the evidence pointed in one direction. In particular, the Metropolitan Police argued that it was confusing. They believed it would lead the public to think that all police officers acted with racist intent. This view was, literally, shouted down in the Inquiry by voices from the public gallery on 1 October 1998 when Sir Paul Condon, then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, appeared before the panel. He said to them that, 'if this Inquiry labels my service as institutionally racist then the average officer, the average member of the public will assume the normal meaning of those words. They will assume a finding of conscious, wilful or deliberate action' (cited in Cathcart, 1999: 358). Cathcart's account refers to 'noise from the public gallery', 'uproar' and appeals 'for calm' during Condon's evidence. I was also present on that day and can add that there were shouted comments of 'resign' made towards Condon when he finished his prepared statement, and 'shame' following his remarks on institutional racism.

Despite the obvious negative reaction of the audience and the critical tone of the panel, John Grieve – at the time a senior officer in the Metropolitan Police – says the finding of institutional racism came as a 'shock' (Bowling with Grieve, 2009: 47) and was an 'intelligence failure' by the police who had not seen it coming. This was and still remains the most controversial aspect of Macpherson. In the decade since those events, distinguishing institutional and individual racism has remained a persistent and dominant problem. Arguably, we have now arrived at a sort of consensus that is, after all, closer to the police's expressed concern at the time.

To follow this tortuous path, I turn to the published report and the evidence submitted to the Inquiry. In the former, it is evident that the contributions of social scientists were valued. The report cites two notes on the meaning of institutional racism submitted by Dr Robin Oakley where he aimed to 'clarify the meaning of the term as a simple, practical concept',[2] and it is important to recognise the deliberately policy-oriented instrumental thrust of his approach. He focused specifically on avoiding and resolving the confusion between institutional and individual forms of racism. Oakley's evidence emphasises that it is manifested in routine practices, where the effect or outcome may be discriminatory even if it is unintended or it is evident in informal cultural practices: for example, taken-for-granted assumptions and stereotypes about minority groups. Other social scientists also stressed that a social or institutional dimension exists beyond individual intention and action, and sought to fuse and transcend cultural and structural aspects of racism. For instance, Bowling sees it as distinct from both individual and cultural racism, and more than the effect of their combination.[3] Such formulations offered a way beyond the well-worn 'rotten apples' approach to police racism, and the search for individual racists in, or those seeking to join, the organisation.[4] While these criticisms were well established long before Macpherson, it is the framing offered by academics that the Inquiry panel seems to have found especially useful (see Macpherson, 1999: chapter 6). In addition to the public written evidence, it has recently emerged that as well as the 'on the record' contributions of social scientists there was more going on behind the scenes. Thus, Bowling relates that he was invited to speak to Dr John Sentamu, another of the advisers to Macpherson. While Bowling says he 'can't really say how influential my intervention was', he also mentions another occasion when he met Dr Sentamu who said 'in his jovial way something like, "This man is responsible for institutional racism"' (Bowling, with Grieve, 2009: 49–50). While this suggests that the influence of academic inputs can be far reaching, the process by which they were absorbed and fashioned into the final report is opaque. I have previously provided some evidence of the negotiations between the panel members – or more simply, 'horse-trading' – in shaping both the content and the presentation of the widely cited view of institutional racism in the report (Murji, 2007).[5]

Whether the problems of institutional racism arise from Macpherson or from the difficulty of the idea – and whether it can be turned into 'a simple practical' concept – is debatable. The problems that are either inherent, or at least deeply entangled, in it remain resistant to definitional clarification. The complexity arises from the important recognition that it is 'something more' than individual intention. But while it is covert, it is seemingly evident in the normal processes and biased outcomes of the workings of institutions. Thus, the question of what is and is not evident is entangled. The extent to which it is unintended implies that even individuals with anti-racist motives can 'unwittingly' be racist, and this sense of people acting in unconscious ways to produce racist outcomes is the most problematic aspect of institutional racism. As senior and other ranks in the police have become more willing to express their opposition to racism, the view that an institution carries on discriminating in racist ways can get reduced to a matter of prejudiced individuals or of small groups and their cultural traits, or as a bureaucratic outcome that no one can control or is able to change. Racist or racially skewed outcomes seemingly occur despite good intentions because of unwitting or unintentional processes. It is this 'pessimistic' view of institutional racism that informs Phillips' (2009) argument against the term. Whatever the merits of the academic contributions to Macpherson were, the underlying problem of the individual/institutional dichotomy (Essed, 1991) remains unresolved; attempts to clarify this agency-structure question theoretically (Wight, 2003) and in relation to the police continue (Holdaway and O'Neill, 2006).

The acceptance of institutional racism by the Prime Minster and the Home Secretary of the day in the wake of Macpherson, as well as a widespread view that the report should be a watershed, set the scene for subsequent legislation and policy such as the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. Such high-level support indicates the importance of the report and its role as a powerful driver or 'galvanising force' (Tonry, 2004: 77) for organisational initiatives within and beyond the police (see Runnymede Trust, 2009, for an overview). However, the application of institutional racism in practice, particularly with regard to the police, has been challenging and suggests that it has never 'settled' as a concept or a practical idea. While Macpherson's recommendations certainly produced a great deal of organisational activity, not least the drive to put all Metropolitan police officers through a two-day Community and Race Relations (CRR) training programme in which there was a significant focus on institutional racism, its impact has been questioned. Evaluations of CRR training (IES, 2003; Rowe and Garland, 2007) highlight the difficulty it had in convincing officers about the applicability of institutional racism to them individually or corporately. They reveal that a structural/institutional approach to racism – as opposed to an individualising one – is tricky to convey to sceptical officers. Indeed, at times a structural approach was missed out altogether. A major Home Office-funded

academic evaluation of police culture after Macpherson also found continuing confusion in police ranks about the meaning of institutional racism, especially their view of it as branding them all as racist (Foster *et al.*, 2005; Foster, 2008). That study did find that overt racism had declined, but as institutional racism was always about covert racism it is much harder to gauge its level and scope. However, in passing, it is noteworthy that such research, as well as my own observations of CRR training, call into question Tonry's (2004: 76) view of institutional racism as unhelpful 'polar words' that are 'conversation-stoppers'. Since officers are rarely unwilling to discuss it – but in the main do not accept what it implies about unintentional and unwitting racism – this is wide of the mark. While social scientists are not responsible for how Macpherson applied their thinking, even the attempt to proffer a plain and instrumentally oriented approach has led, at best, to a great deal of organisational activity along with a certain amount of confusion.

The gap between academic debates and the public or media framing of institutional racism is also evident in another example when in 2006 Sir Ian Blair, as Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, said that there was institutional racism in the media. He was ridiculed for that claim, mainly by media commentators. The main reason for that was because he mentioned the reporting of the murder of two young girls in Soham, Cambridgeshire as an example.[6] Blair's comment that 'no one could understand' why it had received so much coverage was clearly insensitive. I was sitting about half a dozen seats away from him at a public meeting of the Metropolitan Police Authority when this was said and, at the time, his words were not greeted with the shock suggested by a number of politicians afterwards. In my view, that is because Blair had actually been asked a question about the police resources devoted to two murders in London at the time. One was of a white, middle-class solicitor, the other of an Asian shopkeeper. The former got a great deal more media exposure and that was what Blair was reflecting upon.[7] The furore over the infamous 'Soham' comments masked the fact that there were clear differences in how the police responded to the two murders, in part due to the high media and political profile of the former case. Critics, who have long maintained that race crime – even when it is as serious as murder – does not receive the attention it should, found that Blair was actually agreeing with them. While he may not have seen this as institutional racism on the part of the police, he clearly did see that at work in the media coverage.

In light of Burawoy's (2005) distinction, I characterise the contributions to Macpherson as primarily instrumental knowledge, because they aimed to make the idea of institutional racism plain enough to be understood and applied. To the extent that, generally, they chose not to locate racism at the core of British society or even as a fundamental or systemic feature of policing, they are not reflexive in the sense identified earlier – though the origins of institutional racism mean that it could be pitched in that way. This is not a criticism of those who tried to make sense of the term for the Inquiry. If it sounds like it is, it suggests that

Burawoy's conceptualisation privileges – either explicitly or implicitly – reflexive over instrumental knowledge. However, a more significant issue is that what comes after applied or instrumental knowledge is more complex than an instrumental/reflexive dichotomy, mainly because the instrumental strand has never 'stuck'. Public debate on institutional racism – at least in so far as media commentary can be regarded as an expression of that – reveals a repetitive and backward-looking strain. For instance, Ian Blair's critics after his 'Soham' remarks were mostly repeating the same objections to institutional racism as those voiced at the Macpherson report. In a nutshell, these were that it is jargonistic, that only individuals can be racist, that it is a form of thought crime, that it expresses a form of political correctness, or that it is simply wrong.

The sense of limited movement in the past decade seems to be confirmed by the speech made by Trevor Phillips, the head of the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in that organisation's commemoration of the ten years after Macpherson. Phillips (2009) said that it was time to move on from institutional racism. One of the reasons he gave – that it led to an assumption that all individuals become racists once they put on the police uniform – harks back beyond Macpherson to the debate as it was in the 1980s (cf. Neal, 2003). It suggests that attempts by social scientists to provide nuanced explanations of institutional racism have made little impact on the head of the UK equalities body.[8] There was a critical reaction to his intervention, which shows the extent to which the term is still fought over, although the most prominent critic was Duwayne Brooks, the friend of Stephen Lawrence who witnessed his murder.[9] Nevertheless, Phillips' speech appears to have been a harbinger for the political shift that became evident at the major official conference to mark the tenth anniversary of Macpherson, held in London on 24 February 2009. Jack Straw – who set up the Macpherson Inquiry when he was the Home Secretary – said that the charge of institutional racism against the police was 'no longer' applicable and that 'by and large the police service has purged itself of the systemic racism Macpherson identified'.[10] Sir Paul Stephenson, the new Commissioner of police concurred, saying, 'I no longer believe the label to be either appropriate or useful.'[11] If the acceptance of institutional racism a decade ago marked an era of action in both policy and rhetoric, these powerful voices made it obvious that a consensus among highly placed people has emerged that it is now time to draw the curtain on that. In this sense, the 'refining' value of academic research in revealing complexity and clarifying problems is out of step with the times when the political thrust behind institutional racism no longer exists.

'Operationalising anti-racism' – instrumental and reflexive approaches to racial attacks

My second example from Macpherson is about the police response to racist violence. It is evident that Stephen Lawrence was racially abused and murdered

by a group of racist men. The Inquiry focused on the identity, motivations and actions of the five young white men commonly regarded as the key suspects. (Indeed, the Lawrence family brought an unsuccessful private prosecution against them, in the absence of police and prosecution action: see Cathcart, 1999). Alongside the appearance of Paul Condon, their day at the Inquiry was one of the most crowded in the public gallery and received the most media coverage. But the focus on the extremism of the alleged perpetrators individualises the issue of violent racism rather than seeing it in context. Through the demonisation of a particular kind of residual white working-class masculinity (akin to the notion of 'white trash'), their attitudes were treated as exceptional and entirely uncharacteristic of 'mainstream' Britain. This is evident in the treatment of the suspects and their mothers, as McLaughlin (2005) has shown. The approach of the Inquiry provides a partial picture of the nature of violent racism, in which the 'othering' of a group of young men as the exemplars of racism masks the wider manifestations of racism at a structural level. It also obscures the failures of the police to establish a case against the suspects, which is part of a wider picture of inaction in the face of numerous racial attacks, including murder[12] (Hesse *et al.*, 1992; Bowling, 1999).[13] The limited perspective of the Inquiry is certainly not attributable to the academic evidence it received, and I now turn to look at two of these.

The first, by Ben Bowling,[14] takes its cue from his book *Violent Racism*, in which he discusses the well-documented history of racial violence in Britain and the failures of the police to deal with it by employing a reactive style that limits any preventative strategy. He advocates the employment of a victim-centred approach to racial incidents in which the matter of whether an event is deemed 'racial' is based on the view of the victim or any proximate person, not that of the police. He argues that in the absence of obvious racist intent, the police fail to see what it may look like to victims, and the subjective definition is a way of addressing that. He emphasises that victims experience these events as a process, but that the police tend to treat them as disparate incidents. Bowling calls for better investigation of racial incidents by the police and a shift to offender-based prevention (and not victim-focused) strategies, based on a multi-agency approach. A separate statement of evidence was submitted by Barnor Hesse,[15] also drawing on a book of research in east London (Hesse *et al.*, 1992). Hesse identifies two noticeable problems in policing racism: first, a claim that there is a lack of evidence due to widespread under-reporting of racial attacks; and, second, the police view that attacks are largely random and lack a pattern upon which they can act. He argues that there is no lack of evidence but rather a deficiency in police willingness to treat racism as a serious social problem, a lack of organisational coherence to tackle it and a failure to appreciate the significance of racism as an issue in British society. On the second issue – the apparent randomness of incidents or attacks – he maintains that the lack of police organisational resources to fight

racist crime is itself a problem. Hesse argues that if the police treated race crime in the same way as, for example, organised crime, such an attitude would not persist. Furthermore, he maintains that close attention to the spatial location of racial incidents does reveal an underlying pattern of both entrenchment and dispersion. In spite of the differences in their presentation here, there is not a large gap between Bowling and Hesse. Both stress that racial attacks have to be understood in context rather than as a series of incidents. They make the same point that the key concern is the lack of priority given to racial attacks by the police and the criminal justice system, and this is what needs to be remedied. Both of them call for the police to take racist crime as seriously as they treat organised crime.

But, in spite of the overlaps, there is a significant difference of emphasis between them and thus a divergence in how their submissions can be treated. One sign of this is that Bowling provides a definition of institutional racism (and, as we have seen, that was the basis for further discussion between him and the Inquiry), while Hesse makes no recommendations in his evidence. The content of Bowling's submission is akin to instrumental knowledge, while Hesse adopts a more reflexive approach, although this cannot be an absolute distinction given some similarities in their content. Hesse's contribution makes the recognition of racism its key theme. It is concerned not just with the racism or motivation of the perpetrators of racial violence, but also the organisational processes (this could be called institutional racism, although Hesse does not use the term) that shape the police's non-response to racial attacks. Moreover, it locates racism as a structural feature of British history and society, and so seeks to identify the underlying roots of racial violence. Although it is not spelt out as I am doing here, the implication is that tackling racism is not just about the first and second aspect (racial motivation and organisational resources, which is what most contributions focus upon), but also the wider and deeper concern of the direction and equity of a racially structured society. In this sense it is 'systemic' and directed to ultimate ends, although there is little on how that could be realised apart from stressing that the police 'mentality' about race needs to be altered. To be fair, Bowling also gestures in this direction in calling for policing to be placed within a human rights perspective that would accord greater dignity to and a better service for victims of race attacks. However, his is primarily an instrumental approach directed towards policy development – and probably has or had greater impact for that reason (see Hall *et al.*, 2009). Thus, applied social science that provides practical steps for an inquiry is more in tune with a policy-oriented remit. Indeed, it seems to have had wider reach than that. Bowling recounts that he was approached by two Metropolitan police officers asking him to spell out what in his book he meant by 'anti-racist policing'. He comments that: 'It was one of those terrifying moments in academic life when a practitioner signals their intention to act on your advice' (Bowling, 1999: xvii–xviii).

The utility of the instrumental/reflexive distinction is perhaps evident in the fact that Macpherson did recommend the victim-centred definition. Whatever the panel made of Hesse's critique of the police mindset about the random nature of racial incidents, this view did not make it into the report. There is, though, an unexpected echo of that evidence in the concerted police action that did follow. Even while the Inquiry was sitting, the Metropolitan Police set up the Racial and Violent Crimes Task Force (RVCTF). Placed under the command of a senior and experienced detective, John Grieve, the force signalled its intent to take race crimes seriously and to pursue racist perpetrators as strenuously as it did organised crime — rather as Hesse had called for. A TV documentary from this time shows Grieve saying to his team that: 'You are the agents of change in this service. It's about us taking the lessons learnt from fighting terrorism and applying them to this problem. You've made London a hostile place for terrorists. You can make London a hostile place for racists.' In another meeting he says, 'We'll change the culture because we'll lock people up for racism.'[16] The thrust of this statement has attained iconic status in the senior ranks of the organisation as a call to 'let's nick some racists' (see Hall *et al.*, 2009, for accounts of it by Grieve himself). For instance, an experienced former officer, Bill Griffiths,[17] said: 'in that phrase he [Grieve] absolutely nailed it . . . What came out of that was not just [Operation] Athena, in terms of the Racial and Violent Crimes Task Force – which did go for some of the high-level, organised gangs. It led to Community Safety Units in every borough. That's another dividend of Stephen Lawrence – those units weren't there before' (see also Griffiths, 2009). Similarly, when I asked him about it, Sir Ian Blair identified Grieve and the RVCTF as one of the key steps that restored morale in the organisation after Macpherson:

the third and cleverest thing that Paul [Condon] . . . did was [to set up] the Racial and Violent Crimes Task Force and to operationalise anti-racism. By appointing John Grieve to that they pulled the finest detective the Met had at the time into this position and . . . a significant number of operational improvements, particularly in community support units and family liaison [resulted]. And John [Grieve] took all that lot on board and went after the racists – not the internal racists, the external racists. So that was a very clever piece of manoeuvre because in policing terms if you can make, as John [Grieve] used to say it, catching racists as important as armed robbers, quite suddenly you've got somewhere that's really important to the organisation.

Whether the personal drive that existed in the immediate aftermath of Macpherson still exists is debatable, although the most positive views are that significant change has been embedded in the organisation (see Griffiths, 2009; Hall *et al.*, 2009). Nonetheless, in the immediate aftermath of Macpherson, it is clear that Grieve's charisma and drive played a significant role in pushing race crime up the agenda of the Metropolitan Police. Indeed, it may be that his personal contribution was the single most significant factor, outweighing any input by academics or other evidence to Macpherson. Assistant Commissioner

John Yates described it to me as a 'totemic appointment'. But when pressed about whether the priority that was evident in 1999 was still present, he conceded that various factors meant that it probably was not. In Yates's view, the commitment to tackling *serious* racist crime has not been diluted but enhanced. However, in terms of other parts of the organisation dealing with lesser offences, he commented: 'Is it the same on boroughs?[18] Probably not at the levels it was to be honest, but that is a matter for others. I don't think every borough has a Community Safety Unit, I don't think it's staffed in the same way [in terms of make up of staff].' The pressure on boroughs to deliver on centrally driven 'volume crime' targets such as robbery means that, while race/hate crime is a concern, it sits alongside many other ones. There is an accusation that the organisation is driven by targets and key performance indicators – 'what gets measured gets done', as officers put it colloquially. In this sense, race crimes no longer have the high priority they did in the wake of the RVCTF, or perhaps it is that race issues have been re-configured in the past decade. For instance, Operation Trident (which investigates gun crime in black communities) has become about ensuring sufficient confidence in the police for people to provide information to them. Or the widespread and more recent focus on knife crime in London has also been approached as a matter requiring stronger social and familial networks and community partnerships. This has not been done by an independent act of will by the police; it is something that can be seen as a logical and intended outcome of the post-Macpherson stress on community involvement (cf. Stone, 2009).

A decade on from Macpherson, there is an obvious feeling among police officers that the agenda has moved on, in particular from race to faith issues in the wake of terrorist attacks in London in 2005. Race has been incorporated into a wider diversity strategy about which Stephen Lawrence's mother has expressed doubts (see the Foreword in Hall *et al.*, 2009). The preference for diversity rather than race/racism seems to go hand-in-hand with the replacement of the vocabulary of race/racist crime by a hate crime discourse (Hall, 2005; Iganski, 2008). Indeed, for all the emphasis on the RVCTF and the keynote 'let's nick some racists' message, this shift probably took place only a couple of months after Macpherson. In April 1999, various nail bombs were targeted at gay and black communities in London. In September 1999, Grieve is cited calling for a 'broad strategy on race . . . [in which] work around race would give support to work around other forms of crime' (in Rock, 2004: 473). As Rock (2004: 473) observes, 'It was in this fashion that racist crimes evolved within the policing sphere to become a sub-category of a larger and increasingly un-wieldy class of offence, hate crimes.' There could be good reasons for connecting race with other bases of social inequality, such as gender, sexuality, disability, age and so on. But there are grounds to be concerned about this development also. Encapsulating a wide variety of types of offences and social groups within a single word – 'hate' – is questionable because it may not be an adequate way of capturing

the motivation of perpetrators; to the extent that it individualises motivation, it misses the wider social context. Proponents of the term 'hate' argue that it is powerful because it harms the victim, the victim group and society (see Rock, 2004). It invokes the sense that people are victimised because of core elements of their personal and group identities, such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality and so on. But, of course, all of these are relational terms not fixed ones, and 'hate crime' can seem to rely on a view of power as something that is possessed largely or solely by white men. This overlooks the uneven dynamics of power across the main axes of social differentiation, not least social class. Meanwhile, the more practical or instrumental concerns with the police response to race/hate crimes is still dominated by the same premise it was one, two or even three decades ago, such that increases in recorded incidents are treated as signs of increased confidence in policing, and incident-driven responses still hold sway (for views that it is more entrenched than this see Hall, 2005; Hall *et al.*, 2009).

Finally, returning to John Grieve enables me to bring together the two sides of this paper and to shed a different light on the individual/institutional problem. In a newspaper interview (*The Independent on Sunday*, 5 August 2001), he said 'I'm a racist. I must be because Sir William Macpherson said that I am.' This disarming statement reveals Grieve's style and commitment. But, taken at face value, it is also ambiguous. Macpherson did not think that all police officers were racists – indeed the Inquiry was at pains to be seen not to be saying that. That was the view that the academic evidence to the panel reinforced. The admission of racism by one individual, especially a high-profile one, is symbolically powerful. But it does not mean that it is accepted by all in the same organisation. Nor does it follow that the actions and initiatives that result will be effective, as the example of CRR training indicates. Most problematically, the stress upon the 'I' is an individualising step that increases the distance from an institutional response/capacity. This is clearly not what Grieve intended – in the same interview he went on to say that he was for 'change inside myself and in the behaviour of others' – but it does imply the extent to which the problem of institutional racism in Macpherson remains a, and perhaps the, key issue.

Conclusion

In looking at some of the main academic inputs to the Macpherson Inquiry on two key issues as instances of applied social science, I have – unsurprisingly – indicated that a public inquiry and public policy find it easier to deal with instrumental, policy-oriented academic constructions, rather than reflexive ones. However, the distinction between these types of knowledge is perhaps not as significant as implied by Burawoy (2005). Both institutional racism and an understanding of racial attacks can be employed within more or less instrumental and reflexive forms, and in either form can be used critically. Thus, the academic inputs and the Inquiry's report clearly utilise the idea of institutional racism and the poor police

response to Stephen Lawrence and his family critically. The fact that it is harder to apply reflexive knowledge is not a revelation. Such knowledge may be too abstract or at a level of generality that makes the manner of its use unclear (cf. Smith, 2007, on applying theory to policy). Hence, in terms of policy recommendations, what flows from reflexive knowledge – as a deep-seated critique of systemic racism in Britain – is hard to specify. Although that does not invalidate such activity, it does indicate the need for exploration of ways in which such knowledge could inform the public and policy domains, and how it can be combined with other forms of knowledge. The validity of either instrumental or reflexive approaches is open to debate, and there are different possible answers about what influence or impact they aim for or achieve. But attention to the nature of academic contributions to social and public policy may be advanced by being clearer about these matters.

In spite of the challenge of working through a public inquiry, the application of academic social science to Macpherson was notable. Oakley's and Bowling's inputs to the Inquiry both aimed to solve problems of definition, and to do so with a 'critical edge', seeking to re-orient policy in particular ways (cf. Stout *et al.*, 2008). Since it is not possible to be precise about how those shaped what appeared in the report, it is perhaps best described as a wavy rather than direct line of influence. Without much more 'hands on' forms of engagement with policy, such results are not to be disparaged. However, a decade on, the results are at best mixed. The debate over institutional racism contains many of the same confusions as it did in the 1990s. There are individuals in the Metropolitan Police conscientiously trying to make the Macpherson definition work (cf. Griffiths, 2009). But the political drive behind it that was evident in 1999 is missing. A 'window of opportunity' was open for quite a short period, and unless it reappears the scope for applying recent research is limited or non-existent. With regard to the response to racial attacks, sustained police action and resources did result. Arguably, that was mostly due to the drive of one key individual. The intense but probably short-lived focus on racial attacks has been lost; indeed, the turn to the wider category of hate crime seems to have occurred shortly after the report was published. Ultimately, both institutional racism and the focus on racial attacks have been displaced or downgraded by political shifts around faith issues, by a move towards diversity and a preference for the use of the umbrella category of hate crime. Whether these are judged to be positive outcomes or not, it is clear that they are not what went into Macpherson or what the report was intended to achieve.

Notes

1 This and all subsequent quotes without a reference are taken from personal interviews with the individuals cited.

2 NT1/49, National Archives. All subsequent NT numbers refer to documents in the UK National Archives.

3 NT1/167. However, it should be noted that evidence submitted by the Runnymede Trust, the Commission for Racial Equality, the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) and the 1990 Trust all made the same general point, though, arguably, their examples convey a personal and cultural approach. Rock (2004: chapter 9) says that several people lay claim to having suggested the term to the Inquiry.

4 This is largely the approach taken by the 2003 BBC TV documentary 'The Secret Policeman', in which the journalist Mark Daly joined the police and went undercover at a training school to expose the views of some officers.

5 Tonry (2004: 76) describes Macpherson's wording as 'extraordinarily artless and almost incoherent'.

6 The two girls were Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. For Blair's own account of this incident see his autobiography (Blair, 2009).

7 The people murdered were Tom ap Rhys Price and Balbir Matharu.

8 The other reasons he gave were that there were other forms of discrimination based on age, gender, faith, disability, sexuality and not just race. This chimes with the remit of the EHRC, which replaced the previous 'single issue' equalities bodies in the UK. However, it is unclear why recognition of other forms of discrimination makes institutional racism invalid rather than sitting alongside them. Interestingly, Phillips is prepared to draw on academic research that supports his argument, such as Ford (2008). Using the Social Attitudes Survey, Ford maintains that racial hostility is declining in the UK and this is principally generational in nature, so that people born after the 1950s show a significant decline in prejudice.

9 See 'A premature obituary', *The Guardian*, 21 January 2009. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jan/21/stephen-lawrence-institutional-racism-race (last accessed 22 January 2009)

10 This speech is available at: http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/speech240209a.htm Straw speech (last accessed 25 February 2009).

11 Quote as recorded in my own notes made at the event.

12 This was the thrust of the evidence submitted by the IRR, for example.

13 Thus, in the revised edition of his book after the publication of Macpherson, Bowling (1999: xvii) comments that the report 'lacks a coherent analysis of the problem of violent racism'.

14 NT1/167.

15 NT1/168.

16 Both quotes are taken from the TV documentary 'Race against crime', first broadcast on ITV, 25 October 1999.

17 At the time of writing the Director of Leadership Development in the Metropolitan Police.

18 London is divided into 32 administrative boroughs and each of these has a local policing component with a degree of autonomy.

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