Governing the social: community cohesion, asylum seeking and the question of the stranger

(1) Much of my work over the last 15 years in field of multi-agency community safety work has involved :

(i) an ongoing and often tortured argument about the local governance of crime and disorder but also safety and ordering . In the process this work has also sought to unsettle the prevalent dystopian and impossibilist accounts of fellow 'critical' commentators which in turn are generally premised on grand sociological narratives of control (drawing reverentially on Foucault via Cohen and also Bauman). **(ii)** In turn I have been engaged in calling for greater attention to comparative research into localities and geo-historical contexts and what types of evidence we can draw on as social *scientists* - in particular the 'extra-discursive' or the materially real and messy. In short a plea for sociologists especially to get out more!   In turn there is the associated issue of public engagement and our 'expertise' in normative and political debate. At risk of vainglory, I'd like to open up an argument for critical realist, social democratic sociology around 'governing the social and the anti-social' (and bring Jock Young back from the cultural cul-de-sac).

(2) I've distributed the Cultural Studies paper in advance so I will briefly and simply summarise its main features for the sake of those here who haven't read it. Here's the main components of the CS article: the first three sections provide a broad overview of current debates and mapping exercise which needn't detain us here

1 The stranger and community safety
2 Outcasts of globalisation
3 Politics of othering

The last three sections, I'd like to think, get more interesting or at least unsettling to the radical academic canon on

community cohesion, policing, community safety and our theme today of diversity and ASB, through prism of asylum seeking and possible research agendas opened up for us as 'scientists'- experts - of the social:

4 Asylum seeking and the normative turn

5 Local safety and the stranger: volatile processes and places in the UK and Europe (an incorrect coupling there)

6 European nightmares and dreams

The focus of the paper in summary is on the changing governance of the stranger in the social through the conjunction of international, national and local strategies where attempts to regulate migration and promote community safety meet . The paper plots the ways in which migration and Asylum Seeking in particular have been increasingly subjected to processes of 'securitisation' and 'criminalisation' but also how these processes encounter and align with new pressures in 'domestic' crime control and safety policies. I then offer a critical evaluation of sociological grand narratives that try to frame these events and relatedly how such narratives have been appropriated by critical criminological and social policy analysts as the basis for critique. Put briefly, in place of critique and vague, idealist abolitionist claims making , an argument is presented for a more nuanced and I'd suggest more realistic analysis of the instabilities and volatilities of governing strategies and practices and the normative issues they bring into view.

(3) Id now like to talk more broadly about the 'governing the social' aspect of the paper. Here I want to tease out some issues regarding both cultural studies-oriented arguments of the Special Issue of CS (n which this paper appears)as well as my own more realist-inclined departures from the cultural turn. Some of this will be akin to being John Clarke's ventriloquist dummy, but with capacity for some dissent (a subversive feature of the best ventriloquism)

The polemic underpinning the Governing The Social collection and much OU work of which I was an active member for over a decade, was to highlight the ways in which assumptions underpinning the study of social policy and in turn criminology have been profoundly disrupted in theory and practice. This 'disordered landscape' is the backdrop to our collective interest in governing the social. Furthermore, the ambition of the OU project was to develop productive relations between the fields of social policy, criminology and cultural studies. What especially interests me is not a simple contrast between the 'speculative theorising' of CS and the 'hard-headed realism' of SP and Criminology but the ways in which these tendencies may result in productive encounters.

Why 'Governing'? the term captures 'the troubled and turbulent set of relationships, processes and practices that were once rather more comfortably identified as the state' (JC, 837). It's an agnostic term then– pointing to the assemblage of processes and practices and, crucially here, that help us explore the situated struggles over governance (whilst also recognising the necessary relations of power dependence and asymmetric relations). All these processes are at play in the work and struggles around AS but equally ASB management and urban regeneration which I explore in other substantive chapters in my book.

Why the Social?
Again a troubled and turbulent concept, once assumed to reside in old social policy and the positive dimensions of life associated with the personal, the familial, the communal and slightly less comfortably with class (belongings). Now the social is also about mapping difference and how particular

sets of distinctions, divisions and identities are ordered and disordered. Conundrum still that it's hard to give up on belonging and cohesion and there are no easy answers in debating unity and difference/diversity.

(4) Finally to conclude, a few provocative remarks by way of setting up our debate today I hope and for future research.

Is there much mileage in centring on:
-community governance and the imbrications (slates that overlap) of rule and resistance?;
-empirical work on geo-historical contexts beyond the national frame and the translations of governmental projects in these particular contexts ? (questioning generalisation and prioritising causation)
- what are the real as well as imagined insecurities and dangers on the borders (given 'what we share is fashioned increasingly by our fears and concerns' (Adam Crawford)? This is the difficult stuff of cohesion and diversity, change and order (unless privileged 'lightly engaged strangers' vs immobilised communities of fate);
- what are the research agendas for social scientists and our claims to expertise , beyond being proponents of high journalism, essayists and polemicists?

The published paper on which these notes are based is obtainable from:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a781797300~db=all~order=page