Immigrant Crime in Europe and Australia:

Rational or Racialised Responses?

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National Europe Centre Paper No. 80

Paper presented to conference entitled
*The Challenges of Immigration and Integration in the
European Union and Australia*,
18-20 February 2003, University of Sydney

Abstract: In Australia and the European Union today there is a very negative immigration discourse linked to the (alleged) criminality of immigrant minorities - particularly those from Asia and the Middle East - and the existence of ethnic criminal gangs. The issue of immigrant crime - linked to the issue of undocumented migrants and refugees - is driving much of the political agenda in Australia and Europe. This paper first reviews the recent European and Australian experience of immigrant crime and the politicisation and racialisation of the immigrant crime issue. It then draws on the findings from a two-year research project into Youth, Ethnicity and Crime in Sydney - funded by the Australian Research Council, the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and 25 industry partners, including 10 local government authorities and 10 ethnic community organizations in Sydney - to explore the myths and realities of immigrant crime in Sydney, including gender dimensions. The paper then critically analyses media portrayals of such crime and investigates appropriate policy responses at federal, provincial and local government level. Finally, the implications of the immigrant crime debate for immigration and settlement policies in Australia and Europe are discussed.

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Introduction

Europe and Australia today have one important common feature: the impact of immigration and immigrants on their economy, society, polity and culture. In Australian and established and new European Union countries increasingly diverse patterns of immigration been a key consequence of, and at the same time a dimension of, globalisation. The increasing internationalisation of capital has, as its globalisation counterpart, the increasing internationalisation of labour in its increasingly diverse forms: refugee and 'undocumented' immigrant flows, permanent and temporary movements. The key difference is that while many European countries have only recently became – or admitted to becoming – countries of immigration, Australia has a long history of settler immigration (Collins 1991). With the USA, Canada and New Zealand, Australia introduced a large-scale settler immigration program in the last half of the twentieth century. Indeed, Australia has, in relative terms, more first generation immigrants than most other western countries, including Canada, the USA and countries in Europe, as Table 1 shows.

Table 1.

First Generation Immigrants in Europe, Australia and other major western countries 1996

(Numbers and %)

Country	Foreign born (Nos)	Foreign Born (% of pop)
Australia	3,908,000	21.1
Canada	4, 971,000	17.4
USA	24,600,000	9.3
Belgium	912,000	9.0
Denmark	238,000	4.7
France	3,597,000	6.3
Germany	7,314,000	8.9
Italy	1,096,000	2.0
Luxembourg	143,000	34.1
Netherlands	680,000	4.4
Spain	539,000	1.3
Sweden	527,000	6.0
Switzerland	1,338,000	19.0
UK	1,972,000	3.4

Source: SOPEMI, Trends in International Migration, Annual Report, p. 31. (OECD, Paris, 1998).

Today, Australia is a very culturally diverse society, with the more than half of the population of the major cities of Australia comprising of first and generation immigrants (Burnley 2001). Moreover, despite the focus of Australian immigration policy for the first three-quarters of the twentieth century

on racial exclusion of non-whites (Markus 1994) and the explicit preference for British and Irish immigrants (Collins 1991: 19-26), Australia's immigrants come from all over the globe, at Table 2 shows.

TABLE 2:

Australia: Immigrant population by birthplace, (thousands)

Country of birth	1971	1981	1991	1996	2001
Europe	2 197	2 233	2 300	2 217	
UK & Ireland	1 088	1 133	1 175	1 124	
Italy	290	276	255	238	
Former Yugoslavia	130	149	161	n.a.	
Greece	160	147	136	127	
Germany	111	111	115	110	
Other Europe	418	418	457	618	
Asia (incl. Middle East)	167	372	822	1 007	
New Zealand	81	177	276	291	
Africa	62	90	132	147	
America	56	96	147	151	
Other and not stated	18	36	75	95	
Total	2 581	3 005	3 751	3 908	

Sources: Castles and Zappala 2001 and 2001 Census

Australia and European Union countries also share another common feature that relates directly to the increasing cultural diversity that is a product of contemporary immigration flows: the increasing concern about, and controversy related to, immigrant crime.

Concern about crime and fear of crime appear to be one of the characteristics of the age, not just in Australia but also in all western societies. As Findlay (1999: 1) recently put it: 'Crime has been a silent partner in modernization… Globalisation creates new and favourable contexts for crime'. This is particularly the case in the cities of the western world. Reviewing the crime issue in the UK and USA, Schneider and Kitchen (2002: 25) state that: 'Crime and fear of crime are major issues in British and American Societies that help mould our cities and influence the qualities of life in both nations'. Similarly, McCord, Widom and Crowell (2001: 1) argue that in the United States '[j]uvenile crime is one of the nation's serious problems. Concern about it is widely shared by federal, state and local government officials and by the public'.

The issue of crime and its link to immigrants and ethnic groups and ethnic gangs is one of the hottest topics around the globe today. Indeed, it could be argued that immigrant crime is one of the greatest challenges facing the social cohesion of Australia and European Union countries today. This is particularly true of Sydney and New South Wales, where concerns about immigrant or ethnic crime have featured largely in State politics since 1998 (Collins et al 2000) and in the guise of concern for law and order have dominated run up to the NSW elections set for March 2003. Labor Premier Bob Carr

and conservative Opposition leader John Brogden are already engaged in an auction to appear toughest on crime, particularly with the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences for a range of crimes.

But it is also true that the issue of immigrant crime dominates politics throughout Europe today linked, like in post-Tampa Australia, to refugee claimants, undocumented immigrants or 'illegals' as the Australian Minister for Immigration, Phillip Ruddock, likes to describe them. The collapse of the Berlin Wall in the late 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to very large flows of refugees from Eastern Europe to most western European countries (Castles and Miller 1998) in numbers way beyond those, in relative terms, that Australia takes with such controversy. Controversy related to the link between crime, immigration and ethnic diversity has led to a resurgence of the Right in places such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark and drives much of the political agenda in Tony Blair's New Labour Britain. Across the 'pond', as Europeans call the Atlantic Ocean, the recent anniversary of September 11 ensures that an extreme offshoot of the ethnic crime debate – ethnic terrorism - drives much of US politics and preoccupations.

In Europe, North America and Australia the ethnic crime debate overlaps with, and is fanned by, the controversial issue of refugee and undocumented immigrants. This is true in two senses. First, opposition to and suspicion of refugees and so-called *illegals* has been a dominant theme in the anti-immigrant discourse in all these regions and particularly in Australia and Europe. The Howard Government's decision to turn back the *MS Tampa* and subsequent sea craft carrying 'boatpeople" and to refuse asylum applicants aboard them an opportunity to land on Australian soil was a decisive factor in its re-election in late 2001. Similarly, governments and political parties in the European Union have taken strong anti-refugee stances to tap into public concern about being swamped by refugees. In both cases, strong antagonism towards refugees and asylum seekers resonates with increased concern about immigrant crime in countries in the European Union and Australia.

Second, the flows of undocumented peoples have become a new growth area of immigrant crime, with so-called *snakeheads* and others engaged in the organized and profitable crime of people smuggling. Of course, the criminal ethnic gangs that are involved in people smuggling or in large scale drug smuggling are a very different phenomena from the groups of young immigrants or 'ethnics' who hang out on street corners and shopping malls in Sydney, Paris, Brussles or London. Yet the immigrant crime discourse in Australia and Europe, fanned by a seemingly inexhaustible supply of sensationalist media editors, throws a blanket across these two extremes of immigrant crime and all points in between. This leads to a moral panic about crime that politicians of most sides of the political spectrum find irresistible to exploit in an opportunist, though dangerously myopic, way. It also leads to an excessive focus on the cultural, rather than socio-economic, dimensions of crime and thus often diverts policy responses to immigrant crime away from employment, education, housing and urban renewal and concentrates on religion – especially Islam following September 11, 2001 – and cultural traits. Just as such a blanket, sensationalist approach to immigrant crime blurs important boundaries and complex differences in the dynamics of contemporary immigrant crime in Australia and the European Union, so

to does it reproduce (mostly negative) cultural stereotypes towards immigrant minorities, extending by implication or accusation the criminal activities of the few to the cultural traits of the many.

This paper explores some of the recent dynamics of the immigrant or ethnic crime debate in countries in the European Union and compares this with the Australian experience in order make the case that the responses to the immigrant crime issue in political and media discourses and the resulting public responses to it are shaped more by racialised than rational discourses, or, more correctly, are in fact shaped overwhelmingly by racialised discourses dressed in the clothes of rational common sense. If this argument is correct, the responses so far to the immigrant crime issue in the European Union and Australia appear to be more effective in undermining social cohesion in increasingly culturally-diverse societies by reinforcing racial stereotyping than in developing a sensitive and workable policy responses to the realities of immigrant crime. One corollary of this is that in Australia and Europe racist community attitudes and practices are reinforced and reproduced by this racialised discourse on immigrant crime, creating a moral panic about how increasing cultural diversity is undermining community safety. This has a political expression not only in the emergence of anti-immigrant right wing minority parties in Australia and Europe but also in the embracing of these anti-immigrant attitudes within the policy framework and political discourses of ostensibly non-conservative majority political parties such as the Carr Labor Government in NSW and the Blair Labour Government in Britain.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, a brief overview of the immigrant crime issue and the way that it has shaped politics and immigration discourses in Europe is presented. Next the paper then presents some of the key findings of some recent research about perceptions and experiences of the relationship between ethnicity and crime in Sydney before a consideration of the direct and indirect policy implications of the immigrant crime issue in Australia and Europe.

1. **Immigration, Crime and the Rise of the right in Europe.**

The list of European right-wing political parties, albeit generally not in government and with minority support, whose main political message is anti immigration and anti immigrant crime has grown through the past decade. They include: Carl Ivar Hagen's *Progress Party* which won over 15 per cent of votes in Norway in 1997; the Swiss *Centre Democratic Union* which, under Christoph Blocher won 22.6 per cent of the vote in 1999; Pia Kjaersgaard's *Danske Folkeparti*, which currently holds the balance of power in the Danish parliament; Jorg Haider's *Freedom Party* in Austria, which endured such venom from the European Community that Haider took a back seat, though no less important, role; the *Alleanza Nationale* party in Italy, which is playing a key role in the government of billionaire right-winger and media and soccer magnate, Silvio Berlesconi; the *Viaams Blok* party in the Belgium's Flemish-speaking region of Flanders; and in Britain the British National Party, BNP, a new look version of the National Front whose leader, Nick Griffin, promotes a more tolerant anti-immigrant line,

at least in public discourses if not behind closed doors, to appeal to the common-sense voter (Neal Ascherson, 'The warning shot', *The Observer*, Sunday 12 May 2002 Review p. 1). The party hoping to capitalise on last years riots between Asian immigrants and white British youth in towns such as Burnley in Lancashire and Oldham in Greater Manchester. The BNP fielded candidates in 13 of Burnley's 15 wards and five candidates in Oldham the May 2002 local government elections (David Ward, 'BNP targets town at center of riots last year', *The Guardian Weekly*, April 11-17, 2002, p. 8).

In France, old stager, Jean-Marie Le Pen, staged a remarkable comeback from apparent political oblivion to edge out Socialist Prime minister Lionel Jospin in the first round of the French election in May 2002. His comments on immigrant crime rang loud and often prior to the his first round success - when he secured a vote a mere three percentage points behind front runner Jacques Chirac in a multi-candidate election - and prior to his humiliating defeat in the second round, when conservatives and the left in France united to secure 82% vote for Chirac ('Jacques Chirac wins by default', *The Economist*, May 11 2002, p. 34).

In the Netherlands, Pym Fortuyn's rapid rise into the Dutch political limelight, which started with 38% of votes for his 17 elected Livable Rotterdam candidates in the Rotterdam local elections in month year, ended with has assassination on May 6, just nine days before he could test national support for his List Fortuyn party in the Dutch elections. According to one List Fortuyn candidate, Fortuyn dared to say that 90 per cent of street crime in Rotterdam was committed by Moroccan and other immigrants (Andrew Osborn, 'Dutch fall for gay Mr Right', The Observer, April 14 2002 p. 21). In 2001 the Netherlands had an ethnic minority population of 1.5 million, or 9% of the population ('The political legacy of Pim Fortuyn', *The Economist*, May 11 2002, p. 31). But the Netherlands also has the lowest unemployment rate in Europe, at around 2%, so that the anti-immigrant stance could not be leveraged on the argument that immigrants take the jobs of nationals as anti-immigrant critics such as historian Geoffrey Blainey claimed in Australia after the 1981-82 economic recession (Blainey 1984). Fortuyn was not at all comfortable with being put in the same camp as Le Pen, stressing the reasonableness of his anti-immigrant (and particularly anti-Muslim immigrant) stance. His open homosexuality and his criticisms of other European anti-immigrant leaders and their political parties promoted a different spin on the anti-immigrant stance. Part of Fortuyn's opposition to Muslim immigrants – he wrote a book titled *Against the Islamicisation of Our Culture* – is their lack of tolerance to homosexuality. He asked 'In Holland, homosexuality is treated in the same way as heterosexuality. In what Islamic country does this happen?' (Andrew Osborn, 'Dutch fall for gay Mr Right', The Observer, April 14 2002 p. 21).

This served to cement the reasonableness of his position compared to his European counterparts while being in essence no different from them to the extent that his whole political rationale stemmed from his opposition to immigrants. He argued that he was just voicing the concerns and fears of the ordinary Dutch people, who were fed up that their nation was being overcrowded because of immigrants and fed up with being victims, or fearing, immigrant crime. His spin, much like the Australian right-wing counterpart to these European leaders, Pauline Hanson and her *One Nation* party, was that he was

saying the things that people felt but were afraid to say because of the political correctness that ruled the public estate. After his assassination, the support for Fortuyn increased dramatically, leading to significant political gains for *List Pym Fortune* in the following Dutch national elections in 2002. The analogies between *List Pym Fortune* and Australia's *One Nation* do not finish there. In both cases, a short-lived period of shooting-star political attention and voter support gave way to political infighting and the collapse of voter support. In the Dutch elections in last January 2003, the number of successful LPF candidates was cut in one third, from 25 to 8. In the Australian national elections in late 2001 voter support for One Nation collapsed spectacularly. In both countries, this fall in voter support for anti-immigrant parties was partly due to the ineptitude of the new right politicians and the narrowness of their political vision and partly by the fact that the mainstream parties took on the right wing agenda. In Australia's case the Howard-led liberal national coalition government took on the Hanson policy suggestion to use the Australian navy to stop boatloads of refugees landing on Australian shores to gain widespread political support while in the Netherlands both Christian Democrats and Labour took on board criticism of immigration and immigrant crime.

Despite variations, there is a common denominator to these new Right parties throughout Europe: their anti-immigration stance and the association of immigrants and immigration with crime. This is then wrapped up in a populist spin, which leads to a discourse about how only they – the right wing party leaders – have the guts to challenge the pervading powerful political correctness to echo what is in the minds of ordinary people. This populist discourse is generally also wrapped up in an anti-politician stance that mainstream parties cant be trusted to understand the ordinary people, and also usually with an anti globalisation. The latter is dressed in a xenophobic rhetoric that purports to defend the national culture from incursion by outside people (immigrants) and the nation state from incursion by outside governments and, in many instances, capital. All of these elements were present in the rise and fall of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in Australia.

But the concern for immigrant crime and undocumented immigrants has not just been central to the agenda of new right minority parties – and, in Demark, the right government - in Europe. Major political parties of the so-called Left, such as Tony Blair's New Labour (like Bob Carr's New South Wales Labor Government) have responded to the issues of immigrant crime in ways that are often barely distinguishable from parties of the New Right. Tony Blair strongly campaigned on a strong law and order, anti-crime platform in his successful election campaign that wrestled Britain from decades of Conservative Government. As British Prime Minister with a massive electoral majority and a successful re-lection the Blair government continues today to give high priority to the immigrant/youth crime issue, introducing policies that would satisfy most of the right wing anti-immigrant ideologues across Europe.

British Home Secretary, David Blunkett, has developed an amazingly reactionary policy response and discourse on youth crime and immigration. One response by David Blunkett to youth crime in Britain has been to fall back on the incarceration option. In a strong-arm, zero tolerance stance on youth crime,

Blunkett announced plans that would put more youth in to Prison Service custody than ever before. His government introduced new powers to remand youth who, in Blunkett's words, "believe that their age makes them untouchables". As he put it to a youth crime conference in April 2002: "We are sending out a clear warning to youngsters who think that they are above the law- you will be caught and you will be punished." (David Rose 'Victims of Blunkett's lethal war on crime', The Observer, 12 May 2002, page 29).

Another response by Blunkett has been to gives his 'whole-hearted backing' to new and controversial police powers to stop and search, and record the ethnicity of, people suspected of being involved in crime. Police will now have to fill out a report card about each incident, giving his name and the reason for stopping someone. People stopped will be asked their names and a description of their 'ethnicity', although they will be able to refuse to give the details. This represents a change in direction in terms of policies related to the policing of racial minorities. Following the 1999 Macpherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence, the number of stop and searches declined by up to 40 per cent in some police force areas. In Britain the number of stop and searches dropped by 17 per cent from 2000 to 2001, though it dropped only 6% in London and has risen in areas such as Nottinghamshire. Young black men are five times more likely to be stopped than white people (Kamal Ahmed and Gaby Hinsliff, 'Race row as Blunkett backs 'stop and search' *The Observer*, Sunday March 10, 2002).

Another policy response by the Blair government deals with the link between schooling and crime. Each day some 50,000 British school children wag school. Police data suggests that 'of all the many crimes committed by young people aged from 10 to 16, a large proportion occur during school hours – in all, 25% of their burglaries, 30% of car thefts, 40% of street robberies' ('No place for a Mother', editorial, The Guardian, May 15 2002 p. 9). The response by education secretary, Estelle Morris, had been to jail for 60 days a mother of two truant schoolgirls aged 13 and 15. The fact that this would deprive the girls of any supervision at all for 60 days seems to have gone unnoticed by the Education Secretary, whose response to youth crime seems straight out of the 'blame the victims' handbook.

Another policy response, apparently from the same planet, was the idea, mooted by the Blair Government, for parents of persistent truants and youth who persistently commit crimes to forfeit their child benefits. Once again, parents are not only blamed for their children's truancy and criminality, but they are punished socio-economically when socio-economic disadvantage is often a root cause of youth crime. As *The Guardian* editorialized (April 29 2002 p. 13), this policy response is nothing but a form of punitive populism and deducting benefits will not solve crime: 'Like many moves prompted by gut instinct, the proposal has a superficial populist attraction. But the gut was not designed to produce thoughtful responses. What is proposed is unnecessary, unworkable and wrong'. A letter to the editor of *The Guardian* responding to these initiatives put the problem of such a policy response very succinctly:

'I had understood that Tony Blair's pledge to abolish child poverty in a generation was linked, among other things, to New Labour's determination to be tough on the causes of youth crime. His latest suggestion – that child benefit might be withdrawn from the families of persistent young offenders – suggests that Labour may now seek to tackle youth crime by increasing child poverty' (Hartley Dean, Letters, *The Guardian*, April 29, p. 13).

One strategy developed by the Blair government to response to the issue of youth gangs is to announce plan to attach police officers to schools in troubled areas. Full-time police officers will be placed in as many as 400 schools, Education Secretary Estelle Morris announced, in a voluntary program designed to develop stronger links between police and schools in the hope that stronger links would help local communities beat truancy and crime. This move has the support of Police, with Steve Pilkington, Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Police and a leader on youth issues for the Association of Chief Police Officers' agreeing with the move and saying that 'More effort must be put into preventing youth crime by working in schools and seeking to intervene earlier in the lives of young people who are at high risk of turning to crime' (Rebecca Smithers 'Police to be based in schools blighted by truancy', *The Guardian*, April 30 2002, p. 4). According to *The Economist* ('Gangs: Wild things' May 4 2002 p. 36) these policies have their roots in an American anti-gang initiative known as GREAT, which began in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1992 and citing Dan Grant, the police chief of Brownstone, Michigan, as attributing a reduction in drive by shootings and the strangling of gang recruitment to the introduction of the GREAT program and the placing of police in schools.

Moreover, the Blair government makes it clear that it sees law and order in general, and youth crime in particular, as key planks of their strategy for election to a third term. New Labor ideologue and prominent sociologist, Anthony Giddens, has put this rationale clearly. Writing in *The Guardian* ('The third way can beat the far right' May 3 2002 p.8) Giddens argued that a two-prong strategy is needed to redress the tide of growing right-wing politics in Europe: 'reform of labour markets and welfare systems, to place an emphasis on job creation; and the need to address issues traditionally dominated by the right, such as crime and immigration'. Elaborating on the latter, immigration, issue – which he concedes is perhaps the most testing of all for left-of-centre parties', Giddens paraphrases the recent and oft-repeated calls by the Blair government to be "tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime". He argues that for the third way 'it is no use merely proclaiming that EU countries need immigrants (they do). Policies have to be developed which are 'tough on immigration, but tough on the causes of hostility to immigrants"' (*The Guardian* 'The third way can beat the far right' May 3 2002 p.8).

To mix the third way slogans together, Giddens seems that in saying there is a need to be "tough on immigrant crime and tough on the causes of immigrant crime". By this argument, Giddens appears to argue that the only way for non-conservative European parties – the third way – to resist the growing tide of right wing anti-immigrant politics is to tackle head on the immigrant crime issue. Put in the context of New Labour's successful political strategy of exploiting the political advantages of a tough

law and order stance, the suggestion is clear: New Labour needs to be tougher on immigrant crime than their opponents, stealing their thunder and robbing their political advantage on the issue. But surely the consequences of such an approach is to give Labour's imprimatur and legitimacy to the concerns about immigrant crime that has been the hallmark of new right politics, not only in Europe but also in Australasia and North America. Surely this is to collapse behind the racism that is the – unspoken – basis of the populist anxiety and moral panic immigrant crime.

Indeed, this is the argument of prominent British racism scholars, Les Back, Lisa Schuster and John Solomos, whose response to Giddens, in a letter to the Guardian, deserves to be quoted at length:

> 'Giddens takes the popular debate for granted and ignores the whole history of racism in immigration policy over the past 50 years…Despite New Labour's gestures towards cultural inclusion, its body politic bets to a rhythm of a white heart. It cannot mourn its imperial ghosts, nor embrace a democratic and truly multicultural future. In this climate it is incumbent on scholars to look critically at what is happening in relation to both immigration and racism in British society. Unfortunately Giddens says nothing of the scandalous behaviour of New Labour on immigration and asylum over the past five years. Rather his call for New Labour to be 'tough on immigration' simply apes the language of the right. It is hard to see how this strategy defeats the far right, since by and large it seems to accept the argument that immigrants are the problem' (Letters, *The Guardian*, May 6 2002 p. 13)

The roots of these policies appear to lie in an attempt to tap rather than to challenge anti-immigrant sentiment in Britain, which is paradoxically stronger in immigrant communities thatn in the white population. Recent surveys have suggested that almost half of Britain's ethnic minorities and one third of whites think that there are too many immigrants in Britain. This is linked to an overestimation in public minds about the number of immigrants in Britain: opinion polls reveal that the mean estimation of the proportion of immigrants is 23%, when the actual figure is around 4% (Gary Younge, 'At ease with our Diversity' The Guardian, May 13 2002 p. 11).

It is clear from this brief and incomplete overview of recent political and media responses to immigrant crime in many of the countries in the European Union in the last few years that political parties of all persuasions and size have embraced the irresistible political bait of the racialised interpretation of immigrant law and order issue dressed up as a rational response to cultural diversity. The only firm conclusion that can be made is that this response – from minority right wing parties and majority 'progressive parties such as Blair's New Labour – is more likely to be successful in undermining community relations and destabilizing social cohesion than in successfully reducing the incidence of immigrant crime.

3. Gangs, Crime and Community Safety: Perceptions and Experiences in Multicultural Sydney.

Sydney Survey on Perceptions and Experiences of Ethnic Crime

In this section I report on the findings from fieldwork on the ethnic crime conducted in Sydney's Western and Southwestern suburbs in 2000 and 2001. A questionnaire on many aspects related to the perceptions and experiences of immigrant crime was completed by 825 people (380 adults and 445 youth). The survey was conducted mainly in Hurstville, Bankstown, Fairfield, Rockdale, Liverpool, Auburn, and Bankstown LGAs in 2001 after a pilot survey in late 2000 in the Canterbury LGA. These are municipalities in south-western Sydney, the region where most of Sydney's immigrant minorities live (Burnley 2000; Collins and Poynting eds, 2000) and where most of the concern about ethnic crime in Sydney ahs been located. A control sample was also taken of people living in north shore LGAs. It was finalised before September 11 2001. The survey was designed to get 80% of respondents from a non-English speaking background, about half adults and half youth, half male and half female. Adults from 21 different birthplace groups were surveyed, as were youth from 24 different birthplace groups. A control sample of about 20% of third or later generation Australians and immigrant from and English-speaking background was also included. A snowballing or networking methodology was used rather than a random sample. The sample was stratified to include a large range of immigrant voices, as Table 3 shows. Most of the interviews with adults were conducted in languages other than English. This was in order to tap the views of immigrant Sydney-siders who are at the centre of this ethnic crime storm yet whose voices go unnoticed in most English-based opinion poll and other surveying.

Table 3

Country of Birth of Adults and Youth in Sydney Ethnic Crime Survey

Country of Birth	Youth	Adults
Australia	241	63
China	9	20
Egypt	2	21
Greece	3	25
Hong Kong	6	3
India	3	6
Italy	0	9
Korea	7	8
Lebanon	19	45
Macedonia	13	23
New Zealand	28	3
Philippines	5	14
Samoa	6	11
Sri Lanka	8	7
Tonga	2	9
United Kingdom	3	5
Vietnam	29	41
Croatia	2	3
South Africa	3	0
Fiji	8	8
Poland	2	8
Turkey	2	0
Iraq	3	6
Cambodia	6	3
Laos	0	8
Chile	2	0
Thailand	8	0
Other	25	22
Not Stated		2
Total	**445**	**380**

Source: Collins et al (2002: 4-6)

Fear of Crime in Sydney

This concern about crime is also manifest in Australian cities. Lupton (1999) found strong evidence of fear of crime among those that she surveyed in 1997 in Sydney, Bathurst and Wollongong in NSW and Hobart in Tasmania. This fear seems to be linked to increasing globalisation, persistent unemployment and job insecurity as well as uncertainty following rapid technological, economic and social change that has characterised Australian society in the past decade. As Collins, Noble, Poynting and Tabar (2000: 69) argued:

> Fear of crime is widely reported in Australian cities and towns. It appears to be part of the fabric of the current age of uncertainty that has emerged in the last few decades in Australia, characterised by increasing globalisation, rising unemployment and growing economic insecurity.

This fear of crime is particularly associated with youth crime. This is evident in the United States, according to the latest review of juvenile crime and juvenile justice there. As the recent report *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice* (McCord, Widom and Crowell, 2001: 25) put it:

> Since the late 1980s, there has been growing concern about crimes committed by young people. New accounts of serious crimes committed by children and adolescents and criminologists' warnings of a coming tide of vicious juveniles… have encouraged the belief that young people are increasingly violent and uncontrollable and that the response to juvenile justice system has been inadequate.

This is also the case in Australia. For example, Lawlink NSW (1999: 5) reported the results of a survey on *Perceptions of Crime or Public Nuisance Problems in the Neighbourhood*, conducted in NSW in April 1995. The findings suggested that youth and youth gangs were thought to be a problem for one in five people surveyed. In the last few years, concern about youth crimes and youth gangs, particularly those related to immigrant youth, has escalated to near fever pitch in Sydney (Collins *et al.* 2000).

Responses to the questionnaire reveal that fear of crime is very high among Sydney's adults and youth. Two out of three (63%) of the adults surveyed were *very concerned* about crime, with another 25% concerned. Only 12 per cent of those adults surveyed were *mildly concerned* or not concerned at all about crime. In contrast, only one in five youth (21%) reported that they were *very concerned* about crime, though another 41% were *concerned*. Overall, females appear to be more concerned about crime than males, as Table 4 shows.

Table 4

Concern About Crime (by Gender)

Concern About Crime	Males (Number)	Male (%)	Female (Number)	Female (%)
Very Concerned	135	34.4	194	45.4
Concerned	133	33.8	144	33.7
Mildly Concerned	95	24.2	71	16.6
Not Concerned	30	7.6	18	4.2
TOTAL	393	100	427	100

Source: Collins et al (2002: 19)

This fear of crime is linked to the firm impression that crime is on the increase in Sydney, a view held by nearly three-quarters (72%) of adults surveyed and two thirds of youth. This seems to support the findings of a recent report by Don Weatherburn, director of the NSW Institute of Criminology, that "Australia has a serious and growing problem with both property and violent crime". However, criminological data in Australia is very inadequate and ambiguous, leading Weatherburn (2002) to reject the notion of a 'crime wave' in Australia today.

The research also probed the sorts of crime that were of most concern to the people of Sydney. It revealed that crimes related to drugs were perceived as the biggest problem, followed by burglary, violent assault and street theft. Fear of sexual assault was four times more prevalent among females surveyed than among males. Once again, publicity given to the 'race-rape' case can only have exacerbated this.

But concern about crime also has its root in the realities of crime in Sydney. Nearly one in two (44%) of adults surveyed reported that had been victims of burglary, 32% had their car stolen, 12% had been victims of street theft and 10% victims of violent assault. One in three youth reported that they had been victims of burglary, one in five victims of car theft, 14% victims of street theft. Moreover, 17% of youth surveyed reported that they were victims of violent assault and 14% (mainly girls) victims of sexual assault.

The survey was structured to give a voice on the issue of ethnic crime to Sydney's ethnic community itself. Over eighty per cent of those surveyed were from a non-English speaking background who lived in south-western Sydney. This is important, since more than half of those who live in Sydney today are first or second generation immigrants, with an increasing number from a non-English speaking background (NESB). Most of the adults were surveyed in a language other than English. Their voices are often ignored in the English-language based telephone opinion polling that dominates contemporary Australian politics.

The survey gives a clear message, absent from recent media coverage and political point-scoring, that Sydney's NESB immigrants are much more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators of crime. This is particularly the case of ethnic youth in Sydney who are more often labeled as criminals than as victims of crime.

Community Safety in Sydney

We live an age of insecurity and flux. Well before the events of September 11 Pauline Hanson tapped into this insecurity resulting from globalisation, economic restructuring rising unemployment, the casualisation of work and the decline of rural Australia. Her trump card was to link this insecurity to ethnic and indigenous minorities. One dimension of insecurity, as we have seen, is concern for crime. Community safety is the other side of the coin to fear of crime. But the research reported here also reveals an important paradox in regard to community safety in Sydney. The same people who revealed the extent of their concern about crime also thought that their local area was a safe place to live in. This finding is all the more startling since most of those surveyed lived in Sydney's south-Western LGA's, the very suburbs that are regularly reported as being at the heart of crime-ridden Sydney. Overall, two in every three people surveyed (71.7%) reported that they felt safe in their own area. Males in Sydney feel safer living in their suburbs (77.7%) than do females (65%), with youth generally feeling safer in their local area than adults.

As Table 5 shows, eight out of ten adults and youth living in the Hurstville LGA felt safe living there, as did three quarters of those living in the Canterbury Rockdale, Liverpool and Auburn LGA's. Feelings of safety were lowest in the Fairfield and Bankstown LGAs, where around 55% of those surveyed felt safe living there. In all LGAs, males felt safer than females.

Table 5

Do You feel Safe in your Own Area (% Yes by LGA and Gender)

Safe in own area	Local Government Area							
	Auburn	Bankstown	Canterbury	Fairfield	Hurstville	Liverpool	Rockdale	**Total**
Male	85.7	58.3	79.6	60.7	84.7	86	88.4	**77.7**
Female	57.6	53.3	72.2	45.2	76.7	59.3	66.7	**65**
Total	73.3	55.3	75.7	54	81.2	72.1	75.5	**71.1**

Source: Collins et al (2002: 33)

Local streets in Sydney were found to be very safe: only two adults and 21 youth were concerned for their safety on local streets. This finding seems inconsistent with earlier findings about fear of crime. It appears that that the sensationalist media coverage of crime in south-western Sydney suburbs has led to an exaggeration of the concern for crime in the minds of Sydneysiders. A similar survey taken today,

when September 11 , the 'race-rape' case and the law and order election campaign are fresh in the minds of Sydney-siders, might well reveal a diminution of community safety in Sydney.

The research findings identify the public spaces in Sydney where many youth and adults do feel unsafe. South-Western Sydney's unsafe places are mostly pubic transport nodes at night: the railway station, the car park and the bus stop. Two out of every three Sydneysiders surveyed only felt safe using pubic transport during the day. Only three out of every ten surveyed felt safe using Sydney's public transport at any time, with youth feeling safer on pubic transport than adults. Parks and recreation areas were also felt to be dangerous at night. The local shopping centre can also be a place where adults in particular can feel unsafe: 30% of adults surveyed felt unsafe in the local shopping center, compared to 12 per cent of youth surveyed.

There are lessons here for state government and local government authorities, particularly relating to the design and lighting of public spaces like railway and bus stations, car parks and public parks. In many of the south-western suburbs where this research was mostly carried out, such as Campsie, railway station improvements currently under construction or completed since our research may well help to redress some of these fears. There is no point, though, in undergoing such infrastructure investment if the stations are not adequately staffed, a point made by railway unions in their threat to refuse to stop trains at stations that are dangerously understaffed.

There are also lessons from this research for private enterprise who build shopping malls and redevelop shopping centres: think about designs and provisions that will increase users feelings of safety, including young people. Youth and adults share public and commercial spaces in our suburbs and city centers, though often uneasily. About one half of the youth we surveyed reported that they did hang out with groups of friends in the streets or in public places. This finding doesn't vary by gender. The shopping centre was clearly the most common public space where youth gathered with their friends, followed by the movie theatres and amusement centres. The next in the list are pubic parks and transport nodes, the railway station, bus stops and car parks.

Our research revealed that there was tension between youth and adults with respect to use of these public spaces in Sydney. The youth surveyed ranked conflict with police highest, followed by conflict with adult residents, shopkeepers and security guards. This highlights a critical issue to community safety in Sydney. Many youth do hang out in groups in, and have a right to share in, Sydney's public spaces, but many feel unwelcome and are unwelcome in these spaces. In the design of shopping malls that increasingly shape Sydney's metropolitan landscape there is often little attention given to the way in which youth might be accommodated in a way that would acknowledge their desire to, and right to, access these spaces and at the same time minimise conflict with adults and fear of safety of adults. It is not sufficient to just invest in bigger and angrier security guards with the intention just to evict youth from these spaces.

Criminal Gangs and Youth Gangs in Sydney

One of the most controversial issues relating to crime in Sydney today relates to the role of gangs in general, and ethnic gangs in particular. In our book, *Kebabs, Kids, Cops and Crime* (Collins *et al.*, 2000) we argued that there was a need to investigate the issue of criminal gangs with a degree of complexity that is often missing in media coverage. First, we need to separate what constitutes gangs of organised crime from gangs of youth. Second, we really need to interrogate the issue of youth gangs. Are they just friendship groups of kids hanging out mainly in public spaces who occasionally engage in criminal or anti-social behaviour? Or are they gangs in the sense that they have membership rituals, hierarchal structure of power and patterns of systematic criminal activities? In this section we first inquire into adult and youth perceptions and experience of organised criminals. We then probe further into the controversial issue of youth gangs in the Sydney LGAs, including probing into the ethnicity of youth gangs.

Criminal gangs are part of the history of crime in Australia and other countries (McCorkle and Miethe, 2002; Curry, David and Decker, 1998; Grennan, Britz, Rush and Barker, 2000; Ryan and Rush, 1997). Certainly, gangs have a long history in Australia. The first criminal gangs in Australia were probably the bushrangers, with the Ned Kelly Gang being the most famous. There are many ways to define a criminal gang. Goldstein (1991) offers fourteen different definitions of what constitutes a gang. Grennan *et al.,* 2000: 9–10) offer a consensus view of six key features that comprise a gang: being organized; having identifiable leadership; identifying with a territory; continual association; having a specific purpose; and engaging in illegal activities.

How afraid should the public be of gangs? Do the images and rhetoric surrounding street gangs accurately reflect the nature and extent of the threat? Has the response to gangs been commensurate with the actual threat posed by these bands of young males?

Organised Criminal Gangs

It is not surprising, given the strong media coverage about ethnic crime gangs in Sydney that, about two thirds of the youth and adults surveyed did think that organized crime was a problem in their local area in Sydney, as Table 6 shows.

Table 6

Do you Believe there is Organised Crime Locally? (numbers and %)

Is there Organised Crime Locally	Youth	Adults	Total
%Yes	62.6	61.2	62
% No	37.4	33.8	38.0
Numbers Yes	276	221	497
Numbers No	165	140	305

Source: Collins et al (2002: 41)

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Table 6 is that four out of every ten youth and adults surveyed in the Fairfield LGA—where Cabramatta is located and the place attached to much of the media moral panic about ethnic gangs in Sydney (Castillo and Hirst 2000; Dreher 2000)—did *not* think that there was organised crime in the area. Together with Hurstville and Rockdale, Fairfield had the most people who did not think that there was organised crime in the area. Bankstown (three quarters of those surveyed) and Auburn (seven out of every ten) were the LGAs that most respondents thought was an area where organised crime was present. The finding with regard to Bankstown is not surprising, since Bankstown has often been mentioned in media headlines about Lebanese and Middle Eastern crime (de Freitas 2000), and the Bankstown suburb of Punchbowl was where Edward Lee was stabbed to death in October 1998, an event that triggered much of the Sydney ethnic crime debate that followed (Collins *et al.,* 2000: 1).

Youth Gangs

One of the big issues in the current discourse about crime in Sydney is that of youth gangs, particularly ethnic youth gangs. Youth gangs have captured many a media headline in Sydney over the past four years. It is not surprising then that two out of three (64%) of adults surveyed agreed that there was a problem with youth gangs. Youth seem more ambivalent on this issue, with 55% agreeing that there is a problem with youth gangs in the Sydney area and 45% disagreeing. As Table 7 shows, two in three of those surveyed agreed that there was a problem of youth gangs in their local area.

Table 7

Is there a Problem with Youth Gangs in Area? (by LGA)

Problem with Youth Gangs in the Area	Local Government Area							
	Auburn	Banks-town	Canter-bury	Fair-field	Hurst-ville	Liver-pool	Rock-dale	Total
Yes	68.0	72.7	76.2	58.2	51.9	51.4	48.6	60.7
No	32.0	27.3	23.8	41.8	48.1	48.6	51.4	39.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Collins et al (2002: 44).

But how prevalent are youth gangs in Sydney? The central issue here is the distinction between youth gangs and friendship groups of youth who gather together in public places. The international literature stresses the formality of youth gangs, with initiation rights and procedures, hierarchies and uniforms being characteristic features of youth gangs in the US. The Sydney research suggests that the concern over youth gangs may be greatly exaggerated. While one half of youth surveyed reported that they do hang out with friends in pubic spaces in Sydney (Table 8), only 10% of these youth answered yes to the question: "Is this group a gang?", as Figure 1 shows. The common link between these groups of youth is not organized crime, but a shared school, interest in music, sport or other youth interests and, in some cases, shared ethnicity.
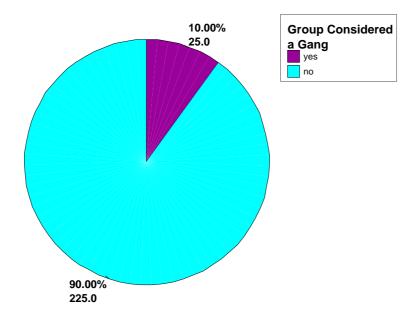
Table 8

Do You Belong to a Group that Hangs Around in Streets or Public Places?

	Males	Females	Total
Yes (Nos.)	118	96	214
Yes (%)	48.6%	48.2%	48.4%
No (Nos.)	125	103	228
No (%)	51.4%	51.8%	51.6%
Total Nos	243	199	442

Source: Collins et al (2002: 55).

Figure 1.

Do You Consider your Group to be a Gang?

Source: Collins et al (2002: 59).

Ethnicity and Crime in Sydney

One of the critical issues in the Sydney crime controversy relates to the links between ethnicity and crime. The Premier and the Police have been come in for criticism from some quarters about their racial profiling and eagerness to link criminal activity to particular ethnic groups in Sydney, particularly Lebanese and Middle Eastern immigrants and Asian immigrants. The criticism is leveled at the way in which criminality is shifted from individuals to cultures via this public and political discourse and its eager amplification in sensationalist elements of the Sydney media.

Today in Sydney the words ''ethnicity'' and ''crime'' go together, a heroic couplet for the new Millennium it appears, so often are they used together in the current media discourse. We investigated this link between ethnicity and youth gangs in the minds of the multicultural public in South-Western Sydney that we surveyed. They were asked whether youth gang and whether organized criminal gangs in Sydney were linked to individuals of particular cultural backgrounds. We then asked those who thought that crime gangs were linked to particular cultural groups to identify those groups.

Perhaps surprisingly, the majority (albeit a slight majority only) did not link youth gangs with particular cultural backgrounds, as Table 9 shows. Those that did so were more likely to living in the Canterbury, Rockdale and Hurstville LGAs than in the Fairfield, Auburn, Liverpool and Bankstown LGAs. Clearly if the survey were taken today the publicity about the gang rapes leading to long jail terms for young Lebanese males the results would very likely be higher overall and higher in particular for Bankstown.

Table 9:

Are Youth Gangs from Particular Cultural Backgrounds? (by gender)

Youth Gangs linked with cultural background	Males	Females
Yes %	61.4%	54.9%
No %	38.6%	42%
total of responses	381	408

Source: Collins et al (2002: 47).

When asked, those who did link criminal and youth gangs to particular cultural groups names to name these groups, about half of the adult respondents thought that there was a link, mentioning many combinations of Lebanese and others from the Middle East; Asian, including specifically Chinese and Vietnamese, Pacific Islanders, Samoans and Maoris. This question was also put to youth. The most frequent responses identified those involved in youth gangs to be of a Lebanese (155 responses), Middle Eastern (31), and Arabic (14) background. The other two groups most often mentioned were from Asia—Asian (136), Chinese (30), Korean (10) and Vietnamese (31)—or the Pacific Islands—Pacific Islanders (30), Tongan (10). Only 17 youth thought that youth gangs were of Australian cultural background.

The most common cultural groups linked to *organized* crime gangs by both adult and youth respondents were very identical to those cultural groups linked to youth gangs: ''Lebanese", ''Middle eastern" and ''Arabic'' or "Äsian", "Chinese'' and ''Vietnamese". Other groups mentioned were Islanders, Tongans, Korean, Assyrian, Korean, Italian, Greek, Iraqui, Indian, Turkish, and Macedonian. Five youth mentioned 'wogs'' while another 4 mentioned ''Fobs'' in this regard. Interestingly, only 8 adults and 10 youth identified ''Australians" as the cultural group linked to organized criminal gangs in Sydney. Those who linked youth gangs to particular cultural backgrounds gave a similar profile.

What emerges strongly here is that the memories of Lennie McPherson and Abe Saffron - Sydney's *Mr Big*s of crime a decade or so ago - and people like Neddie Smith, disgraced policeman Roger Rogerson or sexual murderers the Murphy brothers (vicious killers of Anita Cobby) do not appear to linger on the criminal imagination on those surveyed, despite their regular mention in the Sydney media for many years. It is clear that crime and criminal gangs have been reconstituted as an ethnic, that is, as a non-Anglo Celtic phenomenon in Sydney, despite criminal statistics and histories to the contrary. And while we did not investigate this pint further, it is clear that the media and political preoccupation with ethnic crime has been the prime movers in this dramatic mind shift.

Policing in NSW

Another controversial issue in the crime debate relates to policing. A very public change at the top of the NSW police force – the names of Alan Jones and Peter Ryan linked in a media dominated power

struggle over law and order in NSW - and the installation of yet another Minister for Police has ensured that policing will be one of the key election issues. The survey contains good and bad news for the new police commissioner and his minister.

The good news is that most adults rank police handling of youth and criminal gangs highly, though community attitudes on policing are clearly polarized and youth are not so praiseworthy of the Sydney police. About six out of ten adults adults surveyed thought that the Police were handling organised crime and youth gangs in Sydney 'very well' or 'well'. On the other hand four out of ten ranked police poorly or very poorly on this score.

However, the bad new is that youth were not as positive as adults about police: six out of every ten youth surveyed rated police handling of organized crime and youth gangs in their area as poor or very poor. The LGA's where over 50% of respondents rated police handling of youth gangs as 'very well' or 'well' are Rockdale (53.7%), Canterbury (52%) and Fairfield (53.2%). Police rates lowest on the youth gang front in Auburn, Bankstown and Liverpool, as Table 10shows.

Table 10

How Well the Police are Handling Organised Crime (by LGA)

Police Handling of Crime	Local Government Area							
	Auburn	Banks-town	Canter-bury	Fair-field	Hurstville	Liverpool	Rock-dale	Total
Very well	4.2	4.7	12.1	19.6	12.3	5.3	7.0	9.4
Well	33.3	34.4	54.5	31.5	38.5	38.9	49.0	40.1
Poorly	43.1	39.8	21.2	35.9	34.6	42.1	28.0	34.8
Very poorly	19.4	21.1	12.1	13.0	14.6	13.7	16.0	15.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Figures expressed as percentages. *Source*: Collins et al (2002: 63).

Two out of three adults ranked police were handling of young people – as distinct from youth gangs - as 'very good' or 'good'. But young people were not so enthusiastic, with over half (55%) of youth rating police handling of youth in general as 'poor' or 'very poor'. When considering these results by LGA, pattern emerges similar to other questions about police action: they were ranked highest in Canterbury Rockdale and Hurstville and lowest in Auburn, Bankstown and Liverpool.

Adults surveyed overwhelmingly (86.4%) with the proposition that police should be tougher on youth gangs. It is interesting that three out of four youth surveyed (75.5%) also agreed to this proposition. This highlights the need to view youth as *victims* of youth crime in general and youth gangs in particular, not just as the perpetrators of crime.

We wanted to investigate how our respondents felt about the relations between police and youth from ethnic minorities so we asked if those youth and adults thought that police picked on some groups of young people, and if so, to identify these groups.

Table 11.

Do Police Pick on Groups of Young People (by gender and age %)

	Yes	No
Males	56.5%	43.5%
Females	52.8%	47.2%
Youth	62.8%	37.2%
Adults	44.8%	55.2%

Source: Collins et al (2002: 66).

These results are shown in Table 11. Overall, a slight majority of those surveyed agreed that police did pick on groups of young people, with males slightly more likely to agree to this proposition than females. When age of respondents is considered, it is clear that two in every three youth surveyed (62.8%) thought that police picked on groups of young people. There is also a spatial dimension to this question of police picking on youth from particular backgrounds. As Table 12 shows, two in three people who live in Auburn, Fairfield and Rockdale LGAs believe that police do pick on youth from particular backgrounds, as do more than half of those who live in Bankstown, Hurstville and Canterbury LGAs. In Liverpool, only one third of the respondents thought that this was so.

Table 12:

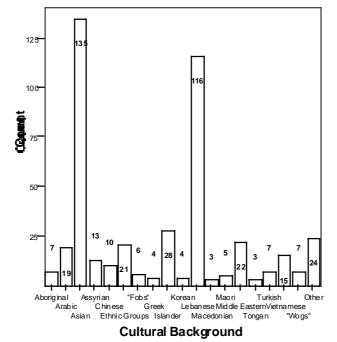**Do Police Pick on Groups of Young People (by LGA)**

Local Government Area	Yes	Yes %
Auburn	45	62%
Bankstown	69	56%
North Shore	13	42%
Canterbury	53	51%
Fairfield	59	62%
Hurstville	74	57%
Liverpool	41	39%
Rockdale	61	62%
Miscellaneous	20	37%
Total	435	55%

Source: Collins et al (2002: 66).

Adults asked to identify these groups most often mentioned immigrants from Asia, the Middle East and Lebanon, with Pacific Islanders also mentioned. Those youth surveyed, named Asian, Lebanese, Middle Eastern and Islander youth as those who they thought suffered police harassment in the Sydney area. Most adults did not believe that police did harass ethnic groups of youth but those who disagreed nominated youth from Asian, Chinese, Lebanese, Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders as victims of police harassment in the area.

Immigrant Victims of Crime

Victim reports are another source of information about the extent of criminality in a society or city, and are particularly important because of the problems, discussed above, of police records of arrest rates or prison data. In the United States, a National Crime Victimisation Survey, which began in 1973, is conducted annually and reports on the findings of a survey of 43,000 households about crimes committed against people over 12 years of age (McCord, Widom and Crowell, 2001: 29).

Chart: Y-axis labeled "Count" with values 25, 50, 75, 100, 125. X-axis labeled "Cultural Background". Bar values and categories:

Aboriginal 7, Arabic 19, Assyrian 135, Asian 13, Chinese 10, Ethnic Groups 21, "Fobs" 6, Greek 4, Islander 28, Korean 4, Lebanese 116, Macedonian 3, Maori 5, Middle Eastern 22, Tongan 3, Turkish 7, Vietnamese 15, "Wogs" 7, Other 24

There is a very big inconsistency between fear about crime and the actual incidence of crime. We pressed both adults and youth a bit further on this, asking them about their personal experiences of crime. Burglary (167 reports) and car theft (121 reports) are the crimes of which most adults surveyed in Sydney had been victims. These far outweigh the other experiences of crime among adults surveyed: 47 adults had been victims of street theft, 38 were victims of violent assault, while eight adults reported being a victim of sexual assault. We asked a similar question of the youth we surveyed. Youth experience matches that of the adult sample in that burglary (145 reports) and car theft (87 reports) are the most common criminal experiences that youth interviewed for our study have experienced as victims of crime. Importantly, however, youth also reported a higher incidence of being victims of violent assaults (76 reports), sexual assault (30 reports) and street theft (62 reports) than adults. Moreover, the incidence of sexual assault is much higher for youth (mainly girls) than for adults. These findings indicate that a surprisingly high number of respondents had personal experiences of crime, although most of this is related to theft of cars or property. Thus, whilst youth are often portrayed as perpetrators of crimes, they are the victims of violent assaults as well.

Self-reporting of crime in Sydney

Another insight into crime in Sydney comes from the responses to questions in the Sydney survey asking adults and youth about the crimes that they have committed themselves. Of course, this data source also has problems. There is a question about the accuracy of the information provided, although research in the United States suggests that the validity of self-reported data tends to vary by race and gender. In particular, some studies have argued that black and minority youth in the USA are less likely to report offences that are already known to officials than are white youth (Tracy 1987). But, as McCord, Widom and Crowell (2001: 31) argue: "It is not known whether the self-reports or the official records are more accurate… Each type of data for analyzing crime trends has advantages and disadvantages'. In the light of these qualifications, we asked those surveyed if they themselves had ever been involved in committing a crime. Of course researchers would need annual survey that asked about crime committed in the past year to construct an authoritative picture of the rate of crime. We did not

set out to do this. We also asked those surveyed if their friends had ever committed a crime to get a sort of self-reporting-once-removed insight into the crimes of youth in particular in our survey. The logic behind this question is that, as Warr (2002: 3) argues:

> Criminal conduct is predominantly social behaviour. Most offenders are embedded in a network of friends who also break the law, and the single strongest predictor of criminal behaviour known to criminologists is the number of delinquent friends an individual has.

The Sydney survey revealed that 34.3% of the males had self-reported criminal activity in the past (no time period was specified in the question), only 15.4% of the females had been involved in criminal activity, as Table 13 shows. Although no time period was specified in the question, this finding confirms that concerns about youth crime do have some foundation and is not just a figment of media imagination.

Table 13: Youth in Sydney Survey Self-reporting Criminal Activity (Nos and %)

	Male (numbers)	Male %	Female (numbers)	female %	Total (numbers)	Total %
Yes	82	34.3	30	15.4	112	25.8
No	157	65.7	165	84.6	322	74.2
Total	229		195		434	

Source: Collins et al (2002: 29).

There is of course a spatial dimension to youth crime in Sydney because crime occurs in different suburbs at different rates. Criminological data of arrests of youth, or of criminal incidents allegedly involving youth in different LGAs, is one take on this spatial dimension of crime within the metropolis. Table 14 shows the youth respondents who admitted to criminal activity in the past by the LGA in which they live. This shows that, of those surveyed, the highest proportion of youth who reported a criminal past lived in the Bankstown LGA (33%), closely followed by youth who lived in the North Shore (29%), Liverpool (28%), Rockdale (28%) and Auburn (27%) LGAs. The lowest proportion of youth who reported a criminal past lived in the Canterbury (24%), Hurstville (19%) and Fairfield (17%) LGAs. Of course, the sample is not random, so that these figures are not necessarily representative of all youth in these areas. Nevertheless, it is interesting that youth surveyed in Sydney's North Shore LGA self-reported similar rates of criminality to those in the Liverpool, Rockdale and Auburn LGAs, and that Fairfield was the LGA with the lowest rate of self-reported youth criminality. This finding upsets the stereotypes that generally represent the middle-class North Shore as a less criminal place that Fairfield, particularly given the constant media depiction of Cabramattta—within the Fairfield LGA— as the heroin and crime capital of western Sydney (Dreher 2000; Castillo and Hirst 2000).

Table 14: Youth Admitting Criminal Activity by the Sydney LGA in which they Live

	Local Government Area							
	Auburn	Banks-town	Canter-bury	Fairfield	Hurstville	Liverpool	Rockdale	North Shore
Yes	17	22	9	9	11	19	15	7
No	44	45	28	34	47	49	39	17
% yes	27	33	24	17	19	28	28	29

Source: Collins et al (2002: 30).

When we asked the youth surveyed in Sydney if any of their friends had ever been involved in committing a crime—that is, friend-reporting of youth criminal activity in Sydney—the most striking finding was that the rates of criminality of youth were much higher that the self-reporting findings. As Table 15 shows, just over half (51.7%) of youth reported that they had friends who had committed crimes. Of course, these 'criminal friends' may be known to many of the youth surveyed, so this does not necessarily give a clear picture of the rate of criminality *per se*. However, given the significance of youth crime as a group phenomenon that is steeped in peer group behaviour, networks and relationships, this finding is still very significant. Moreover, there was a convergence of male and female experiences in this regard: nearly half of all female youth surveyed (44.6%) reported that they had friends who had been engaged in criminal activities. This finding suggests that criminal activity plays a greater part in the life of female peer groups and in the lives of young females in Sydney—at least indirectly—than the well-worn cliché that 'crime is a masculine behaviour' would imply.

Table 15: Youth in Sydney Survey Friend-reporting of Criminal Activity (Nos and %)

	Male (numbers)	Male %	Female (numbers)	Female %	Total (numbers)	Total %
Yes	138	57.5	86	44.6	224	51.7
No	102	42.5	107	55.4	209	48.3
Total	240		193		433	

Source: Collins et al (2002: 31).

As Table 16 shows, around two in three youth surveyed in the North Shore, Auburn and Rockdale LGAs reported that they had friends who had engaged in criminal activity, as did about half of youth who lived in Liverpool, Bankstown and Canterbury LGAs. In contrast, only one third of the youth surveyed in the Hurstville LGA, and one fourth of the youth surveyed in the Fairfield LGA, reported that they had friends who had committed criminal acts. Again the picture emerging of Fairfield LGA in particular is more benign with respect to youth crime than popular media stereotypes would lead us to believe.

Table 16: Youth Admitting that they have Friends who have been involved in Criminal Activity by the Sydney LGA in which they Live

	Local Government Area							
	Auburn	Banks-town	Canter-bury	Fairfield	Hurstville	Liverpool	Rockdale	North Shore
Yes	37	32	18	16	25	35	31	16
No	24	34	19	26	33	33	21	8
% yes	61	48	49	38	43	51	60	66

Source: Collins et al (2002: 31).

2. Conclusion

A number of important findings have emerged from this survey. First, there is clear evidence that there is widespread concern about crime, or fear of crime, among Sydney's NESB youth and adults. Many people surveyed attribute crime in Sydney to organised crime gangs and youth gangs. To about half of those we surveyed, these gangs are associated with particular ethnic groups, particularly Asian, Middle-Eastern and Pacific Islander immigrants. It is not clear from our research how much of this fear of crime and the linking of crime to specific ethnic groups is a product of personal experience of crime *per se* or of reflected 'experiences' read about in what has become a very vocal and persistent media coverage; a coverage that has now been loudly broadcasting this link between crime and ethnicity in Sydney for the past three and a half years.

We also know that many NESB Sydney-siders feel most unsafe on public transport and at places like railway stations, bus stations and car parks. Sydney's youngest and oldest NESB immigrant populations living in the South Western Sydney suburbs are much more likely to rely on public transport. Yet we found that most of those people who live in the suburbs of South Western Sydney that have been portrayed by the Sydney media as the heart of ethnic crime actually *feel very safe* living in these suburbs. This finding supports our view that much of the fear about crime in Sydney is, itself, in part a product of a media beat-up compounded by the political opportunism of state politicians on all sides of the political spectrum.

This is not to say that immigrant youth do not commit crimes, or that ethnic youth and criminal gangs do not exist. In fact, our data on the self-reporting of crime by ethnic youth confirms that they do, as does the recent police arrests of Middle Eastern immigrants involved in criminal gangs of organized car stealers in Sydney during the last few months. Rather, the most important point is that the fear of ethnic youth crime in Sydney appears to be far out of proportion to the realities of the scale of ethnic youth crime in existence. While some immigrant youth do engage in criminal behaviour, this is probably a transitory stage for many youth of all ethnic backgrounds in Sydney today. From earlier research (Collins *et al.,* 2000) we have established that only a minority of youth in Sydney appear to be the

perpetrators of serious crime, and only a minority continue this criminality into adult life. Perhaps acceptance of the normality of youth crime might help dissolve some of the moral panic and fear of crime in our society.

The Sydney survey also reveals that most of the NESB youth interviewed hang out in public spaces together, and that most of these youth do not consider these friendship groups to be 'gangs'. This leads us to the view that the fear of youth gangs in Sydney is being exaggerated by media coverage. This is not to deny that there are youth gangs in Sydney and that some of them do have their basis in ethnic solidarity. However, the media moral panic about ethnic youth gangs appears to be out of step with the reality and, once again, is a major contributing factor in the vast insecurity and fear of crime that pervades Sydney today.

This survey does confirm strongly that youth are as much the *victims* of crime as they are its perpetrators. As such, they are deserving of our sympathy, help and understanding rather than just our blame and suspicion. Youth of all ethnic backgrounds have a right to access Sydney's public spaces, yet they do not appear to be well served by urban planners and municipal and state authorities in terms of the provision of safe public space, particularly at night and at public transport nodes. Moreover, there is an apparent tension between youth and the owners of shopping malls and others who commodify public space. Once again, youth have a right to—and will—access these private commercial venues, even though their layout and design often fails to come to grips with this important aspect of social design for Sydney's commercial spaces.

Police actions and response to crime and police handling of youth and criminal gangs are clearly controversial issues among the adults and youth surveyed. Not surprisingly, NESB youth are less supportive of police actions than are adults. However, even here there seems to be a split within the youth and the adults surveyed about how they view police responses to crime in Sydney. Fundamentally, the question remains: is this high concern about crime by those living in Sydney's South Western suburbs based on their experiences of crime, or some media and political construction of crime which have continually stamped these ethnic groups as criminal and the regions that they live in as the "crime precincts" of Sydney?

What we do know is that fear of crime is disproportionate to experiences of actual crime. We also know that it is only a minority of youth of Asian, Middle-Eastern and Pacific Islander background who are involved in youth and criminal gangs, and that youth and criminal gangs are not the preserve of youth of Asian, Middle-Eastern and Pacific Islander background. The great danger of the current moral panic about ethnic crime in Sydney is that the criminality of a *few* begins to be portrayed as a criminality of a *culture*. This leads to the negative stereotyping of many of Sydney's diverse immigrant cultures. It also leads to the possibility that we respond to, analyze and portray ethnic youth crime in Sydney in a very different way to that response we have to crime committed by youth of the majority Anglo-Celtic background. This process leads inevitably to the *racialisation* of the youth crime problem in Sydney. If

this is the case—and there is strong evidence in Sydney that this has been the case for the past four years—then we put at risk an accurate understanding of the nature, extent and dynamics of the crime issue in Sydney and also put at risk the ability of policy responses to deal adequately with the issue. Even more alarmingly, if we continue to reinforce the racialisation of the youth crime issue in the discourses, policies and practices of Sydney's media, police and governments, the social cohesion of one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities is put in jeopardy.

This conclusion also seems to hold for European responses to the immigrant crime issue. In all culturally-diverse societies - including Britain, the USA, Canada and Australia, there have been problems of police racism. In all these countries there is an issue of the racialisation of crime. That is, authorities react to, and respond to, issues of immigrant crime in a different, more dramatic way than they respond to non-immigrant crime of the same dimensions. Invariably, the public discourses around immigrant crime see it to be worse than non-immigrant crime. In all cases, negative stereotypes are drawn in the official discourses of authorities as well as in the public discourses in newspapers; talk back radio and televisions coverage and reports. This recreates negative sentiments about immigrant minorities, fuels xenophobia and appears to confirm the fears and arguments of the new Right. In all cases this is overlaid by a negative discourse on immigration in general, and refugee and undocumented immigration in particular. The main worry is that as the processes of globalisation gradually but inexorably increase cultural diversity in countries in Europe, Australasian and Northern America the racialised discourse on immigrant or ethnic crime can only undermine social cohesion and feelings of community safety. This worry is further entrenched by the apparent inability of politicians from all ends of the political spectrum to avoid opportunistic point scoring on the law and order issue and the inability of sensationalist media from irresponsibly fanning a moral panic about immigrant crime in particular and the problems of an immigration-induced culturally diverse society in general.

In culturally-diverse societies, criminals will be culturally-diverse. It is true, at least in Australia, that some youth from some immigrant minorities are over-represented in institutions of the criminal justice system. Some youth do form gangs, while transnational organized crime often uses ethnic solidarity as a key leverage of trust. Immigrant crime is a reality in Europe and Australia, though data does not as yet allow a sufficiently precise image of this relationship. But the important issue here is how to respond to immigrant crime in a way that is sensitive to broader social cohesion of our towns, cities and neighborhoods. There are also important policy implications that flow from this. First, in relation to policy responses to immigrant crime, a preoccupation with the *cultural* or *ethnic* dimensions of crime will lead focus away from socio-economic and social class dimensions of criminal behaviour. This leads to an emphasis on policies to have more police with stronger powers, to develop 'ethnic profiling' reports and statistics, to get ethnic community and religious leaders to deal with their troubled young. It leads away from a policy response rooted in improved education outcomes, qualification recognition, employment-creation and local area community development strategies, and away from masculinity and adolescence and away from an adequate emphasis on policing in a multicultural society.

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